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The little magazine as a world-making form: Literary distance and political contestation in southern African journals

Stefan Helgesson

In 1980 the academic journal *English in Africa* (*EiA*) devoted a special issue to English-language little magazines in South Africa. With contributions mainly from the editors of the magazines themselves, the issue was an early acknowledgement of the form's importance in nurturing a local literary culture. Produced in what was still the thick of apartheid, the essays in *EiA* not only presented an historical overview of the main literary publications, ranging from the avant-garde forerunner *Voorslag* (Durban, 1926–1927) to the recently launched *Staffrider* (Johannesburg, 1978–1994), but also covered different political facets, from the vaguely liberal *Contrast* (Cape Town, 1960–1989) to radical magazines such as *Donga* (Johannesburg, 1977–1978). These differences paled, however, in view of apartheid's machinery of power, which was a common adversary to all contributors at this time.

As a snapshot of South African literature, the *EiA* issue gives the impression of a functioning but embattled field. Even as they proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s, many journals had altercations with state power. Issues of *The Purple Renoster* (Johannesburg, 1956–1972), *Staffrider*, *Donga* and other journals were banned, editors were harrassed by the Special Branch and authors were banned or forced into exile, or both. As Peter D. McDonald (2009: 17) has shown, moreover, apartheid censorship was itself implicated in defining the very terms of literary legitimacy in South Africa. The censors were not just against but also *for* literature, acting as state-appointed 'guardians of the literary' – which instead led, as we see later in this chapter, to resistant renegotiations of literary value. From a world literary perspective, the consequences of censorship in South Africa were particularly problematic: a writer who had been censored in

South Africa was, almost by default, conferred with an international badge of honour. At the same time, this mode of visibility could relegate the international reception of a literary work to the political domain. Nadine Gordimer's attacks on South African censorship and defences of writerly freedom operated within that ambivalent zone, on the one hand making censored writers internationally visible and, on the other, insisting that the principle of freedom of speech had nothing to do with *literary* value. 'Literary worth', Gordimer (1988: 260) was at pains to emphasize, 'may be assessed only by critics and readers free to read the book.' This betrayed of course Gordimer's awareness that the international value of South African literature at the time was often counted in a currency of moral probity, distinct from the supposedly 'pure' currency of literary value.

How, then, did little magazines operate within this transnational exchange between (and doubling of) literary and political values? Produced locally, sometimes in such a low key that they could be described as 'amateur self-publication on an intimate scale' (Abrahams 1980: 33), little magazines *precede* not just international circulation but indeed book-format publication of (single-authored) works on a national level. For this reason, if only fleetingly, they had a stronger potential to produce unsanctioned textual events than more costly and internationally visible forms. State censorship in South Africa did what it could to curtail little magazines, but their very smallness made them a perplexing target. They generally had a minimal quantitative impact, making texts public to restricted readerships and for a limited stretch of time. Even *Contrast*, the most professionally managed of the South African journals, never reached a higher circulation than 1,500 (Cope 1980: 20). The intriguing exception here is *Staffrider*, whose circulation shot up to 10,000 at one point (Kirkwood 1988: 3), but this is wholly untypical. In these respects, as one would expect, southern African literary journals did not at any time in the twentieth century achieve truly popular recognition locally (the 1950s *Drum* in Johannesburg being an exception, insofar as it can be designated 'literary') or prominent recognition internationally.

Low publicity, however, goes together with a high degree of sociality: behind the making of little magazines we invariably find stories of people in interaction. *Staffrider*, for one, was prompted by the emergence of community-based writers' groups around the country (Kirkwood 1980: 21–5, Helgesson 2018), whereas more commonly a group – be it looser or tighter – will coalesce around a journal. Whatever the case, little magazines significantly weaken, from a methodological viewpoint, the analytical relevance of the individualist author function.

Instead, they are produced through collaboration (as well as disagreements), which testifies to the degree of social interaction needed to sustain literary cultures. However, if book publishers, in Bourdieu's (2008: 123; emphasis in original) France-centred account, are 'invested with the extraordinary power to ensure *publication*, to confer upon a text and its author a *public* existence (*Öffentlichkeit*) along with the fame and recognition that this entails', the makers of little magazines are at a looser, more amorphous end of publication, fame and recognition. In the words of Jack Cope (1980: 9), editor of *Contrast*, a magazine can be 'a kind of open school or laboratory'. As such a testing ground, or indeed playground, its stakes are nominally far lower than for publishing houses. In addition, Bulson (2017: 48) remarks that little magazines are not commercial ventures, nor are they necessarily reliant on a 'centralized power structure of editors, critics, and translators'. They can get by on modest funding, switch editors at a moment's notice, keep a flexible roster of contributors and publish texts without having to invest in their authors beyond that particular moment of publication – even though (and this is the all-important caveat) their potential long-term significance for the fostering of local literary culture can be completely out of proportion to the modesty of their outward appearance. By the same token, journals can fold after a few issues and still, retrospectively, be singled out as crystallizing pivotal moments in literary history. This is most obvious when facsimiles or compilations of the journals – as in the cases of *Voorslag*, *Caliban* (Maputo, 1971–1972) and *Charrua* (Maputo, 1984–1986) – are reissued long after the fact as monuments to this least monumental form of print literature. Finally, and very significantly for my argument, the often hyper-local nature of these journals belies the multiple ways in which they connect across geographies, literatures and languages, shaping malleable literary world maps that contribute to the contours and orientations of the local literary culture.

It is this last aspect that characterizes the mode of world-making investigated in this chapter. The local, one might say, is afforded a particular texture through intimations of what I call *literary distance*, whereby momentary constellations of 'other' literatures serve to position the journal in a world space (and a secular temporality) whose coordinates differ from the international order of state power. This distance, however, can only be grasped in relation to *literary proximity* – that is, what a journal defines, explicitly or implicitly, as *its own* literary domain. The main locus of such proximity is the original material presented in the magazine, but this is given density and meaning by way of contrasts that can be geographical, ideological, linguistic or aesthetic in nature.

In these respects, literary distance is related to Pascale Casanova's (2004) world republic of letters, which establishes a social space that is not (or not only) a mirror of the political world map. Yet the instantiation of distance in these journals is more flexible and idiosyncratic than her model apparently allows. Indeed, the point of the magazine format is rather that distance becomes *negotiable*, however fleetingly. By bringing the distant into the journal it is actively made proximate – as when René Char, Bertolt Brecht, Dante and Jean-Paul Sartre are quoted prominently in the first issue of the Maputo journal *Charrua* (June 1984). Such enfoldings of distant literature recalibrate, in turn, the very meaning of proximity. The national or colonial space may in this way recede into the background, or become relativized, when a journal engages other orders of belonging, such as an allegiance to the lyric as a genre, or to writers as a transnational professional category. This shows that distance–proximity relationships should not be thought of only in geographical or political terms but must also be imagined phenomenologically, as elusive experiential categories in which language and heteroglossia have pride of place. Varying degrees of comprehensibility, the contrasting affective charge of different languages, the splitting or gathering of constituencies of readers through multilingualism – all enter the mix, producing 'translingual events' (Helgesson and Kullberg 2018) with complex implications for how we read the cosmopolitan–vernacular making of literary time.

To approach these larger questions, I investigate a limited yet regionally comparative corpus: specific examples are culled from *Voorslag*, *The New African*, *The Purple Renoster*, *The Classic*, *Caliban* and *Charrua*. South African journals form the backbone of this account, but the two Mozambican examples (*Caliban* and *Charrua*) offer an instructive contrast. In terms of period, it should be noted that *Voorslag* precedes apartheid, and the Mozambican cases must be understood on their own historical terms. Although contextual knowledge is factored into my discussion, my main method consists in reading the journals themselves, both as designed material objects and as compilations of texts, from the viewpoint of a cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic.

