

Conference

of the International Research Network on Postcolonial Print Cultures

Law and Print in Postcolonial Contexts: Censorship, Copyright & Piracy

This conference addresses the relationship between print and legislation, censorship and copyright in postcolonial contexts. It aims to explore the role of colonial and postcolonial institutions, of the state and other gate-keepers in the regulation of print; the forms and practices of cultural regulation and censorship particular to certain postcolonial contexts; as well as the many alternative, informal or interstitial publishing networks, spaces and practices operating outside official (or monitored) circuits.

Full concept note: <https://irn-postcolonial-print-cultures.org/index.php/law-and-print-in-postcolonial-contexts-censorship-copyright-and-piracy/>

University of Chicago Center in Paris, 6 rue Thomas Mann, 75013 Paris

Day 1, Friday July 5th

Session 1 – 9: 30 – 11 AM

Introduction: Laetitia Zecchini (CNRS)

Isabel Hofmeyr (University of the Witwatersrand) & **Kaneesha Parsard** (University of Chicago)

Moderator: Abhijit Gupta (Jadavpur University)

Isabel Hofmeyr: Colonial Copyright

Copyright is often imagined as a legal instrument that moved, more or less unchanged across the world. Yet, like all technologies (legal or otherwise), copyright was changed by the circumstances into which it moved. Taking a southern African perspective, this paper explores the different meaning that copyright accrued. For customs officials, it became a type of racial trademark which signified that a book has been manufactured in Britain and so was implicitly 'white'. For book sellers, it became a mechanism to try and best their competitors. For African writers, keen users of copyright, it became one small way of claiming rights.

Kaneesha Parsard : Strange Claims

British subjects bent the legal and narrative genre of the claim as they sought restitution for the injuries of slavery and colonialism. Specifically, I will be presenting on a 1986 oral history with a Trinidadian woman, Viola Gopaul Whittington, which recounts a family story: In 1880s Trinidad her great-grandparents, a woman of African descent and an indentured Indian man, fled the estate of their violent employer. A court ruling by then-Chief Justice John Gorrie should have awarded ownership of the estate to the pair but Gorrie never carried out the decision, leaving generations to pursue the claim throughout the twentieth century. My presentation will attempt to reconstruct this family's claim through the records of Chief Justice John Gorrie, a famously liberal judge

in the colonies, and consider how to conceptualize claims that are individual rather than state-led or communal, speculative rather than evidentiary.

Coffee break

Session 2 – 11:15 - 12:30 AM:

Roundtable (10-15 min/speaker) on law and print in colonial times with Shrutakirti Dutta (University of Chicago), **Tanya Agathocleus** (Hunter College)
Moderator: Josephine McDonagh (University of Chicago)

Shrutakirti Dutta : Absconding Wives, Murderous Husbands": Marriage, Law, and Satirical Publications in Nineteenth Century Bengal : on the role of law and the judicial process in nineteenth century Bengal, particularly in relation to conjugality, that contributes to a proliferation of satirical publications in Bengali literature (*battala* as well as periodical presses) geared towards disciplining the marital home.

Tanya Agathocleus: I will draw on my book, *Disaffected: Emotion, Sedition, and Colonial Law in the Anglosphere*, which examines how colonial sedition law shaped British and Indian print culture while bifurcating the colonial anglosphere, and what counted as civil discourse, along racial lines. I use this context to explore the lasting effects on sedition law on free speech in contemporary India and in the West, with particular attention to recent free speech debates about Israel-Palestine.

Lunch

Session 3 – 1:45 - 3PM:

Asha Rogers (Birmingham University) and **James Procter** (Newcastle University)
Moderator: Aurélie Journo (Université Paris 13)

Asha Rogers: Copyright and the non-translation of African language literatures: the case of Peter Nwana's *Omenuko*

This presentation shares research on the institutional forces that bore against the translation of the earliest Igbo-language print narrative, Peter Nwana's *Omenuko* (published in 1934 and which finally appeared in English translation in 2014). It demonstrates the range of agents in the mid-century Nigerian literary field that had a stake in *Omenuko*'s non-circulation as 'world literature': chiefly its British publisher Longman and Nigerian subsidiary Longman Nigeria, which withheld translation rights to translators; and the market-effects of Federal government state ownership policies, which created the new publishing category of 'Nigeria exclusives' – titles with no perceived sales market outside the country. Highlighting the complex conditions in which African-language publishing was situated between the postcolonial state and market in the mid-seventies, the dispute over *Omenuko* also raises issues of language as a zero-sum-game, as reading in Igbo was pitted against reading in English, and translation against national education.

