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Materiality and Minority Representation in Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern

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Materiality and Minority Representation in *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*

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Abstract

Founded in San Francisco in 1998, *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* was launched by Dave Eggers in tandem with McSweeney's publishing house in an attempt to create a platform for up-and-coming writers, experimental literature, and other forms of writing that would be difficult to publish in a traditional magazine. Two representative examples of how *McSweeney's* attention to physical design, unfixed format, and interest in global literature overlap are *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43*. *McSweeney's 36* includes an oral history of governmental oppression titled "Ma Su Mon," an excerpt from *Nowhere to be Home,* a text in the McSweeney's publishing branch oral history series titled Voice of Witness. On the other hand, *McSweeney's 43* is comprised of "McSweeney's 43" and *There is a Country: New Fiction from the New Nation of South Sudan.* Where "McSweeney's 43" includes new fiction, letters, and nonfiction essays from well-known journalists, *There is a Country* is an anthology of fiction from South Sudanese writers. Both *There is a Country* and "Ma Su Mon"'s inclusion in *McSweeney's 36* embodies the magazine's social consciousness, both of which are key facets to the editorial mission of all of Eggers's publishing ventures, including *McSweeney's*.

The physical design of *McSweeney's* issues holds significance in an interpretation of the content of the magazine, especially in the case of *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43* where there are clear efforts to shape the reading experience through the intentional use of non-traditional design elements and media platforms. Thus, this project aims to understand the relationship between *McSweeney's* efforts to serve as a platform for minority voices and *McSweeney's* material design utilizing Gérard Genette's theory of the paratext. This paper argues that the box head design of *McSweeney's 36* invites the reader to attend to the ostentatiousness of the numerous pieces of the issue rather than focus on the literary content of any single item. This emphasis on the materiality of *McSweeney's 36* works in tandem with the *McSweeney's* branding on the packaging of "Ma Su Mon" to speak over Ma Su Mon herself, obscuring her experiences of oppression. On the other hand, the more subtle and minimal *McSweeney's* branding on the covers of *McSweeney's 43* and *There is a Country*'s capacity to be independently distributed provides this issue with a substantial platform outside of the *McSweeney's* umbrella. However, *There is a Country's* independence within *McSweeney's 43* is comprised by its complicated library cataloging, indistinguishable cover designs for "McSweeney's 36" and *There is a Country,* and removable back book cover blurb sticker. Through analysis of the material paratexts of "Ma Su Mon" in *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43*'s *There is a Country,* this paper concludes that these particular issues of *McSweeney's* are imperfect vessels for minority voices.

Executive Summary

In his first call for submissions to *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, Eggers "characterized his new 'offbeat quarterly'…as 'a place where odd things that one could never shoehorn into a mainstream periodical, and might be too quirky for other journals, might find a home,'" adding that, "'This thing will be more about trying new, and almost certainly misguided ideas'" (Bollen et al. 4). With no two magazines ever looking the same way, *McSweeney's* not only takes risks in terms of its design, but the publication also aims to publish diverse stories and up-and-coming authors that have not received attention elsewhere. Two representative examples of how *McSweeney's* attention to physical design, unfixed format, and interest in global literature overlap are *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43*. Contained inside a box resembling a human head, *McSweeney's 36* includes an oral history of governmental oppression titled "Ma Su Mon," detailing the story of a young Burmese woman who was imprisoned and later exiled for participating in the Burman pro-democracy movement of the late 1990s. This individually bound booklet is an excerpt from *Nowhere to be Home,* a piece in the McSweeney's publishing branch oral history series titled Voice of Witness, which aims to share the stories of people who have experienced human rights crises. On the other hand, *McSweeney's 43* is comprised of two fold-out-cover codices titled "McSweeney's 43" and *There is a Country: New Fiction from the New Nation of South Sudan.* Where "McSweeney's 43" includes new fiction, letters, and nonfiction essays from well-known journalists, *There is a Country* is an anthology of fiction from South Sudanese writers. Both *There is a Country* and "Ma Su Mon"'s inclusion in *McSweeney's 36* embodies the magazine's social consciousness, a key facet to the editorial mission of all of Eggers's publishing ventures, including *McSweeney's*.

The physical design of *McSweeney's* issues holds significance in an interpretation of the content of the magazine, especially in the case of *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43* where there are clear efforts to shape the reading experience through the intentional use of non-traditional design elements and media platforms. Gérard Genette's theory of the paratext— the thresholds through which the reader passes in order to consume and interpret a text—provides one method of defining "the status of a paratextual message," such as a preface, chapter title, or interview with an author, and describing "a paratextual message's spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics" (Genette 4). Evaluating the additional elements that accompany the written text in relation to the text itself illuminates the functions of the paratext; ultimately, "Whatever aesthetic or ideological investment the author makes in a paratextual element…whatever coquettishness or paradoxical reversal he puts into it, the paratextual element is always subordinate to 'its' text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and its existence" (Genette 12). Consequently, by assessing the various *peritexts* (a material paratextual element that surrounds the volume of work or is "inserted into the interstices of the text") of *McSweeney's 43* and *McSweeney's 36* that relate to the production, reception, and circulation of the magazine, one can understand the relationship between *McSweeney's* efforts to serve as a platform for minority voices and *McSweeney's* material design (Genette 5).

Ultimately, this paper argues that the box head design of *McSweeney's 36* invites the reader to attend to the ostentatiousness of the numerous pieces of the issue rather than focus on the literary content of any single item. This emphasis on the materiality of *McSweeney's 36* works in tandem with the *McSweeney's* branding on the packaging of "Ma Su Mon" to speak over Ma Su Mon herself, obscuring her experiences of oppression. On the other hand, the more subtle and minimal *McSweeney's* branding on the covers of *McSweeney's 43* and *There is a*

Country's capacity to be independently distributed provides this issue with a substantial platform outside of the *McSweeney's* umbrella. However, *There is a Country's* independence within *McSweeney's 43* is comprised by its complicated library cataloging, indistinguishable cover designs for "McSweeney's 36" and *There is a Country*, and removable back book cover blurb sticker. Through analysis of the material paratexts of "Ma Su Mon" in *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43*'s *There is a Country,* I conclude that these particular issues of *McSweeney's* are imperfect vessels for minority voices.

While *McSweeney's* has claimed its devotion to nontraditional content and new writers, this mantra had not led the magazine to publish a diverse group of writers, as evidenced by Hungerford in *Making Literature Now.* Hungerford writes, "Admittedly, resisting the process of canonization in this book has no social justice payoff of that sort. My focus on McSweeney's produces a story about a cultural network of white, middle-class writers, most of whom are men, most born in the 1970s and 1980s—hardly a group underrepresented in mainstream American culture or a group thrown back on their heels by demographic disadvantage" (17). I propose to build on Hungerford's discussion of minority representation, commodification of literature, and the culture of consumption in contemporary literature in particular, focusing on the design of book-objects, page space devoted to minority voices, and literary celebrities in *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43*. Not only am I interested in furthering the discussion of diversity in contemporary publishing in regards to the contributors of *McSweeney's,* but I also hope to emphasize how magazine design and form impact the reading experience of *McSweeney's* in this project, given that much of the existing research has not attempted to understand the literature published in the magazine through its physical presentation. After all, *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* is a publication that is clear about its love of print media and the book, but the

physicality of the text functions as a counterproductive paratext, as Gerard Genette's theory of the paratext will demonstrate. Thus, while a project involving *McSweeney's* is important given that the magazine is fairly understudied, it is also significant in that this work considers how form and book design function as a paratext for interpreting the content of *McSweeney's*.