Periodical research and world literature

This chapter's focus on little magazines has a context of its own. Periodical research has increased exponentially in recent decades, as observed by Latham and Scholes (2006) and confirmed by the emergence of an academic journal such as *Periodical*

Studies, founded in 2013. The ghosts of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound haunt this field both as practitioners and as the first theoreticians of little magazines (Eliot 1926, Pound 1930), which in Pound's understanding were 'a core about which / not a box inside which every item' was contained (quoted in White 2013: 2). Eric B. White's understanding of modernist periodicals as dialectically cosmopolitan and local vehicles for inaugurating 'new aesthetic principles' or holding 'existing ones in suspension before they were picked up and developed by the next generation' (ibid.) resonates strongly with my discussion in this chapter. If anything, these southern African periodicals repeatedly signpost affinities with magazines and literary groupings elsewhere. It can seem as though the little magazine functions as an anthropological constant across the world in the twentieth century, negotiating – as did Eliot (1926) – between the extremes of narrowness and broader appeal. However, the fractured political conditions in southern Africa also rerouted aesthetic endeavours in directions that cannot be accounted for in terms of North Atlantic modernism. The African dimension matters, in other words, and recent years have witnessed how early work by Lindfors (1996) has been further developed by, among many others, Switzer (1997), Gardiner (2004), Barber (2006), Mokoena (2009), Hofmeyr (2013), Sandwith (2014), Peterson, Hunter and Newell (2016), Bush (2016), Suhr-Sytsma (2017), Davis, Dick and LeRoux (2018) and Mkhize (2018). One reason for the post-millennial surge in interest in periodicals is archival: digitization has radically, if unevenly, enhanced access. In African and other post-colonial regions with lower volumes of book publication, it can be added that periodicals have been not just a central part of print culture, but sometimes almost *all* of print culture.

As in print culture generally, so in literature specifically: it is by way of magazines that print literatures in African contexts have prevailed, from the nineteenth century until the ongoing digital revolution, which once again has reshaped the conditions for literary practice on the African continent (as did the double incursion of print and colonialism in the nineteenth century). These post-millennial developments bracket the concerns of this chapter, which deals with pre-digital print journals, but not in a nostalgic register. The point, rather, is that the digital era has made us see print culture afresh, enabling a renewed understanding of literary history. Eric Bulson's (2017) study *Little Magazine, World Form* is exemplary in this regard, combining as it does an established Western narrative of the modernist little magazine – in which the *English Review*, the *Egoist*, *Criterion*, *Dial* and Jolas's *transition* have pride of place – with a wide-ranging account of post-colonial and exiled magazines across the world.

To trace salient aspects of the little-magazine format in twentieth-century southern Africa, this chapter proceeds in five movements. The first section presents some theoretical considerations concerning 'field' (Bourdieu), 'world' (Arendt, Cheah, Hayot) and 'the vernacular'. The second section discusses the pre-apartheid initiative, *Voorslag*. The third section looks at the fates of *The New African*, *The Classic* and, above all, *The Purple Renoster* under high apartheid. The fourth section discusses the lusophone colonial and post-colonial cases of *Caliban* and *Charrua*. The conclusion, finally, attempts to articulate some larger implications of these discussions for world literature methodologies.

Field, world, vernacular

Sociologically, the makers of little magazines are agents on the literary field, as defined by Bourdieu (2008). Editors act as gatekeepers, deciding what should be included between the covers of a journal. In this way they contribute to staking out the historically shifting boundaries of the literary in the much wider social terrain of texts and speech acts. Writers present their texts in a bid to occupy a position in the literary terrain. Journals are collectively shaped in such a way that their 'profile' places them at more or less distinct positions in the field – as radical, liberal, aestheticizing, political, academic, avant-garde and so on.

To these general considerations, however, we need to add aspects that are historically specific to southern Africa. The fields in question are institutionally weaker than in Bourdieu's France, which to some extent explains why little magazines have been so important. Even in well-resourced South Africa, there was in the twentieth century a reduced number of local publishing outlets and, at least until the 1970s, a dearth of local reception (except for the special case of Afrikaans). In addition, colonialism and apartheid had instituted racialized regimes of literacy and literature, which explains the fragmented literary history of the region – but also makes it important to measure the degree to which some journals overcome the split.

But are literary journals identifiable as a world form at all? As implied above, increasing amount of evidence speaks in favour of such a view. Over a stretch of maybe 150 years, the material properties and social preconditions of little magazines on different continents make them particularly suitable for comparative investigations, as work by Brooker and Thacker (2009), Bulson (2017), Chaudhuri (2013), Orsini (2019) and others shows. Contrary to the

challenging case of the novel (Moretti 2000), with its French and English pedigree, magazines have not been straitjacketed by any dominant generic norm. Rather, a defining feature of the 'periodical code' (Brooker and Thacker 2009: 5–9) is the ability of magazines to accommodate multiple and contingent constellations of texts in various genres.

But if we understand the intervention of journals through the terms mentioned previously – literary distance and proximity – this requires a clarification of their spatial implications. Bourdieu (2008) usefully distinguished between social and physical space: social space, which is never quite tangible or visible, is typically transferred to relations in physical space. Social space, however, can also *warp* physical space. It is not just possible but indeed commonplace to be physically proximate while socially distant, and vice versa (Reed-Danahay 2015). This is a central implication of Casanova's (2004) world republic of letters: mediated by print, the world republic is a highly differentiated social space that is relatively independent of physical location. Its 'capital' in her account, Paris, happens to be both physical and social, and the actual publication of literature requires material resources – the point, however, is that social (coded as aesthetic) proximity can be established even across extreme geographical distances.

An intriguing twist in Casanova's argument is that aesthetic proximity to the centre has a temporal aspect:

The unification of literary space through competition presumes the existence of a common standard for measuring time, an absolute point of reference unconditionally recognized by all contestants ... Events that 'leave a mark' on the literary world have a 'tempo' that is unique to this world and that is not – or is not necessarily – 'synchronous' with the measure of historical (which is to say political) time that is established as official and legitimate.

(Casanova 2004: 87–8)

In this way, the 'aesthetic distance of a work or corpus of works from the center may thus be measured by their temporal remove from the canons that, at the precise moment of estimation, define the literary present' (ibid.: 88). As this chapter demonstrates, overcoming such aesthetic distance has frequently been a concern of little magazines in southern Africa.

There are potential problems with the model, however. Jarad Zimblar (2009) has claimed that both Bourdieu and Casanova reduce the literary field to a strict opposition between autonomy and heteronomy – between the pure aesthetic space of the literary present and the 'external' forces of commercialism

(Bourdieu) or politics (Casanova). *Literary* legitimacy, by their definition, must have an aesthetic and not a political or commercial motivation. Conversely, legitimacy in the heteronomous pole is measured in sales or instrumental efficacy, and has nothing to do with form. In this regard, Casanova has simply magnified Bourdieu's nationally confined model to a world scale. Although this binarism should be read as an *outcome* of empirical investigation rather than an *a priori premise* of field analysis, I quite agree with Zimbler that the South African case presents us with 'a reality in which agonistic relations are often complex and multi-directional, rather than Manichean' (ibid.: 612). Making sense of such a situation may be helped, as Zimbler claims, by a minimal understanding of the field as 'a relatively discrete space, a social universe within a universe, marked by peculiar practices, techniques and products which are defined in relation to one another' (ibid.: 615). Identifying the boundaries of such fields is methodologically challenging, but the theoretical point is that Casanova's model can work in reverse. Literary fields might well recognize the 'time zone' of the world republic of letters, but as either a resource to be exploited for their own ends or a foil for the construction of divergent values, without aiming for recognition in the centre. Hence literary fields are capable of producing their own events and aesthetic tempos that may or may not, at different moments, be synchronized with Casanova's literary Greenwich Meridian.

Here we need to pause, however, and ask whether the field concept itself requires supplementation. A potential weakness with the concept is its recursive nature: it invites us to read literary practice as a feedback loop, always reproducing the logic of the field but lacking significance beyond the vested interests of its agents. The playful nature of little magazines would seem to suggest otherwise. The field, however, is anything *but* playful; Casanova (2005: 90) speaks, characteristically, of 'the long and merciless war of literature'. Play and experimentation indicate instead another and more tentative relationship to the world than that of social competition. There are losers in games and battles, but not in free play. Experiments may fail, but that need not be the same as losing. To draw on Gadamer's (2013: 107) famous discussion, play exists 'in a world determined by the seriousness of its purposes' but it 'fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play'. Significantly, therefore, '[s]omeone who doesn't take play seriously is a spoilsport' (ibid.). In the examples discussed below, proponents of a cultural and political status quo, sometimes in the guise of state agents, have acted as spoilsports – but the nature of the mediated game in

these little magazines has sometimes enabled the carnivalesque incorporation of the spoilsports in play.