James Procter: Copyright, Commerce, and the Short Form: Writing at the Limits of Late Modernism

In *Modernism and Copyright* (2011), Paul K. Saint-Amour proposes that as ‘modernism’s portrait of the artist as a lone insurgent’ became displaced by accounts of collaborative networks, corporate patronage, and canny commercial ventures, authorial ‘personality began to look like property right’. Focusing on three major exponents of the midcentury short story: Jean Rhys, V. S. Naipaul, and Sam Selvon, this paper explores recurring tropes of borrowing, beggary, and artistic theft as shared forms of ‘propertized expression’. It proposes that the short form, specifically, has a great deal still to say about how late modernist writers responded to metropolitan institutions and their efforts to legislate, and legitimise, certain modes of literary production and circulation after World War II. Short form literature was a peculiarly fraught and fertile site at which questions of censorship, copyright and piracy played out in this period, precisely because it was here that the associations of authorship /ownership were at their most precarious. Extending some of my recent research in *Scripting Empire* (2024), this paper considers how cultural institutions like the BBC were implicated in this transactional moment, and how the short story as both a material object, and a mode artistic expression negotiated the increasingly meshed worlds of print and broadcasting

Session 4 – 3 : 15 – 5 : 15 PM :

Robert JC Young (NYU), **Elara Bertho** (CNRS) **with Claire Ducournau** (Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3), **Adelaide Vieira Machado with Sandra Ataíde Lobo** (Universidade NOVA de Lisboa)¹

Moderator: Anna Arzoumanov (Sorbonne Université)

Robert Young: "Undesirable": Fanon and Censorship

Frantz Fanon published his first two articles and his first book, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), with remarkable ease. This stands in stark contrast to the constant difficulties he faced throughout his life and afterwards with all his other publications. From his original medical thesis to his plays, *L'An V* (1959) and articles on the Algerian situation in the 1950s, to his final publication *Les damnés de la terre* (1961), Fanon encountered a variety of rejections, impediments, police seizures and censorship. I will conclude with a discussion of the archival material that details the rationale behind the banning of *The Wretched of the Earth* in South Africa after his death.

Elara Bertho and Claire Ducournau : "Some Cross-Fertilized Thoughts about Censorship and Print Cultures in Colonial Dahomey and Postcolonial Guinea"

From the clandestine publication of *Le Recadère de Béhanzin* (1917) in colonial Dahomey to the censorship of a historical play under Sekou Touré in Postcolonial Guinea: how censorship obstructs access to sources and archives; the “tactics” or strategies of researchers to retrace and reconstitute these archives/sources

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Adelaide Viera Machado & Sandra Ataíde Lobo: Censorship in a Dictatorial context: the Case of the Goan Press

As much as dictating a reconfiguration of press, the Portuguese empire necessarily reshaped public and private archives as much as impacted on press as archives of the present, turning particularly demanding the question of knowing how we may approach such archives *along and against the grain*. Centred on the case of Goan press and journalists, we propose with this communication to approach different archives constituted during this period and in postcolonial times: a database on press that discloses democratic complicities in 1953; some collections of particular interest at the Portuguese national archives, namely those of the dictator Salazar and of the political police (PIDE), that shed light on mechanisms of vigilance and repression and that, ironically, are now being put at the service of helping recovering banned publications; finally, not the least, a precious private collection safeguarded by the owners of the founders and owners of a newspaper published in Goa since the last years of Portuguese domain until the first years of integration on independent India, the *Diário de Goa* (1953-1966), a daily that achieved to be published legally in Goa but was constantly subjected to the “blue pencil” of the censors, which allows to uncover the different layers of censorship in the dictatorial environment, namely individual censorship, moral censorship near public opinion, prior censorship and apprehension of printed material.