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Preface

If anyone unfamiliar with *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* were to come across an issue sitting on someone's bookshelf, the odds of said person thinking that these unusually designed textual objects would contain an esteemed literary magazine are unlikely. Issue 17, for instance, is disguised as an ordinary bundle of junk mail, including oddities such as a catalogue for sausage baskets rubber-banded together with more fitting content like an experimental fiction magazine titled *Unfamiliar.* Rather than reinvent every issue with such an elaborate configuration, the *McSweeney's* team often publishes hard-or-softcover codex form magazines featuring small anomalous additions that add a touch of peculiarity; for instance, *McSweeney's 16* is a hardcover issue that not only comes with a black narrow tooth comb and a story printed on a deck of cards, but *McSweeney's 16* also "uses more cloth than any issue to date" according to the online store ("McSweeney's Issue 16"). As another example, Issue 11 includes a "Making of McSweeney's" DVD featuring a "Literary Cribs" episode featuring the American author Jonathan Ames, an intern discussing how writers like their coffee, and other audio content. Many issues come in a variety of cover designs or are divided into separate booklets, such as issue 47, which packages ten separate booklets displaying a panoramic illustration when lined up next to one another into a cardboard slipcase. The evolving graphic design of the magazine through the years indicates to some critics that "McSweeney's has grown into something of a literary empire…and that flagship literary quarterly has evolved from a plain-looking throwback to the 19th century, to an intriguing array of eye-popping designs and visual puns" (NPR Staff). Thus, not only has *McSweeney's* been recognized for the quality of its content, but its innovative graphic design and resurrection of forgotten printing techniques like "die-cuts, elaborate foil stamps, ribbon markers, endpaper printing" have also helped propel the magazine into high esteem (Thomas 40).

McSweeney's 36 and *McSweeney's 43* are representative examples of the graphic design possibilities within an independent visual arts magazine's publishing model. According to Susan Thomas, "there are three kinds of art magazines: magazines about art, magazines as portable galleries, and magazines as art…the artist's magazine occupies a place where a 'conflation of all three' occurs" (40). In addition to its artistic qualities, the independent visual arts magazine is published free of market factors and led by its editors in "an exploratory, noncommercial direction" (Thomas 40). However, in the case of *McSweeney's,* its outlandishly designed issues have been commercially successful among independent visual arts magazines, which the sold-out *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43* demonstrate. In a market with such a small profit margin, this economic stability can be accredited to the publishing model Eggers unintentionally developed. Although Eggers himself has dismissed his having interest in profit and corporate publishing on numerous occasions, the success of *McSweeney's* depends on a publishing model that accommodates commercial market pressures and independent publishing values. *McSweeney's* absurd aesthetic has created a corporate-like sales force that allows only a small portion of work that fits *McSweeney's* editorial ideals and branding to be published in the magazine. In order to stay financially stable, the magazine holds strictly to its aesthetic to appeal to the "literati cult" of McSweeneyites who comprise their dependable subscription-based revenue stream (Thomas 41). According to Katrien Bollen, Stef Craps, and Pieter Vermeulen, *McSweeney's* emphasizes "the aesthetic qualities of literary artifacts under this model and transforms magazines into collectible commodities, as in *McSweeney's 36"* (6). To fit the magazine's eccentric aesthetic, *McSweeney's* nontraditional graphic design became the hallmark,

emphasizing an aura of "otherness" that "resists easy distribution, acquisition, and preservation," while simultaneously increasing public interest in the publication (Thomas 42). Despite Egger's desire to be an alternative publication for unknown authors and misguided ideas, "That the result of *McSweeney's* unconventional approach is a best-selling collector's item of which the aesthetic is recognizable and coherent—and thus inevitably homogenizing and brand-building—is the intriguing irony of *McSweeney's"* (Bollen et al. 9). Consequently, critics have been doubtful of Eggers's economic disavowal, often reading his financial philosophy as working at odds with the social consciousness of his work in various ways. In Bollen, Craps, and Vermeulen's analysis, they state that the "apologetically aggressive tone of Egger's editorial statements" reveal "a deep unease with the inability to inhabit a cultural and economic position that is untainted by the compromises that publishing requires…this disavowed complicity with the market in fact sustains Eggers's editorial practice in *McSweeney's*, which, in marked contrast to his explicit statements, thrives on a dynamic of commodification," which is evident in *McSweeney's 43* and *McSweeney's 36* (Bollen et al. 1).

This ambivalence towards Eggers's magazine selling practices reflects larger attitudes about bookselling in American culture, as Laura J. Miller explains in *Reluctant Capitalists*: "Both within academic analysis and the popular imagination, there exists an assumption that the economy is in some way at odds with culture…the business of books presents one of the best cases for seeing the importance of joining together an economic and cultural analysis" (Miller 6). Just as there is a "culture-commerce tension" in the book world, the pressures of the independent visual arts magazine market and commitment to publishing high quality magazines are evident in *McSweeney's.* Moreover, *McSweeney's* struggles with issues of access unique to magazines given that these kinds of periodicals are expensive to subscribe to, varied in terms of how libraries may choose to catalogue them, and difficult to preserve in standard collections, as Thomas details. As a result, there are instances where the culture-commerce tension, accessibility concerns, and physical book-objects themselves create a disjunction between the way readers consume the content and Eggers's well-intentioned reasons for including "Ma Su Mon" and *There is a Country* in *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43* respectively.

Comparatively, Dave Eggers's novels, cultural influence, and literary persona receive more attention in academic analysis than *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern.* For instance, Timothy Galow centers on Eggers's personality, literary politics, and aesthetics, focusing on issues commonly discussed by readers and critics of Eggers' novels and other literary works. Out of the relatively small body of scholarly work on Dave Eggers and McSweeney's publishing, a few texts also use a book history approach, and even fewer academic works focus solely on Eggers's work with *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* while utilizing a book history approach. For instance, Caroline Hamilton "examines Eggers's writing and literary career in terms of his negotiation of the porous space between public and private life of an author" building off of ideas from Pierre Bourdieu, Gerard Genette, and Richard Dyer (6-8). As Hamilton explains, Eggers has paid much more attention to epitexts and literary accessories than the average author in recent publishing history, allowing book design to emerge "as a subject for serious discussion in popular reading culture" (7). Although Hamilton acknowledges Eggers's attention to design, her work is largely concerned with Eggers as a literary celebrity, discussing at length his interviews, reviews of his work, and public events, and the oeuvre of work he has personally written.