These remarks point towards the need to supplement 'field' with an attention to 'world'. If field analysis is all about how position-taking accumulates symbolic capital, 'world' directs our attention to the multiplicity of linguistic signification, play, material fabrication and collective as well as individual action. In Arendt's (1998: 52) understanding, as discussed in the introduction to this volume, the world is related 'to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together'. The world in this sense need not only be about accumulating capital but could equally be about 'incautious spending', a central notion in Rabindranath Tagore's ([1907] 2015: 282) understanding of world literature as steeped in the spirit of *ananda* (joy/delight). The little magazine, I argue, frequently bears the marks of such excess: ephemeral and constellational, its textual and visual content evinces a transversal tendency. Its 'aesthetic worlds', to use Hayot's (2012) term, interlace with other worlds which by definition will include the literary field without being reduced to it.

It is here, finally, that the vernacular enters the picture. A notoriously elusive term, the understanding in this chapter (and in the present volume more generally) is that the vernacular is a multivalent, relational concept. As such, it draws our attention to particular tensions in the construction of literary values, languages and worlds. A general observation is that all these journals avail themselves of vernacular relationalities – through demotic registers of language, local languages (Afrikaans, Shangaan, Shona), locally embedded words or a generic notion of 'the people' – in their projects of 'literarization' (Beecroft 2015: 11–12), but these become literarily meaningful (with varying degrees of success) only in contrast to some cosmopolitan 'other' that is coded precisely as *not* vernacular. As both Pollock (2006) and Beecroft (2015) make clear in their respective historical arguments, we should not expect to find any *unmediated* vernacularity in the domain of literary practice, only constructions and projections of the same, involving adaptations of cosmopolitan models. This is one crucial difference between a linguistic and a literary notion of the vernacular: being a peculiar, crafted use of language, literature's mode of public formation operates at a remove from direct verbal communication. This is all the more so if we restrict our definition of the literary to print literature. The vernacular, therefore, can be understood as a vanishing point around which little magazines often organize themselves, as I intend to show.

This ‘fetish that rules the country ...’: Shocking the settlers in *Voorslag*

In a letter to the editor, a certain Erich Mayer explained why he found the first issue of *Voorslag* (June 1926) disappointing. In his view, it tended to ‘mislead and confuse the public opinion both here and abroad, the writers being neither too well acquainted with the true mentality, character and aims of their Dutch-speaking compatriots, nor with the true psychology of the black and coloured races of South Africa’ (*Voorslag* July 1926: 67–8). It failed, above all, to express the ‘virile spirit of our young South African culture’ (ibid.: 67). The response of the editor, Roy Campbell, was cutting: ‘God forbid that art should ever express the “soul” of such a small, rancidly-racial nation as ours. The soul of our nation is always being expressed in Eistedfodds, exhibitions of paintings by South African artists, and anthologies of bad poetry. If this is art, then the soul it expresses must be suffering from senile decrepitude’ (*Voorslag* August 1926: 59).

Although Robin Hallett (1978: 29) could describe its brief appearance in 1926 as ‘one of the few really exciting events in the history of South African literature’, the afterlife of *Voorslag* in South Africa in the 2020s is hardly guaranteed. Produced by white male authors, it addressed an exclusively white readership in the Union. In other words, its intervention occurred entirely within the ambit of a politically dominant and constitutively racist settler minority. But an intervention it was: designed as a provocation – *voorslag* means ‘whiplash’ in Afrikaans – the journal managed, at least in its early issues, both to upset racist complacency and to bring fragments of European avant-gardist modernism to bear on a South African context.

The extravagant Roy Campbell (1901–1957), who later became a fascist fellow-traveller in Spain, was at the time a fêted young poet, recently returned from Britain, where his long poem *The Flaming Terrapin* (1924) had been met with enthusiasm in London’s literary circles. In a mythologized moment he teamed up in the South African winter of 1926 – the same year that Eliot (1926) theorized the ‘literary review’ – with the even younger writers William Plomer (1903–1973) and Laurens van der Post (1906–1996) to produce *Voorslag*. Campbell hailed from Durban, a town which even in white South Africa at the time had a reputation for its reactionary and insular English colonial culture. Cooped up with his family and co-editors in a borrowed bungalow by the Natal coast, and having secured sufficient funds from acquaintances to launch *Voorslag*, Campbell’s verbal missiles met their target with high precision. Before

they fizzled out, that is: conflicts with *Voorslag*'s sponsor, Lewis Reynolds, led to Campbell's resignation as editor after only two issues, and Plomer and Van der Post followed suit after issue three, which meant that the tone shifted in the remaining run of *Voorslag* (an additional eight issues).

As illustrated by Campbell's exchange with Mayer, Campbell and Plomer (Van der Post was less of an influence) attempted to rearticulate the cosmopolitan-vernacular terms in which the culture of the white, English-speaking elite viewed itself. If Mayer expressed the complacency of a local elite that took its British and 'racial' pedigree as proof of its cultural superiority, then Campbell's contributions to *Voorslag* inverted the very logic of (white) racial and national solidarity. They did so primarily by undermining the bedrock of this elite's racialized cosmopolitanism, namely its tight identification with the cultural prestige of Britain, coupled with a patriarchal claim to colonial 'virility' and 'youth' that old England lacked. The accumulated effect of Campbell's attacks was to play havoc with the clock of South African English culture. In this way he vernacularized – negatively – his own social group. His exposure to modernist currents of thought and art in Western Europe at the time – through Nietzsche, Freud, Frazer, T. S. Eliot and others – armed him with a conceptual repertoire previously unheard of in the English circles of South Africa. This is why, instead of youth, he finds a culture marked by 'senile decrepitude'. In his review of Plomer's novel *Turbott Wolfe* (1925), he laments that 'political, moral, and theological standpoints are still considered legitimate criteria in reviewing a work of art' (*Voorslag* June 1926: 39). The only proper response to *Turbott Wolfe* would be 'the production of another work of art as significant ... and so far this country has produced nothing approaching it' (ibid.). In support of such aestheticism, under the pseudonym Lewis Marston, Campbell produces in the second issue a wholesale dismissal of Victorian and Georgian poetry as 'a form of confectionery' (*Voorslag* July 1926: 33) that has betrayed the 'genius of the English race' (ibid.: 32), which found full expression in the run of poets from Chaucer to Shelley. To remedy this 'Victorian débauché', he writes, 'all English artists and writers who are doing anything worth while have their eyes on Europe' (ibid.: 34).

In the voice of Marston, Campbell speaks of the English as 'we'; in his own voice the 'we' (as in the response to Mayer) tends to refer, caustically, to his social group in South Africa, or to a generic civilizational 'we' whose reference can both expand and contract. The latter reaches its apotheosis in Campbell's essay 'Fetish Worship in South Africa' (*Voorslag* July 1926), which can be described as a South

African reinscription of some Nietzschean and Freudian figures of thought. In characteristic modernist fashion Campbell is full of contempt for 'mass consciousness'. Crowds, and hence 'the average respectable citizen', are governed by self-interest and 'primitive instincts' (ibid.: 5). Their own 'superstitions, taboos and witch-rituals' are used 'as standards by which to gauge the barbarity of others' (ibid.). In a striking formal manoeuvre, Campbell organizes much of the essay as a dialogue between Writer and Reader. This allows him to achieve an internal distance between what we read as his own voice and the conventional wisdom of the Reader. The latter's attachment to the notion of 'White South Africa' is abhorrent to the Writer. This is the South Africa that is ruled by the fetish of 'Colour-prejudice' (ibid.: 13) and the mania for racial labelling. Here the first-person plural suddenly returns: 'this mania forces us to tie tickets on to things before they exist. It is all the outcome of fear[,] the strongest of all mob emotions, and it forces us into all sorts of necessary tyrannies' (ibid.: 14). The notion of 'White South Africa', he adds, is 'just vague and mystical enough to appeal to sentimentalists: and sentimentality is the chief quality of the South African character' (ibid.).