Day 2 – Saturday, July 6th

Session 1 – 9:30-10:45 AM:

Neelam Srivastava (Newcastle University) **and Paolo Horta** (NYU Abu Dhabi)

Moderator : Xavier Garnier (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3)

Neelam Srivastava: Losing the Empire: Amnesia, Censorship, and Italian Anticolonialism

Italy lost all its colonies in 1941, when the British forces took them over in the course of the Second World War. This paper discusses the complex relationship between Italian intellectuals’ support for Third-World liberation struggles and their near-total amnesia towards their own empire in the postwar period. The material examined will include prominent left-wing newspapers and journals, films, and popular periodicals, in order to highlight the surprising range of discursive positions vis-à-vis colonialism among artists, writers, and editors.

Paulo Horta: The Part about the Censors: Franco-era Law and the Silenced Legacy of Roberto Bolaño

This paper explores the complex interplay of postcolonial print cultures and legal frameworks through the lens of Roberto Bolaño's literary legacy, profoundly impacted by Franco-era defamation and privacy laws in Spain. Bolaño, a Chilean author who arrived in Spain in the immediate aftermath of Franco, navigated an environment shaped by imperial era censorship and control. His works, deeply influenced by this backdrop, now find themselves ensnared in a posthumous legal battle driven by the same oppressive structures. The central focus of this study is the unexpected invocation of

Franco-era laws by Bolaño's estate, in contemporary Spain. These privacy and defamation laws, originally designed to protect authoritarian control and suppress dissent, are currently being utilized to censor scholarly work on Bolaño. The estate's actions, ranging from banning unauthorized biographies to filing lawsuits against Bolaño's former collaborators, reveal a disturbing trend of using postcolonial legal remnants to control literary narratives. In a striking case, the estate employed these laws to classify discussions about the authenticity of Bolaño's posthumously published works as defamation. Both his would-be literary executor and his longtime editor, when they asserted that these works were mere drafts misrepresented as newfound masterpieces, were sued by the Bolaño estate. This situation underscores a broader theme of postcolonial censorship, where the legal system, a relic of imperial governance, continues to stifle academic and artistic freedom.

Coffee break

Session 2 – 11: 15 AM - 12:30 PM

Roundtable (10-15 min/speaker) on censorship & modernisms with Supurna Dasgupta (University of Chicago) **Mantra Mukim** (CYU Paris), **Laetitia Zecchini** (CNRS)

Moderator: Cécile Roudeau (Université Paris Cité)

Mantra Mukim: *Terror of the Line: G.M. Muktibodh, Cold War, and the Language of Punishment* This presentation will focus on the pre-eminent Hindi modernist, Muktibodh, and the obsessive descriptions of legal sentencing, punitive action, and censorship in his work. Alongside, reading this language of punishment in his poems, I will compare it to various kinds of redactive exercises, such as lines, inkblots, cuts, that proliferate in the draft editions of his long poems that are housed in Bharat Bhawan Archive, Bhopal. I will read Muktibodh's use of the line or the scratch against the poetic sentence as a compositional strategy, but also the staging of a dramatic antagonism between the poetic line and the legal sentence, where the former is an editorial strategy and the latter is a figure of institutional censorship. Muktibodh deliberately, and consistently, intermixes these two uses of the line: a grammatical-visual tool and an instrument of redaction.

Supurna Dasgupta: *Butterfly Chronicles: A Postcolonial Debate on Obscenity* In this paper, I show how the legal category of obscenity came under several forms of questioning in postcolonial Bengal, especially in the context of countercultural aesthetic experimentations during the 1960s. Taking the case of a single novel *Prajapati* (The Butterfly, 1967), which was particularly controversial and was debated for nearly two decades at various Bengal courts of law including a book-banning, I argue that postcolonial print cultures altered the legal and aesthetic contours of obscenity in India, and transformed the paradigms of legal and moral acceptability when it came to literature

Laetitia Zecchini: *The Scissors and the Little "Rags": Modernism, Censorship and Assemblages* Drawing on one of the privileged mediums of modernisms in India, the little magazines, I would like to discuss how modernisms were mediated and reinvented through the print medium, and focus on some of the artisanal practices of assemblages, collages, poaching and recycling (of clippings, quotations, cut-up reproductions, xeroxed editions) in the 50s-60s, that could be associated with what Geeta

Kapur calls the “transgressions of uncategorized practice”. Against the “scissors” of (colonial, then postcolonial) censorship which often stifled modernist voices in India, and in order to compensate for various shortages and restrictions (of distribution, copyright, etc.), several writers and artists devised a resourceful “scissors-and-paste modernism.”