In addition, in 2016, Amy Hungerford published *Making Literature Now,* which seeks to uncover the conditions that decide which contemporary literary works are most often read

through an analysis of both bestsellers and little-known traditional and digital literature from smaller presses, including McSweeney's books and *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*. In her chapter on "McSweeney's and the School of Life," Hungerford discusses the "McSweeney's Network": the volunteers and subsistence writers whose contributions are largely not discussed, the social worlds of contemporary literature, and the career value (or lack thereof) of being published in *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*. Interestingly, Hungerford focuses on the social and material networks surrounding *McSweeney's* contributors, mapping the histories of both the lesser-known *McSweeney's* contributors and its celebrity contributors, and discussing the canonization of literature in the 21st century. Moreover, Hungerford's work acknowledges some of the conditions that affect what books are read (gender, class, race) and issues of representation in the first 33 issues of *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* while building off of Hamilton's argument that "McSweeney's books present themselves as gifts rather than commodities, to be received and cherished rather than consumed, to be literally unwrapped when they arrive, somewhat unexpectedly" (Hungerford 43). While *McSweeney's* has claimed its devotion to nontraditional content and new writers, this mantra had not led the magazine to publish a diverse group of writers, as evidenced by Hungerford. Hungerford writes, "Admittedly, resisting the process of canonization in this book has no social justice payoff of that sort. My focus on McSweeney's produces a story about a cultural network of white, middle-class writers, most of whom are men, most born in the 1970s and 1980s—hardly a group underrepresented in mainstream American culture or a group thrown back on their heels by demographic disadvantage" (17). Overall, Hungerford and Hamilton's works mention the importance of the material book object as demonstrated by Eggers's personal publishing philosophy and the production quality of *McSweeney's*, but both critics focus on historical and social types of paratexts to *McSweeney's* whereas this project uses materiality as a paratext for understanding *McSweeney's*.

Acknowledgements

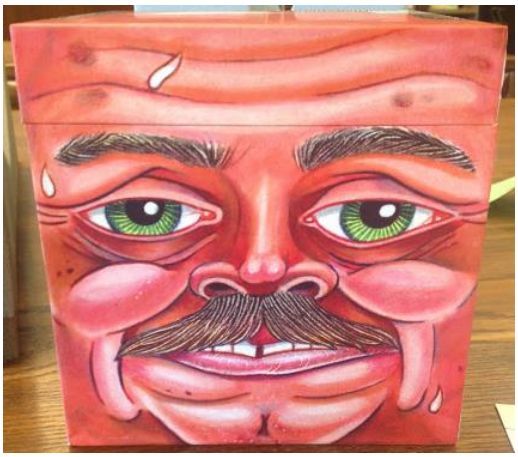
I would like to thank Professor Roylance for overseeing my work for the past two years; without her constant mentorship and encouragement, this project certainly would not have been completed. I would also like to thank Professor Forster for serving as my reader and the English department for their support throughout the Distinction in English and Textual Studies program.

Materiality and Minority Representation in *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*

On their website, *McSweeney's* states that it "exists to champion ambitious and inspired new writing, and to challenge conventional expectations about where it's found, how it looks, and who participates. We're here to discover things we love, help them find their most resplendent form, and imagine new ways to bring them to you, Dennis. (If you are not Dennis, kindly ignore the aforementioned)" ("About Us"). As emphasized in their mission statement, not only is *McSweeney's* interested in developing the "most resplendent form" for the texts they publish, but *McSweeney's* also seeks to "challenge conventional expectations about…who participates" in contemporary independent publishing ("About Us"). Consequently, the materiality of *McSweeney's* issues holds significance in an interpretation of the content of the magazine and who produces that content. Two representative examples of how *McSweeney's* attention to physical design, unfixed format, and interest in publishing minority voices overlap in troublesome ways are *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's 43*. The box head design of *McSweeney's 36* invites the reader to attend to the ostentatiousness of the numerous pieces of the issue rather than focus on the literary content of any single item. This emphasis on the materiality of *McSweeney's 36* works in tandem with the *McSweeney's* branding on the packaging of "Ma Su Mon" to speak over Ma Su Mon herself, obscuring her experiences of oppression. On the other hand, the ability to distribute *There is a Country*'s independently and the minimal *McSweeney's* branding on the covers of *McSweeney's 43* provides this issue with a substantial platform outside of the *McSweeney's* umbrella. However, *There is a Country's* independence within *McSweeney's 43* is compromised by its complicated library cataloging, indistinguishable cover designs for "McSweeney's 43" and *There is a Country*, and removable

back book cover blurb sticker. Thus, *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's* 43 both do not fulfill their goals of giving a platform to minority writers.

The eclectic arrangement and materially complex design of *McSweeney's 36* overwhelms the simple booklet "Ma Su Mon." Designed by Matt Furie, the box containing *McSweeney's 36* depicts different sides of a red-faced cartoon man's head on its outer boards. This illustrated container opens where the man's forehead is drawn, creating the appearance of entering someone's mind as you sift through the eleven individually printed and bound items. Furie's artwork typically mixes "child-like enchantment and momentary adult situations. His self-proclaimed 'children's book illustrations for adults' combine traditional and modern mark-making for his ripe, cartoon-inspired character" (The Nib). The first text that the reader encounters is a pamphlet-like piece titled "Inside This Head," which serves as both a table of contents and a space for the managing editor, Brian McMullen, to include an editor's letter. In his letter, McMullen jokes about how much he would be willing to pay to rack someone's brain for an in-depth look at the human psyche, which was the concept behind the issue's design: "If a man were to approach me at my desk right now and tell me he could get me into your head for fifteen minutes for $200 without you knowing about it,



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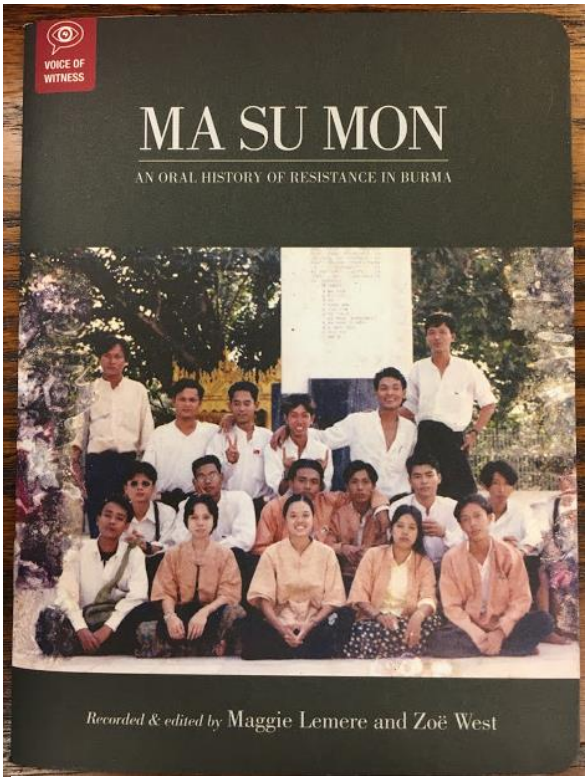
I'd run to the ATM. If the price were $500, I'd put it on my credit card. I would pay no more than $600" (*McSweeney's 36,* "Inside This Head"). Moreover, each text is separate, allowing the items to be rearranged so that new readers do not always consume the pieces in the same order. Another unique feature of the box is that it is meant to be added to, just as new thoughts constantly enter our brains. Readers can even email a picture of themselves with their magazine to McMullen and receive "something extra" to add to the box (*McSweeney's 36,* "Inside This Head"). Furthermore, McMullen explains that the work that follows was selected based upon what he feels someone would find in his own brain: "There's some fun stuff in there; some serious stuff; some fragments" (*McSweeney's 36,* "Inside This Head"). McMullen's categorization of the contents highlights the fact that *McSweeney's 36* has a number of tongue-in-cheek and abstract items that stand out in contrast with "Ma Su Mon"'s politically driven content and traditional book design.