The 'we's' referential slippage between an English/civilizational and a (white) South African community stakes out the operative poles in *Voorslag's* cosmopolitan-vernacular dynamic: in Campbell's understanding, the journal's brief is to redefine both registers of cultural belonging. What the white South Africans take to be English is misinformed and outdated, and what they value as South African is deplorable. Although of a strikingly different temperament, William Plomer contributed to this mode of immanent critique in the satirical poem 'The Strandloopers' by his alter ego Pamela Willmore. A defunct Afrikaans word for a group among the Khoisan (actually spelt 'strandlopers'), Plomer uses it to mock delusions of racial superiority as well as social Darwinist conceptions of progress: 'Strandloopers? ... / They had no stays or stockings, spectacles or boots! / ... No bioscopes or beer or guns or daily press! / ... Had they no culture? We have quite a lot' (*Voorslag* June 1926: 53).

With Plomer's poem we also glimpse another function of vernacularity in *Voorslag*. The translingual use of Afrikaans in the poem's title is of a piece with the ambition to produce a bilingual magazine (and even trilingual – there were plans to introduce Zulu (Gardner and Chapman 1985: 1)). Throughout much of the twentieth century, Afrikaans would often be invoked in English-language literary circles as a touchstone of South African authenticity and hence a refuge from the dominant yet derivative nature of Britishness – as indeed the very

name 'voorslag' signals. Although only three articles in Afrikaans and two Afrikaans translations of Catullus would ever be published in the eleven issues of *Voorslag*, this underlines the *symbolic* importance of including the language in the otherwise anglophone journal. By constraining comprehensibility, the inclusion of Afrikaans drew a clear boundary between local and foreign readers – just as the use of *both* languages at this time singled out the local public as white.

The tone of earnest aspiration in Laurens van der Post's essay 'Kuns Ontwikkeling in Afrikaans' ('The cultivation of art in Afrikaans') contrasts quite jarringly with Campbell's bombastic pronouncements and Plomer's satire. Van der Post rehearses here the Afrikaner narrative of struggle for cultural and linguistic self-determination, with both Dutch and English as antagonists – and without any mention of African languages. His point is to support the ambition to produce 'art' ('kuns') and 'literary works' ('letterkundige werke') in Afrikaans, a language he claims is still in its infancy. 'It was only yesterday', he writes, 'that they [Afrikaans writers] learned to write in their own language and it is with great uncertainty that they search for a proper form' (*Voorslag* July 1926: 42).¹ As can be expected, the 'properness' of form is measured against 'foreign' standards: 'in comparison to the age-old works from overseas [van die Buiteland] our literary harvest is very mediocre' (ibid.: 43).² This presents us with an ideal-typical statement of Casanovian world literary rivalry, in which the uneven vernacular-cosmopolitan relationship is not just a geographical or linguistic matter, but also a temporal one – the accumulated status of the 'age-old works' cannot be matched by will alone. The desirability of writing in Afrikaans is nonetheless understood, along Herderian lines, as axiomatic in Van der Post's piece.

There seems, then, to be both an ironic and an earnest deployment of vernacularity in *Voorslag*. Campbell's Nietzschean frame of mind pushed him towards a notional separation between the two, violently dismissing the settler vernacular of English South Africans (which he knew intimately) in terms of 'mediocrity' and 'crowd consciousness', while gesturing towards authentically vernacular values located elsewhere, among 'natives' or indeed – in a joking register – in a 'Wildebeste' (gnu) who is 'self-contained and sufficient ...

¹ 'Hulle taal het hulle eers gister leer skryf en met groot onsekerheid tas hulle rond vir 'n juister vorm.' My translation here and elsewhere, unless otherwise indicated.

² '... in vergelyking met die eeuoue werk van die Buiteland is ons letterkundige oes baie middelslag.'

never goes about trying to inflict his language, his point of view, or the law of his existence on anybody else' (ibid.: 12). Indeed, '[i]f you try to make him swot up English or Afrikaans he simply kicks up his heels and scampers off. Whenever he wants to say anything he says "Kngrrarhr!"' (ibid.). The true vernacular, it seems, lies beyond the boundaries of human culture altogether, a thought which boomerangs to knock down the high pretensions of Campbell's elitist cosmopolitanism. The wildebeeste, presented first as 'a photograph of a gentleman who belongs to an old, a very old South African family' (ibid.), is successful as a gag, but transforms the vernacular – in primitivist fashion – into a pure abstraction even as it supposedly directs, by way of a non-human animal, the reader's desire towards vitalist Being in its raw form. This is a parody of primitivism, signalling its exhaustion at the very moment of its aesthetic adoption in South Africa. The joke's deft evasion of the vernacular as a concrete *human and African* world of language amounts to a significant failure to bridge the distant and proximate by aesthetic means – a failure that ultimately retraces the alienated condition of settler colonial culture, or its lack of world.

Little magazines under high apartheid and late colonialism

The brief moment of *Voorslag* inspired followers such as *The Toulieier* (1930) and *Trek* (1939–1952). Although the latter covered a much broader range of cultural and political issues, and also cultivated a left-leaning ethos, it is notable that *Trek* memorialized *Voorslag* in 1951 (Routh 1951a, 1951b), thereby constructing a particular lineage of South African cultural magazines. Insofar as these journals attempted to synchronize the (white) cultural clock with Western Europe, however, this project floundered in the apartheid era. The 1980 *EiA* issue mentioned earlier appeared in the wake of decades of turmoil for South African literature. The effect of the Publications and Entertainments Act, passed by the South African parliament in 1963, in combination with the older Suppression of Communism Act was brutal. Ushered in by the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, this era of police raids, bannings and banishment effectively gagged a large group of writers within the borders of South Africa and forced large numbers into exile. Under such adverse conditions, could literary journals matter at all? In a qualified sense, yes. Being sometimes infinitesimally small, yet always connected locally and internationally in ways that the state's repressive

apparatus struggled to fathom, journals became critical players in the adaptive continuation of literary practice. My three examples in this section are *The New African*, *The Classic* and *The Purple Renoster*, with an emphasis on the latter. They range from the slightly bigger and more diverse in content (*New African*) to the extremely small and literary (*Renoster*).

Censorship under apartheid is a story of a mentally divided Afrikaner establishment. On the one hand the proliferation of mass media was seen as a threat to its core values, a threat typically coded as ‘pornography’. On the other hand this establishment – in the spirit of Van der Post’s essay in *Voorslag* – was equally anxious to appear contemporaneous with the West. As McDonald (2009) shows, censorship became for a period the state’s tool for promoting a normative version of literature, understood in formalist (New Critical) terms and seen as a sign of an advanced culture. Instead of the intended separation between literature and politics, however, this policy drew them together more tightly than ever: in as much as the state had a stake in the literary field, literary practitioners would increasingly, and often reluctantly, have a stake in the political field. The journals themselves provide a remarkable record of this unfolding, and deteriorating, state of affairs.

The March 1964 issue of *The New African* notes, on its first page, that its offices had been raided and emptied by the police. All the back issues, counting from 1962, were held in police custody at Caledon Square, Cape Town. ‘We are unable to anticipate the charge that may be brought against us,’ the editors write, ‘for the reason that we are aware of having broken no laws.’ The May 1964 issue reports that the offices were raided once again, with the police confiscating more than 2,000 copies of the March issue. This time the security police claimed to be investigating charges of obscenity on account of the story ‘The Fugitives’ by Can Themba. ‘It is not the normal function of the Security Police to investigate such charges,’ the editors drily note, and defiantly hope that their readers are ‘inspired rather than deterred by the attention we are receiving’. It did not end there, however: after their escape from South Africa (Vigne and Currey 2014), the editors rebooted *The New African* in London.