Lunch

Session 3 – 1 : 30 - 2: 45 PM :

Abhijit Gupta (Jadavpur University) **and Claire Joubert** (Université Paris 8)

Moderator : Karthika Nair (poet and librettist)

Abhijit Gupta : This Book will not be Censored: the case of *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015)

In 2015, Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar, whose first novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014) had won a clutch of literary awards, published a collection of short stories titled *The Adivasi will not Dance*. It immediately ran into trouble as a group of political parties and academics accused Hansda of portraying the indigenous Santhals in a disrespectful light and called for a ban of the book. Hansda, who worked as a government doctor, was suspended from his post and the book was banned by the state government of Jharkhand in 2017. Though the ban was lifted subsequently and Hansda reinstated, those who lobbied for the ban still continue to insist that the book is pornography and is an insult to Santhal women. This paper will look at the circumstances of the ban and the curious phenomenon of political parties and a section of academics making common cause. It will situate it in the larger context of print censorship in contemporary India which does not necessarily emanate from the State but from its proxies. The paper will also reflect on Jadavpur University Press’s 2020 publication of a Bengali translation of the anthology, and the response from Bengali readers to Hansda’s powerful, provocative book.

Claire Joubert: The Struggle to Publish, Access and Archive Ambedkar in India Today

This meeting will provide a welcome opportunity to work towards an overview of the current state of the Ambedkar corpus, with an as-yet open-ended exploration of the complex historical pressures which have combined to produce its characteristic dispersed and contested editorial contours. The contrast with the patrimonial care invested in the collected works of Gandhi or Nehru and in B.R. Ambedkar’s writings and speeches, both in forms of curatorial neglect and of editorial control (from the state of Maharashtra) or political appropriation since the 1990s, provides a clear methodological framework. But a more deep-lying system of fracture is also observable, in the diverging legacy traditions of national political/intellectual history and of Dalit efforts of curation and circulation over the last seven decades. Forces of censure have coexisted from the start with cross-forces of activist vernacular scholarship; and now current developments in a similarly diverging culture of “digital humanities” in academia and in grassroots activism are seen to introduce both new complexity and new critical possibilities.

Coffee break

Session 4 – 3:15 - 5 PM

Elizabeth Holt (Bard College), **Sami Rustom** (Fehras Publishing Practices) **and**
Zahia Rahmani (INHA, Paris)

Moderator: Anne Castaing (CNRS)

Elizabeth Holt: Soft Power, Palestine and the Temporality of the Archive ...

As state and private archives of the Cold War are declassified and made available to the public, Palestine's central place in soft power politics becomes increasingly legible. The temporality of these archives, dictated through waves of declassification, publication, manuscript edition, and reorganization and reclassification over the last decade, is an active force in ongoing soft power politics. Reverberations articulated through newly available documents and information recast the geography of the Cold War and debates over liberation, colonialism and state sovereignty, with Palestine emerging with particular urgency in the archives and publications of the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom, the Soviet-sponsored Afro-Asian Writers Association, the Mao-funded Afro-Asian Writers Bureau, and letters and personal memoir of Palestinian intellectuals in the 1960s and early 1970s. This attunement to archival temporality allows us in turn to see how the Cold War continues to influence the ongoing catastrophe in accessing historic Palestine.

Roundtable moderated by Elizabeth Holt on archives and the different (artistic/curatorial, critical, socio-political, etc.), uses they can be put to, with **Sami Rustom** on [Fehras Publishing Practices](#) and **Zahia Rahmani** on the [Global Journals Portal](#)

Drinks and Readings of Texts