When Dave Eggers founded McSweeney's in 1998, its only product was the literary journal *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*. Today, McSweeney's Publishing is a full-fledged nonprofit publishing house encompassing several book divisions in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, art and comics, children's literature, and humor. Among McSweeney's Book's many notable collections is Voice of Witness, an oral history series aiming to share the stories of people who have experienced human rights crises. Additionally, McSweeney's publishes a humor website, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency,* and previously printed the bimonthly magazine *The Believer* until it was acquired by the Beverly Rogers, Carol C. Harter Black Mountain Institute at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 2017. Seeing as these publications all fall under the same parent company, readers often find advertising for works from other branches of McSweeney's Publishing within McSweeney's publications.



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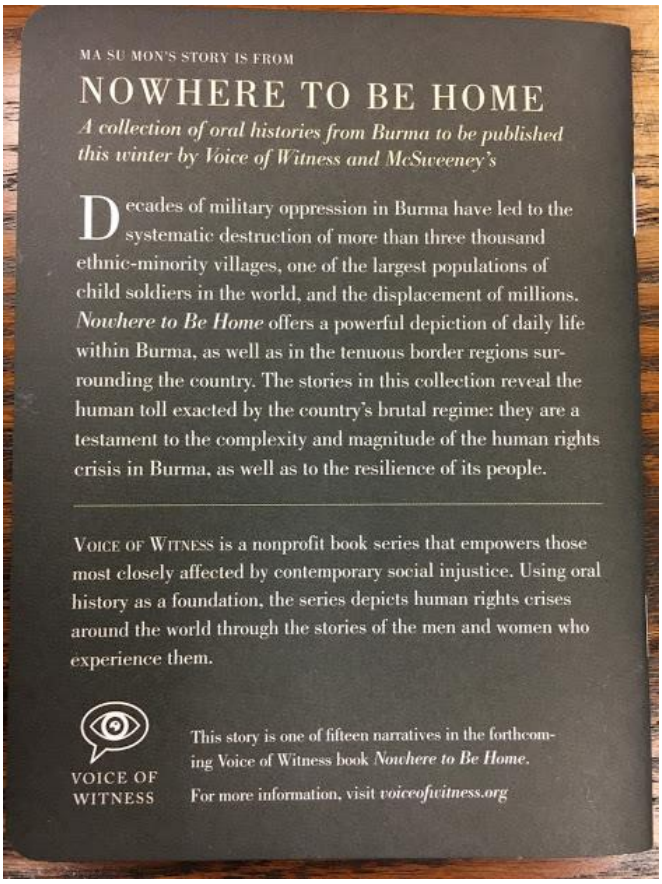
For instance, *McSweeney's 36* includes an oral history of governmental oppression titled "Ma Su Mon," detailing the story of a young Burmese woman who was imprisoned and later exiled for participating in the Burman pro-democracy movement of the late 1990s. "Ma Su Mon"'s cardstock cover and codex format is much less ostentatious in comparison to the rest of *McSweeney's 36*. "Ma Su Mon" is formatted in the traditional book format of a codex—a collection of paper bound together along one edge—and bound by staples. While the rest of this issue of *McSweeney's* includes some codex-like pieces similar to "Ma Su Mon," other items are not formatted in a typical book-like manner. For instance, additional pieces in this issue include a postcard collection designed by Ian Huebert that reveals an illustration of a fish when all four postcards are aligned and a scroll of paper fortune cookie inserts held together by a rubber band, which the reader can unravel and cut into individual fortunes.

Although the image of Ma Su Mon on the front cover somewhat stands out as the only photographic image used on a cover in the magazine, the rest of the design emphasizes the Voice of Witness project and *Nowhere to be Home* rather than Ma Su Mon herself. Many of the colors on the covers of "Ma Su Mon" are neutral and muted, but the "Voice of Witness" tag is brightly printed in red in the corner of the front cover, catching the reader's attention potentially more than the other front cover features. Furthermore, the back cover is inundated with text describing



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the Voice of Witness project and summarizing the *Nowhere to be Home* collection, the book in the series that "Ma Su Mon" was excerpted from. The largest and most noticeable text on the back cover is the display type used to write the title *Nowhere to be Home.* The back cover may claim that this piece is "Ma Su Mon's story," but the only place on said cover where she is even mentioned is in a small font introducing *Nowhere to be Home*. The outward details of the booklet are clearly trying to move us away from *McSweeney's 36* towards the Voice of Witness series, which compromises the focus on Ma Su Mon in *McSweeney's 36* and makes the text appear like a marketing ploy in the context of the magazine. Eggers perhaps included "Ma Su Mon" in *McSweeney's 36* not to amplify her voice specifically, but rather to increase the readership and therefore the sale of *Nowhere to be Home.* As a non-profit series, the Voice of Witness project was created to earn social justice and the producers of the books possibly receive no financial gain from their involvement with the project. Nevertheless, *McSweeney's 36* is an imperfect vehicle for publicizing the cause given potential monetary conflicts of interest in advertising the nonprofit book in a for-profit magazine publication owned by the same publisher.

The Voice of Witness project's goals dictated the production of "Ma Su Mon" and must be understood in order to recognize the cultural work the piece is attempting to accomplish. Cofounded by Eggers and Lola Vollen in 2005, the Voice of Witness book series aims to raise awareness of social justice issues and serve as a space for sharing the seldom-heard stories of human rights crises victims. Although much of *McSweeney's* content is also focused on politics and social justice, Eggers perhaps felt that a separate oral history collection would provide "an opportunity to better understand the world we live in through human connection and a participatory vision of history" (*Voice of Witness Reader,* back cover). According to the project's key principles, a different pair of editors oversees each publication in the series from the interviewing stages to the revision process. Dave Eggers particularly emphasizes that he and the Voice of Witness team "honor their stories by making them right" and ensure that the subjects "own their stories, now and always" during the publication process (*Voice of Witness Reader* 18). "Ma Su Mon," much like *The Voice of Witness Reader,* is a sampling from a larger Voice of Witness collection called *Nowhere to be Home,* which recounts first-hand experiences of military oppression in Burma from victims of the civil rights crisis. Eggers states that *The Voice of Witness Reader* "was conceived of as a way a general reader might be introduced to the work of Voice of Witness…Our hope, of course, is that this sampling will bring readers to the full texts" (28).

