

## ONLINE ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING

### SOME THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

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In this presentation I want to give a few thoughts about publishing on Africa in general, and electronic publishing in specific. I do this from my background as publisher for Brill, but will try to make it more general. First, I want to give some highlights of the connections between Brill and Africa over the past century.

Secondly, I will bring up some issues on publishing in and about Africa and thirdly, I will describe some of the newest developments in electronic publishing and their impact on Africa.

Brill was founded in 1683 and is one of the oldest publishing houses in Europe. We have had connections with Africa for a long time. Some highlights, without being exhaustive:

- We published work by Dr. **Johann Büttikofer (1850-1927)** was a [Swiss zoologist](#). He made two trips to [Liberia](#), the first was from 1879 to 1882, and the second from 1886 to 1887. Between 1897 and 1924 he was Director of the Zoological Garden at [Rotterdam](#)
- Julius Euting was an Orientalist from Strassbourg and traveled to Syria and Northwest-Arabia and published some of this works with Brill.

- Orientalist Enno Littmann (1875-1958) was director of an expedition to Ethiopia and published material between 1914 and 1949
- the Journal of Asian and African Studies was founded in 1965 by K. Ishwaran.
- the Journal of Religion in Africa, was founded in 1967 by Andrew Walls
- 2000 African studies started as a separate entity within Brill, bringing together all the publications on Africa. We have a total of almost 500 titles now with approximately 30 new titles added per year. We also publish 5 journals on Africa with plans for another 2.
- 2006 Brill had its presence at the first Cape Town Book Fair

## **Can a publisher do something to bridge the divide between north and south?**

We have heard several lectures in which elements of a solution have been given. As a commercial publisher I would like to mention a few elements that to add to the discussion.

### **- Print still popular and important**

In this age of electronics, there is a big need for books and journals in Africa. The 'hunger' for print is still there: online publications are a big step for many scholars, students and academics in Africa. Although we need to develop electronic publications, we should not forget the print.

### **- Attract more African authors**

Writing about Africa has been dominated by non-African writers. The discussion about orientalism (which is the dominance of oriental studies by a western or should I say northern perspective) can be supplemented with a discussion about africanism. I refer of course to the debate initiated by the late Edward Said.

For African Studies it is not necessary to be an African, but there should be a balance between Africans and non-Africans. In some cases, this means that we need to make an extra effort to attract Africans to African Studies. Some other

speakers have dealt with this issue in their presentation. As a publisher you need to be very aware of this problem.

FACT: for our African Social Studies Series, 7 of the 14 titles that have appeared so far are written by Africans. It is an exception to the rule however.

One of the solutions is spending more money on copy editing. Without going into too much detail, the opposite of africanism (saying that non-Africans cannot study Africa) is nonsensical as well.

- **Publish with local publishers**

In a globalized world, the location of the publisher seems irrelevant. However, the country of origin gives a certain connotation which can be positive or negative.

Some authors prefer to publish in their home country. We are now trying to set up more co-publication arrangements: the main bottleneck is to find funds to print books locally. We deliver PDF-files at no or low cost. This has been done in individual countries because pan-African or regional publishers hardly exist.

There is also quite some time lag between the original publication and the African publication.

- **Local prices**

There was a time when we had local times. Amsterdam and Leiden had different times. With the coming of trains, local times had to be synchronized and now

many companies and all airlines work with UTC (universal time coordinated by the way! a compromise between English and French). In the past, pricing of books was also at a local level, with even big differences between the US, the UK and Australia for instance. However, nowadays, books seem to be distributed world-wide at fixed prices: publisher work with global prices. If you order with Amazon, the prices are all the same. It would be much better to have local prices, depending on the economy of the country. Some publishers (like Oxford in India and South Africa) work with this model, but it seems quite difficult to implement. My conclusion would be that information cannot be priced the same all over the world.

*FACT: Of all Brill sales less than 0,5% is on the African Continent, but more than 5% of our program is on Africa.*

- **Promote African Studies worldwide**

The image of Africa is very much dominated by the world press and the coverage of wars, poverty and corruption in various African countries. It is invaluable to promote African Studies as a contribution to worldwide scholarship, research development and increase of knowledge. Publishers can have a role in this.

- **Assist libraries in making and preserving collections, reprinting old titles**

A major task for the future is to create better collections in African libraries. For the future, electronic (digitized) collections need to be considered. Brill's parent company IDC has a lot of experience in preserving large collections on microfiche (and online since a few years). Newspapers, periodicals, personal archives and linguistic materials have already been made available. A lot more needs to be done.

We also should not forget to concentrate on complete publication programs and not only on the most recent titles. There is a lot of older material that is very useful for researchers and that is not always easily accessible. For a good collection, a library needs books that long have been out of print. Brill has started with experimenting printing on demand and making old titles available again in small circulations.

### **Africa is not Africa**

We like to talk about Africa, but the variations within the continent are vast. I don't have to tell you this. Look only at the different languages, and the sales potential in various countries.

*FACT: top-5 buying countries in Sub-Saharan Africa:*

*1.South-Africa 2.Zambia 3.Ethiopia 4.Kenya 5.Ivory Coast*

The same is true for the North-South divide: it is a very general term, but we need to differentiate between countries and regions.

### **Sponsor-a-publisher program Cape Town Book Fair 2007**

*FACT: number of African Publishers (excluding South-Africa) at Cape Town Book Fair with their own booth: 8 out of 418 exhibitors.....*

If every non-African exhibitor sponsors one African exhibitor, we can attract a lot more publishers from the African continent. I have dropped this idea with the Book Fair organization. Covering booth costs and travel expenses can make all the difference for African Publishers.

- **All these efforts need investments.**

Books are not for free. Online is not free. Open Access is not free. Publishers, whether commercial, non-governmental, university or other) need to invest a lot of money in new developments. Nowadays, we need more money for copy editing, archiving, digitizing, distribution and marketing. We are talking about millions, not thousands of dollars and small publishers just cannot afford this. Although subventions and sponsoring are options, we also raise money by selling books to people and institutions who can afford them.

That is what our publishing business is about: a mix of commerce, passion and support.

**Some recent developments in electronic publishing, making the world ready for online (also Africa!)**

- **Via Ebsco Host**, some of our 120+ journals are more easily accessible in less developed countries. We work with journal sponsoring programs such as the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information PERI, ATLA and the New School for Social Research which has a journal sponsoring program.
- **Through Google Book Search** some 5,000 Brill books are searchable now for everyone. You can search the table of contents, several pages and sometimes the index.
- **Content management systems** have been introduced at Brill for journals and major reference works. This enables authors to work on one project amongst themselves, do peer reviewing, selecting and commenting within a closed community before publication. These systems require Internet access, and theoretically could put African authors at a distance again. However, they can also help in making access easier for these authors where travel and other forms of communication are expensive or unreliable.

- Although we do not plan to go out of business after 325 years, our electronic publications are now all archived by the **Royal Library** in the Hague for future generations. They guarantee accessibility to the files, even if technology changes over the years.
  
- **Africa Yearbook Online.** This month we have launched the Africa Yearbook online. This collaboration with the African Studies Centers in Uppsala, Hamburg and Leiden, is now also available through Internet.