The Classic, which was started by the ill-fated Nat Nakasa and whose first appearance coincided with the passing of the Publications and Entertainments Act, had the same source of funding as *The New African* (see below), but contrary to the latter’s political outspokenness, *The Classic* was forcibly pushed into a political corner – and almost crushed – by government policies. The editorial in issue four, which appeared in 1965, mournfully notes:

Nat Nakasa [*The Classic's* first editor] has left South Africa on an exit permit and cannot return for as long as present rules persist.

...

These have been terrible times, insane times, when the simplest human values have been confused, labelled and belittled, and many of those who have sought to propagate them banned and imprisoned. People of all races and convictions have suffered terror and violence from the outrage of ninety days to the madness of the station explosion.

These are tired days, wounded days, but those initial values, which presume for all men the freedom to love, live, search and aspire, must not be neglected; and it is of them, to the best of its ability, that *Classic* will attempt to speak.

(*The Classic* 1964)

The Classic survived, but only just: it would take until 1966 for issue five to appear – produced in memory of Nat Nakasa, who had committed suicide in New York, and also eulogizing the Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker, who had ended her life in the same month of July 1965.

In *The Purple Renoster*, finally, we also find editorials in issues five (1963) and six (1966) that comment directly on the state's disruption of the literary field. My central example is the 1966 issue, but let us first reflect on some differences between these three journals. As is well known today, both *The New African* and *The Classic* were supported by the Farfield Foundation, which was secretly channelling funds from the CIA (Saunders 1999). This ambiguous financial security enabled professional production and distribution, and hence a noticeable (if still marginal) presence in the public sphere. *The New African* mentions the substantial circulation figure of 2,000, which reflects its more political orientation as well as its continental (African) address. Subtitled *The Radical Review*, it had a socialist edge and was always topical and connected to Africa at large. Even so, literary material enjoyed prominence, and writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ama Ata Aidoo and Ayi Kwei Armah published some of their earliest pieces in the journal. *The Classic's* profile was narrower: its brief was to publish poetry, stories and essays, but with a contemporary African connection. It undertook to translate work from both francophone and lusophone writers, cultivating in this way a broader African ethos on behalf of the South African literary field. *The Purple Renoster*, finally, was narrowest – and the most local – of all, in McDonald's (2009: 119) view 'the most typical "little magazine" of the apartheid era'. Having first appeared in 1956, it was almost entirely managed by its editor, the physically challenged Lionel Abrahams, and

had no mass impact whatsoever. Indeed, by Abrahams's own admission in 1966, its sporadic appearance meant that it could better be described as 'an irregular series of small anthologies' (*The Purple Renoster* 6, 1966: 6) than a periodical.

On a Bourdieusian field map, *The New African* would count as the most heteronomous, and *The Purple Renoster* as the most 'purely' literary – with *The Classic* between the two, but closer to the *Renoster*. Yet all three were affected by state legislation, and all three register this fact on their pages. Here we come up against the question of form, genre and rhetoric. What can a little magazine do when faced with state repression? And what happens to the specific values cultivated by its makers?

The Purple Renoster offers a remarkable vantage point from which to consider these questions. The name itself is a performance of vernacular inventiveness: *renoster* means 'rhinoceros' in Afrikaans, with purple thrown in as a surreal twist. In the words of Abrahams's inaugural editorial in 1956, the journal was dedicated to 'writing done in response to the need for self-expression – as distinct from that produced primarily to the requirements of journalism, academicism and crusaderism' (*The Purple Renoster* 1, 1956: 3). Indeed, that first editorial begins with some statements that manifest this turn away from purposefulness:

The point about purple is its pointlessness. We never saw a purple renoster, we never hope to see one; we can tell you anyhow that we're jolly well going to be one. Not because we have any ideas about what purple is pertinent to. We freely admit, in fact, that so far as we can see, it is thoroughly impertinent. And from our point of view all contributors to 'The Purple Renoster' will be (to vary a phrase from one of them) Impertinent Writers.

(Ibid.)

This gives some idea of the journal's spirit: a purposeful purposelessness, along the lines of Kantian aesthetics – but with humour. This is the domain of Gadamer's 'play'. It is hardly a coincidence that the words 'purple', 'purpose' and 'purposeless' are in such sonorous proximity.

So far, then, it would seem as though the *The Purp(ose)le(ss) Renoster* fits perfectly in the Bourdieusian–Casanovian schema. Abrahams is deliberately positioning himself and his journal along the autonomous side of the field, pursuing literature for its own sake and not in response to any external specification or demand, and certainly not for economic profit. Following Casanova's model, it would seem that *Renoster* attempts to synchronize itself with the world republic of letters. Physically distant from the 'capitals' of Paris, London and New York, Abrahams's journal makes a bid for proximity to the autonomous pole in the social space of world literature.

Such an analysis ignores, however, how the dynamics of the local literary field in South Africa reconfigured the logic of literary legitimacy. Issue six of *The Purple Renoster* appeared a full ten years after the first. On the back of this 1966 issue, there is an intriguing inscription:

ONE HAS ONE'S DOUBTS
ABOUT 50,000,000 FRENCH-
MEN ... BUT THE S. B. (*),
THE P. C. B. (**) & THIRTY-
NINE SUBSCRIBERS (***)
CAN'T BE WRONG
:: THE PURPLE RENOSTER::
NEEDS LOOKING INTO

The asterisks are explained at the foot of the page: S. B. (Security Branch) means 'cops', P. C. B. (Publications Control Board) means 'censors' and the thirty-nine subscribers are defined as 'connoisseurs'. There is a drama going on here, with *The Purple Renoster* at its centre. Although cryptic, it speaks with uncanny precision to Casanova's much later model. The '50,000,000 FRENCHMEN' gestures self-ironically towards France and Paris as the world centre of culture – as if the *Renoster* belonged there as a matter of course. But the inscription tells us that the *real* significance of the *Renoster* – its legitimacy – is instead secured jointly by agents of the state plus the thirty-nine subscribers, the 'connoisseurs' who make up a strategic section of the local literary field.

The editorial clarifies matters. Presenting it as an 'Open letter to the Publications Control Board', Lionel Abrahams launches here a furious yet witty attack on the government. He begins, characteristically, by distancing himself from politics as such. Whatever the ideology, politicians make Abrahams 'itch, writhe and rattle with unbelief, fear, revulsion, the moment they militate and thus cease to be their tolerable philosophical selves' (*The Purple Renoster* 6, 1966: 3). The only politicians he can trust are those 'whose causes are lost' and 'instead of deceiving their followers and fellows, get deceived by them' (ibid.). This establishes precisely a *literary* distance from daily politics. And yet, Abrahams must admit, he himself has been launched into a 'ludicrous political "career"' by the Publications Control Board and the Security Branch.

What follows is an account of how his home had been raided by the police one July morning in 1964, in search of subversive and incriminating writings. A few months later he was again visited by police brandishing a copy of *The Purple Renoster* issue five, 'one of an unintentionally limited edition of *under 200*, then

some *fifteen months old* (emphasis in original), as he poignantly adds. This time the journal was being confiscated because of a short story by Barney Simon, 'Dolores', which the PCB deemed to be pornographic. 'During this operation', Abrahams writes, 'I allowed myself to opine that [the policeman] and his colleagues were not confining themselves strictly to real matters of state security. But that outburst must be set down to political naivete' (*The Purple Renoster* 6, 1966: 4).

With *Renoster* issue five declared an 'undesirable publication', Abrahams is compelled to register his strong disagreement:

[M]y contention is that the obscene elements of the narrative are artistically functional, and that the effective emotion is not salaciousness but agonised compassion for people caught in common traps between destructiveness and suffering. Only an unintelligent reading could fail to intergrate [*sic*] the elements to the humane, serious and poetic purpose.