Historically speaking, *McSweeney's* and Voice of Witness were getting their start alongside the political tumult and government oppression in Burma that is recounted in Ma Su Mon's narrative. In producing *Nowhere to be Home*, West and Lemere aimed to "reveal the human toll exacted by the country's brutal regime" (*McSweeney's 36*, "Ma Su Mon", back cover). Accordingly, Ma Su Mon's childhood memory of the 8888 Uprising in Rangoon is the

starting point of the narrative. The 8888 Uprising occurred on August 8, 1988 and served as the tipping point at which five months of localized pro-democracy demonstrations throughout Burma and years of political unrest escalated to a nation-wide protest. From 1962 leading up to the 1988 riots, the Burmese government was controlled by the military leadership of General Ne Win, whose administration and policy system, referred to as the "Burmese Way to Socialism," established the Burma Socialist Programme Party [BSPP] in 1974 (Chandiramani). From 1974 until 1988, Ne Win forcibly ruled over Burma as chairman of the BSPP and severely impoverished the country. When rioting started to become a daily occurrence by July 1988, Ne Win resigned from the BSPP and promised to create a multi-party government system in his place. However, in the tumultuous period after Ne Win's resignation, a time marked by election-related arguments between the National League for Democracy [NLD] and the BSPP and ongoing violence between citizen protestors and lawless BSPP soldiers, the State Law and Order Restoration Council [SLORC] took control of the government in a coup d'état on September 18, 1988. Thus, Burma remained a military-controlled authoritarian state.

When Ma Su Mon joined the NLD in 1996, SLORC had already imprisoned or killed countless members of the NLD, viewing pro-democracy sympathizers as a threat to their anti-democratic regime. The 1990 and 2010 Burman elections should have transitioned the country to democracy, but fraudulent electoral processes and interference from SLORC has kept the military junta in control. Thus, the human rights crisis that West and Lemere shed light on in "Ma Su Mon" has been an ongoing issue in the country for four decades. Certainly Ma Su Mon's experiences are significant, but it is important to recognize that the story being shared belongs to one individual out of many generations of ethnic Burmese people who have been oppressed and forced to take refuge outside of the country. Seeing as the principles of the Voice of Witness

project are to allow subjects to maintain ownership of their stories and use the human connection of the oral history format to better understand history, it is also in the interest of Voice of Witness's mission to acknowledge Ma Su Mon's individualism.

Although the goal of Voice of Witness is to amplify Ma Su Mon's voice, her perspective on her story is hardly present in "Ma Su Mon" because the additions of editorial voice into the text continuously erase her identity from the narrative. Foremost, the form of oral history requires heavy editorial influence by nature of how an oral history narrative is constructed. As explained in the end matter, West and Lemere transformed their interview transcripts into first-person narratives; however, the oral history was merely a "foundation" for the final text (*McSweeney's 36,* "Ma Su Mon" 31). Even though the end matter explains that the interviewees provided some "assistance" with the editing process, the simple fact that the perspective of the story was reconstructed raises a question of whose voice the reader is hearing (*McSweeney's 36,* "Ma Su Mon" 31). Additionally, the altered point of view presents the narrative from the perspective of an unnamed first person, which separates the story from Ma Su Mon personally and suggests this narrative could belong to any Burmese woman. In this way, the unnamed I becomes a voice speaking on behalf of all Burmese people, which overgeneralizes the individual experiences of other Burmans. As Sunjay Chandiramani states in "Burma and Western Precepts of Democracy," "Authoritarianism in Burma exists for reasons more complex than simple human lust for power, and consequently requires solutions that are sensitive to and aware of Burma's own political history" (27). The systemic erasure of Ma Su Mon's identity by means of altering the perspective of the narrative is precisely the kind of insensitivity that Chandiramani notes is counterproductive to efforts to increase awareness of those affected by Burma's oppressive military regime.

Moreover, the layout of the text adds editorial voice through pull-quotes, footnotes, and section headings, which suggest that the resulting story is no longer just Ma Su Mon's interpretation of Burma's history. The editors provide historical context and structure to Ma Su Mon's narrative through footnotes and section headings, consequently interrupting Ma Su Mon's narrative by filling the story with an additional authorial voice. By adding these elements, West and Lemere are perhaps overstepping their authority in this textual conversation that was meant to be had by those who experienced the humanitarian crisis in Burma firsthand. However, the editors assume authorship by choosing which statements to emphasize in pull quotes for the use of indirect characterization; therefore, West and Lemere have added their voices into the narrative. These additions of editorial voice through production of the text are problematic when the entire project is based on the principle of creating a space where the victims of human rights crises could be heard.

Ma Su Mon's individual identity is also erased from the narrative through the way the cover designs of "Ma Su Mon" reduce her to a character in her own story and emphasize the Voice of Witness book series. As an oral history, the text is a collection of personal statements from Ma Su Mon; consequently, she can be considered the author of the piece because the narrative, in theory, should be constructed from only her words. However, Ma Su Mon is credited in just the title, which is more suggestive of her being the subject of a story composed by someone else than the owner of the text to follow. Likewise, by crediting West and Lemere on the front cover in the way an author is usually listed, the front cover further suggests that the editors have assumed ownership of the narrative and Ma Su Mon's voice. Consequently, this design decision compromises the Voice of Witness project principle stating that the interview subjects should "own their stories, now and always" (*McSweeney's 36,* "Ma Su Mon" 18).

Although Ma Su Mon is depicted on the cover image, the group photo chosen does not distinctly indicate which individual is Ma Su Mon. In fact, the reader could not be certain where Ma Su Mon was located in the photo unless he read the small footnote on the first page explaining where she was sitting. Because Ma Su Mon is present but not clearly foregrounded in the cover image, the editors have visually muddled the owner of the story, similar to the subjugating effect of titling the piece after Ma Su Mon rather than crediting her as a coauthor. By skimming the covers of the piece, the reader may form misleading initial assumptions of Ma Su Mon due to the subjugating outward details of the booklet, which will ultimately detract from the impact of the piece's goal of giving Ma Su Mon a voice.

Overall, the covers of "Ma Su Mon" appear to have been designed to function as a marketing tactic to draw attention to the Voice of Witness series; however, the design compromises the focus on Ma Su Mon. *McSweeney's 36* functions as a collectible commodity designed with an aura of otherness known to sell successfully in the *McSweeney's* market; with this in mind, the editors covered Ma Su Mon's voice with promotional content for their Voice of Witness project. Thus, much like how the *Voice of Witness Reader* was meant to raise awareness and, by effect, sales of the Voice of Witness series, Eggers appears to have included "Ma Su Mon" in *McSweeney's 36* in hopes of increasing awareness and circulation of *Nowhere to be Home.* When considering this individual item in the greater context of *McSweeney's* publishing model, it seems likely that including *Ma Su Mon* in an avant-garde issue of the magazine might put her story in the hands of a different audience than the piece typically might have attracted on its own. Nonetheless, Ma Su Mon's identity is not only undermined by the promotion for the book series on the covers, but these covers also suggest the editors have appropriated and commodified Ma Su Mon's story for promotion of their project.

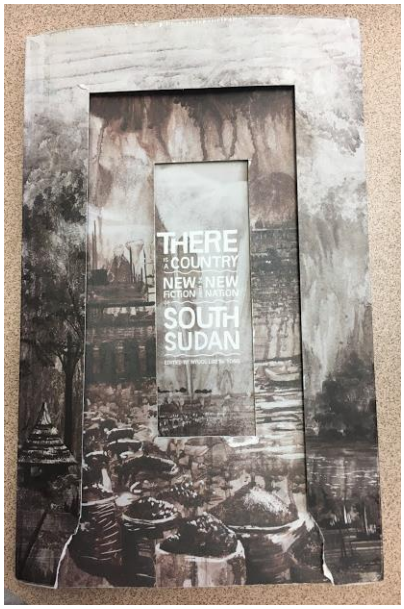
Courtesy of Special Collections Research Center at Bird Library, Syracuse University

Whereas the emphasis on ostentatious design in *McSweeney's 36* competes with the message of "Ma Su Mon" and *Nowhere to be Home, There is a Country* is given a more substantial platform through the design of *McSweeney's 43*[1]. Divided into two slim codex-form texts, *McSweeney's 43* organizes the "Letters" section and assorted fiction and nonfiction works into the collection entitled "McSweeney's 43," while works by South Sudanese authors are printed in the text *There is a Country: New Fiction from the New Nation of South Sudan.* Excluding the "Letters" section, there are six pieces printed in "McSweeney's 43" spanning 160 pages. The "McSweeney's 43" portion tackles political topics and human rights issues in both its fiction and nonfiction, including William Wheeler's reported essay documenting his experience as a journalist covering the Libyan revolution, "Zero Hour," and Charles Baxter's *Charity,* a short story about a man who develops an opioid addiction after incurring viral arthritis on a service-based trip to Africa. While there is variety in terms of the topics covered in the "McSweeney's 43" half of the issue, there are few emerging voices in this portion, instead boasting notable *McSweeney's* regulars like T.C. Boyle and premiere international authors such as Ludmilla Petrushevskaya.

[1] *McSweeney's 43* refers to the 43rd issue of *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, which comes in the form of two codices. "McSweeney's 43" refers to one of the two texts that is titled after the issue and contains short fiction and nonfiction as well as *McSweeney's* signature "Letters" section. *There is a Country* refers to *There is a Country: New Fiction from the New Nation of South Sudan,* the first anthology of South Sudanese fiction and second text comprising *McSweeney's 43.*

Meanwhile, *There is a Country* undertakes a significantly different mission: to "begin to give readers a picture" (9) of South Sudanese literature by publishing "the first collection of its kind, from the youngest country in the world" (Tong, back cover*).* In the introduction to the anthology, Tong explains that he is often asked to "describe the literary culture" of South Sudan and recommend representative works that provide "a more grounded understanding of this new nation" (Tong 5). Although Tong states in the introduction to *There is a Country* that South Sudan is too young to have literary celebrities, Tong presents two established writers published in the collection as equivalent to celebrities: "the acclaimed critic and poet Taban Lo Liyong, South Sudan's most well-known literary figure, and Arif Gamal" (9). The other contributors are portrayed as young, up-and-coming writers chosen from "the dozens received" whom Tong "stumbled upon… while looking for African Short Stories online" or who "became known to [him] after our call for submissions went out" (Tong 9). Based on the rhetoric used in the introduction, the process for selecting the authors published in *There is a Country* appears not to be based on notoriety and reflects pride in discovering rising new talent. Similar to *McSweeney's* devotion to up-and-coming authors and difficult-to-publish works, *There is a Country* seems concerned with proving what these newly discovered writers are capable of in addition to "what South Sudanese literature has to offer" (Tong, back cover). Thus, Tong and the *McSweeney's* team are aware of their role as the gatekeepers deciding who will "send [their] own work out into the world" (8-9).

According to Xavier Luffin's "Sudan and South Sudan," the Sudanese novel remains largely understudied by scholars and unknown to readers in both the Arab and Western world. The lack of attention devoted to the Sudanese novel can be attributed to the marginalization of Sudan in the Arab world "where the country is sometimes considered as African first," the weak distribution of Sudanese literature, the lack of government encouragement or support to develop a national literature, and the impact of censorship on recent novels (Luffin 1). Since the novel grew popular in the 1990s, the Sudanese Civil War has had a dominant presence in the literature. Writers during this period chose to write "poor and marginal people as major, if not always main, characters" and set their stories in the slums. Luffin provides an overview of the major works in the novel genre in Sudan and South Sudan and scholarship on this topic, noting some works that are also concerned with the South Sudanese experience. However, in his attempts to outline trends in the history of the Sudanese and South Sudanese novel, Luffin's consistent and ill-defined use of "the Sudanese novel" throughout the essay seems to lump the two nations together and fails to name distinct qualities of South Sudan's literature. Therefore, Luffin's work points to the necessity and timeliness of *McSweeney's* effort to capture the burgeoning literary culture of South Sudan.



Personal photograph

Many of the pieces in *There is a Country* are set during the Sudanese Civil War. "Sudanese Civil War" has become an umbrella phrase for the complex history of war in Sudan and South Sudan. Most commonly, the term refers to three main periods of conflict: the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972), the Second Sudanese Civil War, (1983-2005), and the South

Sudanese Civil War (2013-present). The northern and southern regions of Sudan were governed separately under joint British-Egyptian rule until 1946, when the British and Egyptian governments merged South and North Sudan into a single administrative region. Developing as separate entities, "The north was predominantly Arab and Muslim and had maintained close cultural ties to Egypt. The south was predominantly black and Christian or animist with cultural ties to ethnicities in northern Uganda" (Mengel). In 1953, during the first wave of African nationalism, the Egyptian and British governments announced Sudan was to become a single independent nation on January 1, 1956. While tensions had been rising since the merging of the two regions, increased hostility was fostered during the intermediary period prior to Sudan's independence day because the North and South struggled to develop a national identity amidst power grabbing factions and regional ethnic groups. The southern region's fears that the larger northern region of Sudan would deny them representation were actualized in late 1955 when northern leaders backed out of commitments to create a federal government that would grant the South substantial autonomy (Poggo). Thus, shortly after Sudan was granted independence, the First Sudanese Civil War was initiated through mutinies in the rural south. Soon after Sudanese president Col Jaafar Muhammad Numeiri seized power in 1969, Numeiri outlined a policy of autonomy for the South and officially conceded in 1972 with the Addis Ababa Agreement (BBC). Under the peace agreement, the South was recognized as a single administrative region called the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region, ending the 17-year war.

However, the Addis Ababa Agreement failed to resolve the cultural tensions that initially catalyzed the war. Consequently, the Second Sudanese Civil War was largely a continuation of the First Sudanese Civil War. In 1983, the South once again mutinied against the North for numerous reasons, including infringement upon the peace agreement, the abolishment of South

Sudan's autonomy, the declaration of Sudan as an Islamic state, and the exploitation of large oil fields on the north-south border. After 22 more years of warfare, the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended the war and outlined measures to "share power, distribute wealth, and provide security in Sudan" (Sabr). Most importantly, "the south was granted a six-year period of autonomy to be followed by a referendum on final status," which resulted in a vote of 98 percent in favor of secession (Central Intelligence Agency). The South became an independent nation on July 9, 2011, naming itself The Republic of South Sudan. Between two and two and a half million people died in the First and Second Sudanese Civil Wars, with many more being displaced as refugees. Despite South Sudan gaining independence, ethnic clashes and border fighting continued. The South Sudanese Civil War began in 2013 when President Salva Kiir accused his Vice President, Riek Machar, of plotting to overthrow him. Multiple ceasefires and peace agreements have failed over the years, plunging the country into a humanitarian crisis. As of June 27, 2018, President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, the current leader of the largest rebel group fighting the government, signed the newest peace deal ending the war (Specia). Since civil war erupted in 2013, "the total number of displaced people [increased] to nearly 4 million, including 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and nearly 2 million refugees in neighboring countries" (U.S. Agency for International Development).