(*The Purple Renoster* 6, 1966: 4)

Exploiting the moment, Abrahams uses the editorial to object to the PCB's banning of Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* before going for the kill: for all their boorishness and repressiveness, the censors repeatedly affirm 'the power of our particular armament, WORDS'. In a 'verbal war' against a government that displays such a '*terror of words*' (emphasis in original), Abrahams affirms, '*The Purple Renoster* can play some tiny role. For it, the battle will consist in publishing what seems worthy to us, without prior reference to the possibility of your discredited proscriptions'. Hence, he concludes, if 'this conduct constitutes politics, then ... my political career is not yet over' (ibid.: 5-6). The crowning joke that confirms this assumption can be seen in issue ten (1970): the contents page announces that the issue is 'Edited by Lionel Abrahams, with the Publications Control Board, the Minister of Justice, the police force and the legal profession'. By this time, Abrahams's own dedication to local literature had resulted in the publication of young poets such as Mongane Serote, Oswald Mtshali and Njabulo Ndebele, whose work radically vitalized South African literature in the years to come (see Davis 2016 on Mtshali). In relation to *The Purple Renoster* it is clear that Abrahams's negotiation of political pressures was more than merely belletristic. His editorials register not just a shift in his own literary habitus, but a wider transformation of literary legitimacy in South Africa. Part of this transformation consisted in attrition and diasporization through the 'restlessness' of apartheid (Bethlehem 2018), but another aspect was the recoding of literary value. Abrahams's 1966 editorial says, in effect, that the literary itself has become political. What he ironically calls his 'political career'

becomes in this respect fully consistent with his 'literary career' – he keeps on doing the same thing as before, it is just that the *state* has now forcibly defined it as political. But as his closing paragraphs warn, the state has thereby imposed itself upon a field of activity that it fails to understand.

Curious continuities: *Caliban* and *Charrua* in Mozambique

Geographically proximate to South Africa, Mozambique's social and cultural distance from its neighbour is often astoundingly great. Language is clearly a factor in maintaining this distance – especially in the literary domain. In a biographical note on the Mozambican novelist Ungulani ba ka Khosa, we read that in 1984 he joined 'a crazy, dreaming, schizophrenic group of youths who decided, in the midst of a drinking bout, to start the best literary journal in the world: *Charrua*' (Khosa 1990).³ Predictably, this lusophone journal had no impact whatsoever in South Africa, but was decisive for the development of Mozambican literature. Eight issues appeared in Maputo between 1984 and 1986, before it was abruptly discontinued. When Ungulani's bio was published in 1990 (in an edition of his first novel, *Ualalapi*), *Charrua* had already made its mark.

Mozambique in the mid-1980s was a post-colony in crisis: nothing in the daily lives of people could be taken for granted, neither bread nor cooking oil – and least of all the technical and material resources required to publish a literary journal. The immediate reasons behind this situation were multiple. One was the decision by the ruling party Frelimo, following the successful revolution and achievement of independence in Mozambique in 1975, to adopt an authoritarian Marxist-Leninist path of social transformation. The Soviet-style planned economy, including the collectivization of agriculture, was a dismal failure. Both agricultural and industrial production dropped by half between 1979 and 1982 (Marcum 2018: 175–6), resulting in a situation of scarcity that alienated large parts of the population from Frelimo. Another, later reason behind the crisis was destabilization by the South African-trained and -funded rebel group Renamo. In a harrowing hybrid of a civil war and a proxy war, fought partly on behalf of the apartheid government, Renamo brought Mozambique to its knees in the latter half of the 1980s (Vines 1991). When *Charrua* started publishing in 1984,

³ 'Em 1984 junta-se a uma malta maluca, sonhadora, esquizofrénica, que resolve, no meio duma bebedeira, fundar a melhor revista literária do mundo: *Charrua*' (Khosa 1990).

this conflict was beginning to affect the country badly, although Maputo would remain under Frelimo's control throughout the conflict.

In other words, *Charrua* appeared at a moment of embattled decolonization, in a country with very low – but rising – levels of alphabetic literacy, thinly spread competence in the national language (Portuguese) and a political system with limited tolerance of dissent. And yet its makers intended it to be 'the best literary journal in the world'. There seems to be a glaring misfit here between these historical circumstances, which all speak of adversity and a nationalistic post-revolutionary fervour, and the strong cosmopolitan attachment to literature expressed in that ambition.

An excerpt from the poem 'A arte de viver' ('The Art of Living') by Armando Artur, published in the third issue of *Charrua*, gives us one iteration of this attachment:

I inhabit the halo of my verses
where, tirelessly
I rhyme words that lack rhyme
and dry tears without weeping

...

here is the reason
because I dream without sleeping
because I fly without wings
because I live without a life

behind these verses I hide
the treasure of my contrariety
the mystery of my infirmity
the fetish of my eternity

(*Charrua* 3, 1984: 31)⁴

⁴ 'Habitó no halo
dos meus versos
onde incansavelmente
rimo palavras sem rima
e seco lágrimas sem pranto

...

eis a razão
porque sonho sem sono
porque voo sem asas
porque vivo sem vida

no avesso destes versos, escondo
o tesouro da minha contrariedade
o mistério da minha enfermidade
e o feitiço da minha eternidade'

For anyone trained in Western literary history, this is fully *recognizable* as a lyric poem. We are confronted here with the subdued voice of a speaker, the 'I', who expands on his or her subjectivity by way of paradox. Intensely self-reflexive, it stages the act of writing poetry as a metaphor for subjectivation. The poem shapes this metaphor through the familiar gesture of ineffability. It is grasping at a truth beyond the words themselves, in their negative spaces, 'behind these verses'. Read in this detached form, the poem gives us no clue as to where it is written – besides the obvious fact that it is written in Portuguese, which covers many potential locations. Determining *when* is slightly easier: the lack of regular rhyme, the anaphoric repetitions and the self-reflexive paradoxes signal lyric modernism of one kind or another.

Artur was not alone. Key figures in the *Charrua* group, notably Ungulani and the poet Eduardo White, gave the magazine a strong – if not consistent – modernist profile. *Charrua* became in this way the vehicle of a post-revolutionary literary generation whose core group consisted of no more than a dozen writers and intellectuals in their mid-twenties and early thirties. Few though they were, under the auspices of the official Mozambican Writers' Association, AEMO, they were given free rein to shape their journal. On one reading, then, *Charrua* presents us with a little-magazine scenario not unlike *Voorslag's*: a *Sturm und Drang*, an up-and-coming generation of writers vying for recognition and using a journal as a springboard to enter the literary field. They succeeded to such an extent that their influence has been seen as an obstacle to later generations of writers (Manjate 2018). But the question remains: how do we make sense of *Charrua's* modernist impulse from the inside out, as a distinct product of the city of Maputo in a critical phase of its history? Although its deployment of modernism and literary distance invites some comparison with *Voorslag* on a formal level, the historical position of *Charrua's* makers is dramatically different to that of Campbell and Plomer. *Charrua* was a distinctly decolonizing endeavour, which challenges us, to borrow Simon Gikandi's (2011: 163) phrasing, to account for 'the literature of decolonization as a distinctive event in literary history'. Both terms, 'decolonization' and 'literary history', are important here, given that *Charrua's* literary decolonization proceeded on different premises than the state-driven decolonization of Frelimo. Indeed, to some extent it can be read alongside what Gikandi (ibid.: 165) calls 'narratives of delegitimation' which question the post-colonial nationalist project. Such a claim needs, however, *also* to acknowledge *Charrua's* investment in the nation, which we can register in the title of the journal. The Portuguese word 'charrua' means 'plough'; this alludes to

the hoe, one of the three pictorial elements in the Mozambican flag, where, not so coincidentally, we also find an open book. At first blush, then, the journal's name explicitly endorsed Frelimo's national project. The introductory editorial plays around with this:

No, dear reader.

This 'Plough'/'Charrua' does not issue from the Ministry of Agriculture. 'Charrua' is a literary journal produced by the young writers of the Mozambican Writers' Association.

But why in that case 'Plough'/'Charrua'? ... The reason is that this plough-journal ... intends, in the field of literature and culture more generally, to be a most valuable implement at the service of Mozambican literature and arts.

...

These youngsters, dear reader, understand that with this 'plough' they will not be sowing anything, since the seed was already cast in the soil a long time ago. What they will be doing, however, is to turn the soil, to scrape and rend it with the force of this 'Plough'/'Charrua' so the seed will germinate better.

(*Charrua* 1, 1984: 3)⁵

The rhetorical strategy is clear: the editorial's *captatio benevolentiae* – its bonding with its public – consists in deferring both to the imperative of post-colonial nation-building and to the older generation of anti-colonialists. It even pays homage to 'the labourers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals, soldiers and other workers in the vanguard' – one of the few times this vocabulary is used in the journal. By saying that the seed was sown a long time ago, the editorial stresses continuity, not rupture. Hence the journal is presented as sharing a common purpose with Frelimo's state-driven decolonization, and the theme of nation-building recurs in later issues. Number five/six (1985) celebrates the tenth anniversary of independence, and there are occasional poems and stories that speak the language of anti-imperialist struggle and socialist internationalism. But the name *Charrua* could also be read as a purely literary choice: although the hoe represented in the flag is normally called *enxada*, *charrua* is more forceful and sonorous. This attentiveness to the poetic function, which recalls the

⁵ 'Não leitor amigo. Esta "Charrua" não é do Ministério da Agricultura. A "Charrua" é uma revista literária dos jovens escritores da Associação dos Escritores Moçambicanos. Mas, então, porquê "Charrua"? ... É que esta charrua-revista ... pretende ser, no campo da literatura e da cultura em geral, uma preciosíssima alfaia ao serviço das artes e das letras moçambicanas. ... Estes jovens, caro leitor, entendem que, com esta "charrua", não vão semear nada, pois, a semente há muito foi lançada à terra. Pretendem, isso sim, revolver a terra, rasgá-la com a força desta "Charrua" para que a semente germine melhor.'

inward, self-reflexive turn we saw in Artur's poem, speaks to *Charrua*'s frequent valorization of literature as a world of its own and of writing as a desire and a craft (as well as the writing of desire – erotic themes are prominent).

The attachment to literature for its own sake is a constant feature of all eight issues. Examples are poetry by Fernando Pessoa, Aimé Césaire, Manuel Alegre and Vinicius de Moraes; the previously mentioned quotations from Char, Sartre, Dante and Brecht; presentations of Angolan writers Luandino Vieira and Pepetela; Ungulani ba ka Khosa's long essay on Ernest Hemingway in the third issue; various discussions of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nikolai Gogol, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Federico García Lorca and Nazim Hikmet; and trenchant presentations of Mozambican writers such as José Craveirinha, Rui Knopfli, Noémia de Sousa, Orlando Mendes and Rui Nogar. Tellingly, *Charrua*'s section for literary criticism, 'Reticências', is launched in the first issue with an essay by Khosa called 'Writing, this virus!' ('A escrita, esse vírus!') and introduced with a quotation from Roland Barthes's *Critique et vérité*:

To go from reading to criticism is to change desires, it is no longer to desire the work but to desire one's own language. But by that very process it is to send the work back to the desire to write from which it arose. And so discourse circulates around the book: *reading, writing*: all literature goes from one desire to another.

(Barthes 2007: 40, emphasis in original)⁶

This celebration of textuality as a self-generating machinery of desire serves to support the cultivation of Mozambican literary criticism ('the only criticism in the country that has found its form is sports writing' (*Charrua* 1, 1984: 11)). It mirrors the meta-lyrical aesthetic of Artur's poem discussed above, which posits a subjectivity as being produced by the two sides of the verses.

To understand the conditions of possibility for this modernist tendency in post-revolutionary Mozambique, it may help to consider a precursor to *Charrua*: Rui Knopfli and Antonio Quadros's *Caliban*, four issues of which appeared in 1971 and 1972. In some respects, *Caliban* could be described as a lusophone revival of *Voorslag*. Just as Campbell reviewed T. S. Eliot's *The Waste-Land* in the first 1926 issue of *Voorslag*, the first issue of *Caliban* opened with a brief essay on Eliot by Eugénio Lisboa, followed by Rui Knopfli's Portuguese translation

⁶ In the unattributed Portuguese translation as it appears in *Charrua*: 'Passar da leitura à crítica é deixar de desejar a obra para a própria linguagem. Mas, pelo mesmo acto, é também remeter a obra para o desejo da escrita, que a gerou. Assim gira a fala em termos do livro: Ler, escrever, de um desejo para o outro caminha a leitura' (*Charrua* 1, 1984: 11).

of *Ash Wednesday*. Without any editorial paratext, and with content consisting almost entirely of poetry, *Caliban* styles itself as a quintessentially modernist little magazine: a journal and a poetic-artistic performance at one and the same time. Russell Hamilton's (1975: 228) early assessment of it as 'a cosmopolitan Mozambican magazine' in which the majority of contributions should be considered as 'Euro-African' rather than African remains valid. Yet for all that, the historical preconditions enabling *Caliban*'s attempt at relocating modernism in 1971 were radically different from *Voorslag*'s English settler context in 1920s Natal. Decolonization had swept across Africa; Mozambique was embroiled in a war of liberation that soon enough, in 1974, precipitated a coup in Portugal and the subsequent independence in Mozambique in 1975. Hamilton (1975: 227) perceptively recognizes that *Caliban*, as indicated in the title, is grappling with 'the problem of an African poetry in European expression'. Its relocation of Euro-modernist linguistic reflexivity reveals in this way – and nowhere more clearly than in the poems by José Craveirinha in issues one and three/four – a spuriously 'universal' theme to be an historically entangled one.

For all its 'cosmopolitan flavor' and occasional tendency to reduce Africa to a 'decorative' element (ibid.: 224), *Caliban* did not come from nowhere. Indeed, its cosmopolitan orientation was an integral part of the local literary scene. As both Hamilton's and other accounts have shown (Helgesson 2009), late-colonial Lourenço Marques (as Maputo was called then) developed, from the 1940s onwards, a small but vibrant literary culture that enabled the emergence of subsequently canonized writers such as Luís Bernardo Honwana, and the above-mentioned De Sousa, Craveirinha and Knopfli. Even in *Caliban*, with its privileging of the lyric voice and lack of paratextual commentary, this lineage is acknowledged in Knopfli's homage in issue two to the poet Fonseca Amaral, 'Notas para a recordação do meu mestre Fonseca Amaral', where he describes his mentor as a catalysing presence in the post-1945 milieu. Knopfli's list of cultural practitioners whose progress in 'the adventure of creativity' Amaral had supported include De Sousa, Craveirinha and Rui Guerra (by then a well-known film director in Brazil), as well as himself (*Caliban* 2, 1970).

Caliban's cosmopolitan-vernacular constellation of poets and poetry reverberates in this way with *Charrua*'s poetics a dozen years later. The essays in *Charrua* devoted to Orlando Mendes (*Charrua* 4, 1984), Craveirinha (ibid.), and Knopfli (*Charrua* 5–6, 1985), and indeed Fátima Mendonça's survey of literature since independence (*Charrua* 7, 1985), all establish subterranean links with *Caliban* and the longer literary history of Maputo. Not only had

Caliban published work by Mendes, Craveirinha and Knopfli, but Mendonça's mention of Mutimati Bernabé's *Eu, o povo* ('I, the people') bridges the late-colonial, anti-colonial and post-colonial phases of Mozambican poetry: Mutimati Bernabé was the pseudonym of the Portuguese painter and poet António Quadros (1933–1994; not to be confused with the philosopher António Quadros, 1923–1993), who lived for many years in Mozambique. It was with Quadros that Knopfli started *Caliban*, and Quadros also featured in *Caliban* under the pseudonym Frey Iohannes Garabatus. Quadros's practice is reminiscent of Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms, and it is striking how his two personages are positioned at different ends of the colonial endeavour, with Garabatus parodying the diction of the sixteenth-century imperial apologist Camões and Mutimati Bernabé presented as a poet emerging from the depths of the Mozambican populace.