Not only is the South Sudanese Civil War Africa's largest refugee crisis since the Rwandan genocide in 1994, but "Both sides have committed abuses that qualify as war crimes, including looting, indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the destruction of civilian property, arbitrary arrests and detention, beatings and torture, enforced disappearances, rape including gang rape, and extrajudicial executions. Some abuses may also constitute crimes against humanity" (Human Rights Watch). Although *There is a Country: New Fiction for the New*

Nation of South Sudan was published in 2013, Nyuol Lueth Tong's assertion that, "No other force or reality has had the ubiquity in South Sudan that war has had in the last several decades. War dominates, and its legacy will continue to influence our literature in many ways for years to come. Its face is more familiar for most of us than this new reality of peace and stability," holds true for the present status of war in South Sudan (9).

Long before the First Sudanese Civil War, Sudanese literature reflected a grappling with the Islamic and Christian cultures of Sudan, the resurgence of Sudanese nationalism, advocacy for an Afro-Arabic hybrid identity, and the coexistence of "many different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups living side by side in Sudan" (Luffin 6). As alluded to by Nyuol Lueth Tong in the introduction to *There is a Country…*, the issue of national identity was especially prominent in the literature produced immediately after South Sudan gained its independence. The mission of *There is a Country* is to provide insight into what South Sudanese literature is by selecting "literature that illuminates its cultures and experiences" (Tong 6). Because "South Sudan…is still too young to be able to claim a literary coterie," editor Nyuol Lueth Tong states that he often recommends "personal accounts from my country's diaspora of former refugees and war survivors. I point them to books like Dave Eggers's *What is the What…They Poured Fire on Us From The Sky,* by Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, Benjamin Ajak, and Judy Bernstein; *God Grew Tired of Us*, by John Bul Dau and Michael Sweeney…But I am reluctant to refer to them as South Sudanese literature," (6-7). Tong states that the pursuit of a definition of South Sudanese literature "evokes long-standing concerns about the nature of African literature—its sources, its influences, its languages, its possibilities…The need to find modes of expression that suit African cultures and imaginings comes to the fore here, charged with an urgency based in South Sudan's particular colonial context and current historical

juncture" (7). Thus, defining South Sudanese literature is a doubly complicated task because South Sudanese citizens grapple with the lasting effects of the physical threat of war from Sudan and the colonial threat of Western missionaries. In his introduction to the anthology, Tong suggests that war and "tension with the North is still 'the main glue that binds the country's multiple ethnicities together'" and colonial languages unify the factions of South Sudan "as a common medium of communication and of national identification, an umbrella under which different ethnicities and cultures can find equal representation" (7-8). Much like the decades-long fight for an independent, unified South Sudan, the mission of *There is a Country* is to unify the developing literary movement in South Sudan.

Much of the evidence of *There is a Country's* independence as a textual object can be found on its back cover. The back cover of *There is a Country* is masked by a red sticker displaying a description of the collection and information such as a price ($12.00), a sales barcode with the ISBN, and the McSweeney's logo. When printing commercially published books, publishers often design back covers to display this kind of information to give potential readers insight into the work and allow retailers to easily sell the item. In addition, neither the introduction from the editor nor the detachable back-cover description mention the specific issue of the quarterly that the anthology was included in. Thus, if one were to encounter *There is a Country* outside of the context of *McSweeney's 43,* the sticker might lead a reader to assume that *There is a Country* is a trade-published anthology or a work published by the McSweeney's books division rather than one half of an issue of a literary magazine. Whereas the back cover of "Ma Su Mon" is used to advertise other *McSweeney's* publications, there is no advertising for McSweeney's publications within *There is a Country*. In contrast, the back matter of the "McSweeney's 43" portion of *McSweeney's 43* is filled with advertisements for other

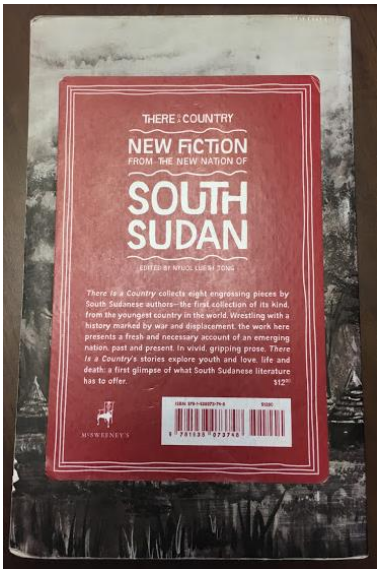
McSweeney's Publishing works. Following the "Contributors" section, the similarly formatted "Also Available from McSweeney's" list includes blurbs of titles from the Books Division written to market these works to potential readers. The two-page spread following the list of McSweeney's Books titles depicts an advertisement for the 10th anniversary issue of *The Believer*, featuring an image of the cover of the magazine and a list of those who will be contributing, ending with the promise of "more!" The ad explains that:

> We're celebrating our tenth anniversary with a very special, decennial-sized March/April 2013 issue, featuring: Three different fold-out covers/Interviews with Jeanette Winterson…Plus: contributions by writers from March 2003's Issue One, including Susan Straight…A new collaboration by Raymond Pettibon and Jonathan Lethem; Comics and Reviews devoted to things that are ten years old…And more! ("McSweeney's 43," back matter)

Moreover, the final page of "McSweeney's 43" advertises the next issue of *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* with yet another list of contributors and promises that readers can expect "much, much more." Not only do these advertisements speak to McSweeney's emphasis on literary celebrity given the consistent name dropping throughout the promotional content in the back of "McSweeney's 43," but the attention to presenting McSweeney's as a unified literary brand is apparent. Because all the advertising for other McSweeney's publications and the staple "Letters" section occurs within "McSweeney's 43," readers are drawn to the content of *There is a Country* instead of having their attention taken to other content from McSweeney's. Moreover, the fact that *There is a Country* has a unique ISBN whereas "McSweeney's 43" in *McSweeney's 43* and "Ma Su Mon" in *McSweeney's 36* do not also suggests *There is a Country* has the most independence as a text. The ISBN ultimately allows the anthology to be sold by book retailers and catalogued in libraries independent of *McSweeney's 43.* Although one cannot buy *There is a Country* individually on the McSweeney's "Books Division" page, it continues to be sold as a component of *McSweeney's 43* among other magazines under the "Timothy McSweeney's

Quarterly Concern" portion of the website. The South Sudanese anthology also appears to be sold on its own by major retailers like Amazon and Barnes and Noble in new and used condition. Thus, the back cover design, with its ISBN and barcode for the anthology, and introduction's lack of references to *McSweeney's 43* reinforce the idea that *There is a Country* was made to be independently distributed from "McSweeney's 43" and the *McSweeney's* oeuvre.

However, there are elements of the design of *There is a Country* that muddle the autonomy of the South Sudanese perspective. For instance, the separate ISBN for *There is a Country* also complicates the cataloging of *McSweeney's* in library archives and increases the likelihood of a reader confusing the status of *There is a Country* as an independent text. For instance, Syracuse University Libraries has a listing for an item titled "McSweeney's 43" that can be accessed in its Special Collections Research Center, but upon examining the contents of this holding or reserving the item, it is evident that this listing only includes the "McSweeney's 43" portion. Meanwhile, *There is a Country* is unable to be viewed as it has been in library processing for many months. In contrast, the British Library in London, England lists a holding for "McSweeney's 43" in its catalogue, but this only includes *There is a Country* without "McSweeney's 43." In this case, cataloging *There is a Country* under the title of *McSweeney's 43* could be misleading, but this presentation proposes that *There is a Country* does fall under the umbrella of *McSweeney's 43*. Thus, while the separate ISBN for *There is a Country* increases the likelihood of the anthology circulating in the retail arena, this detail complicates libraries' ability to preserve and make accessible *McSweeney's 43* with both the "McSweeney's 43" component and *There is a Country*.



Personal photograph

Moreover, most of the extratextual clues indicating that *There is a Country* also exists as a standalone work were included on a removable sticker. One might assume that the information provided on the sticker would have been printed directly on the back cover when the text was designed if it were intended to be sold by outside retailers or read independently of *McSweeney's 43* from the beginning of the editorial process. Instead, the use of the detachable sticker suggests that in order to release *There is a Country* independently of *McSweeney's 43*, this information may have had to be added on after the collection was printed. Given that the mission stated in the introduction of *There is a Country* is to disseminate the first anthology of South Sudanese literature "out into the world…In an effort to enrich our culture and share the work of our new country," the possibility that *There is a Country* was not originally conceived to be released independently so as to make it widely accessible would have limited the reach of the publication (Tong 9).

Additionally, the front cover is made to look just like the "McSweeney's 43" collection in terms of physical presentation. The die-cut trifold covers feature two gray-hued mixed-media landscapes that could be mistaken as the same image if the reader did not choose to "spread out and peer through and pore over" the covers "until you can take no more" (McSweeney's online store). The front covers of "McSweeney's 43" and *There is a Country* are misleadingly similar looking. The contemporary American artist who designed the covers, Gregory Euclide, is known for juxtaposing natural and man-made objects in non-traditional mixed media pieces that resemble landscape paintings (Euclide, "Information"). Often devoid of human figures, Euclide's

work depicts land as a means of celebrating or critiquing culture. By contrasting flat, painted vistas with three-dimensional materials, Euclide seeks to "expose the illusion of representation and subsequently confuse the pictorial space, calling into question the authenticity of the objects. The forms fracture the pictorial space…inhabiting the frames, robbing them of their ability to define a single view and inviting a phenomenological exploration by the viewer" (Euclide, "Information"). Euclide's work has frequented small-scale group and solo exhibitions in the Midwest, print and digital articles in *The New York Times,* and album art for numerous bands, including the album art for American Indie folk band Bon Iver's Grammy-winning second album, *Bon Iver, Bon Iver*.

In keeping with the rest of his portfolio, Euclide imitates his relief paintings and three-dimensional installations in the mechanics of the paperback front covers of *McSweeney's 43*. The front cover of each codex is made of a long piece of cardstock with an original Euclide painting printed on each side. On both the inner and outer front covers, the paintings wrap around to the inner and outer back cover. The cardstock has been folded down in a Z-shaped manner to match the size of the codex, causing three panels to form when the cover is extended. A large rectangle has been die-cut from the panel closest to the spine and a smaller rectangle die-cut from the center panel. As a result, a sizable amount of the original images have been removed. The die-cutting allows portions of all three panels to be seen at once when the front cover is folded in, creating a layered effect with visual depth.

The description of *McSweeney's 43* in the online store states that there are "not two but four incredible fold-out die-cut covers," but does not indicate what the four covers are. The numeration of the covers could perhaps follow the number of landscapes Euclide painted for the project; Euclide created two paintings per codex comprising *McSweeney's 43,* making a total of

four covers (Euclide, “Gallery”). However, if the number of covers was derived from the number of images created by the folding of the cardstock, one could argue there are six “covers” shared between the two codices. When the front cover is folded to allow portions of both the inner and outer front cover images to be viewed at once, the juxtaposition creates a third image with the combined view of the paintings and accompanying title text. The die cuts and folding conceal details of the landscapes that are unique to the specific paintings, particularly the natural objects. Euclide attempts to represent different geographic locations and types of space in each landscape, which can be inferred from the plant life, terrain, and architecture depicted. However, those forms cannot be viewed in their totality when the covers are folded; therefore, it is difficult for the reader to distinguish between the different representations of place in the artwork for the two texts. The set of landscapes displayed on “McSweeney’s 43” certainly appear to be more complex given their elaborate texture and use of mixed media. One gains the sense that more time was allocated to the artwork in “McSweeney’s 43,” especially considering the fact that Euclide also produced four spot-art paintings that are printed on the title pages of four pieces in the “McSweeney’s 43” half of the magazine. The four Euclide-created spot art works in contrast with the illustrations of the contributors to *There is a Country,* which were made by a different artist and created for each of the pieces included in this component of *McSweeney’s 43.* The folded covers could be compared and contrasted much like a spot-the-difference game before the reader realizes that there are four separate paintings creating the folded front cover image. Ultimately, the fact that the first anthology of South Sudanese literature was made in the image of its Western counterpart “McSweeney’s 43” calls the success of *There is a Country* as an independent platform for minority writers into question.

Furthermore, these stories come to the reader in a tongue which "is not the main medium of conversation for the majority of South Sudanese" (Tong 8). Tong explains that while colonial languages are spoken throughout Africa, "In the South [South Sudan], likewise, more than sixty languages are spoken…English is not the main medium of conversation for the majority of South Sudanese, especially in the villages" (8). As such, the fact that all of the stories in the anthology were originally written in English raises multiple concerns that Tong responds to:

> The reality is that many people on the continent speak colonial languages. …Achebe argued that 'Colonialism in Africa disrupted many things, but it did create big political units where there were small, scattered ones before.' These 'big political units' are united by common experiences under colonial subjugation; colonial languages reinforce this unity as a common medium of communication and of national identification, an umbrella under which different ethnicities and cultures can find equal representation. English also allowed many of the writers here to encounter literature from elsewhere; it seems reasonable to send our own work out into the world.
>
> This is the aim of this anthology. In an effort to enrich our culture and share the work of our new country, we want the world to read stories from South Sudan. (8-9)

While choosing texts written originally in English allows the anthology to be consumed by Western and African audiences, choosing texts written originally in English excludes writers whose work is not written in a colonial language and readers from more rural parts of the African continent who do not speak English, as Tong alludes to. Consequently, the scope of representation in the anthology is limited.

Thus, in many ways, *McSweeney's 36* and *McSweeney's* 43 both fail to completely fulfill their goals of giving a platform to minority writers. The box head design of *McSweeney's 36* invites the reader to attend to the ostentatiousness of the numerous pieces of the issue rather than focus on the literary content of any single item. This emphasis on the materiality of *McSweeney's 36* works in tandem with the *McSweeney's* branding on the packaging of "Ma Su Mon" to speak over Ma Su Mon herself, obscuring her experiences of oppression. On the other hand, the ability to distribute *There is a Country*'s independently and the minimal *McSweeney's* branding on the

covers of *McSweeney's 43* provides this issue with a substantial platform outside of the *McSweeney's* umbrella. However, *There is a Country's* independence within *McSweeney's 43* is compromised by its complicated library cataloging, indistinguishable cover designs for "McSweeney's 43" and *There is a Country*, and removable back book cover blurb sticker.

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