But if we acknowledge these local continuities and resonances as an enabling condition for *Charrua*, it is equally important to recognize that *Charrua* was both more cosmopolitan and more vernacular than *Caliban*. The constellation of writers published and mentioned in its pages requires a wide range of descriptors: modernist, realist, European, African, Western, lusophone, Latin American, national, anti-colonial, post-colonial, to some extent socialist. Its poetry and prose, on the other hand, tends to draw more directly on Mozambican – indeed, African – lexicons and locations than anything in *Caliban*. 'Writing back' to the former imperial centre is in this regard mostly a non-issue in *Charrua*. The magazine instead lays out the coordinates of a literary world on its own terms. By weaving the work of Mozambican writers into the web of literatures from elsewhere, it achieves a distinct, momentary amalgam of literary distance and proximity on behalf of a Mozambican imaginary. Its 'autonomy' consists in the freedom to elect affinities within the discourse network of printed literature. The condition is of course that this occurs in Portuguese as the vehicular language, but Portuguese serves also as a meeting point for multiple Mozambican languages – which figure intermittently on the pages – and the multilingual constellation of distant writing. This is *Charrua*'s distinct 'translingual event' (Helgesson and Kullberg 2018).

The combination of distant and proximate literature is matched by the ardent desire of the *Charrua* writers themselves to make their mark in this world. After painting a depressing picture of the individual fates of Gogol, Hemingway, Lorca, Mayakovsky, Hikmet and others in the essay 'Writing, this virus!', Ungulani inscribes himself in this community of the damned:

It is with some trepidation I contemplate this wave of young people – among whom I include myself – that have been attacked by the virus of writing. Sometimes I ask myself if this virus will persist or disappear ... I want to be a writer. It is a desire. It is a challenge. And if I can't be a writer? Should I commit suicide? Become a bureaucrat, enter the mechanical hum-drum of daily work.

(*Charrua* 1, 1984: 12)⁷

Ungulani did become a writer and his novel *Ualalapi* (1987) is a modern classic. It is really here, in this novel's amalgamation of the verbal force of modernist disillusionment and distinctly Mozambican histories of the arrogance of power, that his aesthetic aspirations in *Charrua* are realized. But ironically, Ungulani also became a bureaucrat (at the national book and record institute). This says something about the precarious nature of *Charrua*'s attachment to the figure of the wayward, independent artist. I read therefore young Ungulani's self-doubt as not merely subjective but also symptomatic (and prescient): a tell-tale sign of the fragility of both *Charrua*'s literary decolonization and the state-driven decolonization of Frelimo.

As 'a distinctive event in literary history', to rehearse Gikandi's (2011: 163) phrase, the eight issues of *Charrua* were a pivotal moment in the search for literary form in post-colonial Mozambique. This decisiveness is confirmed by the republication of the eight issues a few years ago. The freedom exercised to imagine literature anew was obviously facilitated by national liberation in 1975. But the *Charrua* writers also cultivated a Maputo-based *longue durée* of literature which harked back to the mid-twentieth century. The issues repeatedly activated the memory of previous Maputo journals and earlier writers whose literary orientation had been strikingly cosmopolitan. And now, in turn, *Charrua* has entered this *longue durée*, with at least four of its writers having become canonical names in Mozambican literature: Ungulani, Artur, Eduardo White and Nelson Saúte.

According to Artur (2021), *Charrua* died a natural death in 1986: 'The journal ended when each of us found that we had strong enough legs to stand on our own, that is, when we were sufficiently emancipated to publish works of

⁷ 'Há um certo temor que me avassala ao ver esta vaga de jovens – em que eu me insiro – a ser atacada pelos vírus da escrita. Por vezes interrogo-me se essa vírus perdurará ou soçabrá ... Quero ser escritor. É um desejo. É um desafio. E se não for escritor? Suicidar-me-ei? Tornar-me-ei num burocrata, assumindo essa mecânica diária de trabalho ...'

our own.⁸ It had served its purpose to create a world in which its writers could dwell. But in a dialectical spirit, this also needs to be recognized as an imperfect moment: in gender terms, *Charrua*'s version of autonomy was seriously flawed. The journal was a male affair (almost the only exceptions were poems by Clotilde Silva in issues seven and eight, plus Fátima Mendonça's essay); its erotic texts were male-focalized; its affiliative impulse was homosocial. This is particularly ironic considering its name: in Mozambique, it is women who have traditionally done most of the agricultural work. In that respect, and also generally with regard to the limited reach of print literature in Mozambique, it spoke eloquently *in* the nation, but could never quite speak *for* the nation.

Concluding discussion

If, with Ezra Pound, we take the form of the little magazine to constitute a 'core' rather than a 'container' of literary renewal, what conclusions can be drawn from these southern African cases as regards their world-making capacity? They share, to begin with, a certain anarchic potential, often deploying satirical and ironic modes. This enables them to summon a public and a counterpublic at one and the same time. If one agrees that *Voorslag*, *The Purple Renoster*, *Caliban* and *Charrua* all engage literature as a public value, their different instantiations of literary distance tend to scramble sanctioned conceptions of literature in their particular historical context. Their long-term efficacy – which contradicts their ephemeral appearance – has something to do with how literature, through its specific attention to language as play, tinkers with the inner workings of the creation of publics. Lionel Abrahams was right to say that the apartheid state was out of its depth when it challenged the protean domain of literature – the complexities of its censorship regime notwithstanding. Warner's (2002: 51) point that 'there could be an infinite number of publics within the social totality' is the authoritarian ruler's nightmare but the enabling condition of literature. Warner again:

Public discourse, in the nature of its address, abandons the security of its positive, given audience. It promises to address anybody. It commits itself in principle to

⁸ 'A revista terminou quando achamos que cada um de nos tinha pernas para andar sozinho, isto é, quando nós achamos emancipados no sentido da publicação individual das obras.' Personal communication, 17 March 2021.

the possible participation of any stranger. It therefore puts at risk the concrete world that is its given condition of possibility. This is its fruitful perversity.

(Ibid.: 81)

In the examples studied in this chapter, the tension between the constraints of a lived world and the apparently open address of literature across time and space is extreme but differently structured in each journal. Armed with fresh readings from Europe, Campbell attempted in *Voorslag* to reconfigure a specific white anglo public in South Africa. In a more understated register, Abrahams cultivated a locally based literary micro-public – and was thrown into a contest with state power. This happened not by design but by default, since the ‘fruitful perversity’ of the literary address in *The Purple Renoster* was read literally as perverse by the state. Abrahams managed, however, to reintegrate this legal challenge and personal threat with flair as an element of the journal’s address. In the passing of the literary torch from *Caliban* to *Charrua* in Maputo, finally, we encounter the local articulation of modernist poetics from two almost diametrically opposed historical vantage points. If for Knopfli and Quadros the main constraint was their positioning as dissident white *colons* during the mounting crisis of Portuguese colonialism, for the contributors to *Charrua* it was the rapid deterioration of the promise that the revolution had held for them. The peculiar transtemporal address of literature as play had different implications in both cases, although the modernist repertoires activated by the journals overlapped. *Charrua* incorporated and recoded, one might say, the cosmopolitan impetus of *Caliban*.

But the constraints of literary address itself, as actualized through specific translingual events, must also be acknowledged – and here we can register a severe limitation in Warner’s model, which treats language transparently. Although the anglophone South African journals ventured, in ‘white South African’ fashion, into Afrikaans territory, other African languages were absent from their pages. Vernacularity was in this way restricted to the white domain, as exemplified by Laurens van der Post’s Afrikaans essay. The aborted plan to make *Voorslag* trilingual by including Zulu remains an unexplored enigma, but might have resulted in a far more experimental journal. As for the parallel trajectories of English and Portuguese, they demonstrate the potential for linguistically discrete cosmopolitanisms to be articulated in the same region while excluding other African languages. *Charrua*, with its occasional code-switching and inclusion of various Mozambican languages, is the only limited exception among the cases

discussed here; others would be *Two Tone* in Zimbabwe, which published poetry in Shona, and *Staffrider*, which was more translingual in its practices.

The overdetermined predominance of English, Portuguese and to some extent Afrikaans rehearses the colonial framing of the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic in southern African literatures. Yet as the form of the little magazine demonstrated for a period, this framing has been susceptible to repeated adjustments. Or, to use another vocabulary, writers and editors succeeded in changing the structure of the region's literary fields through momentary crystallizations of their efforts in the material form of the journal. This is one point from which to develop a more comprehensive comparative account of little magazines as a world-making form.

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