



differences in the quality of this pirated reproduction compared to the original are extremely slight. Although *A Family Portrait* includes, amongst others, the writing of one of Zimbabwe's most famous writers, Tsitsi Dangarembga, the production quality of the legal original is so poor that I wondered, when comparing the two texts, why readers would opt for the far more expensive original version. Later, I discovered that these stories are available online on the ICAPA website in both Epub and kindle formats, which again made me wonder why readers would buy the bad quality print versions of these texts at all.

I narrate this anecdote because I see it as a microcosm of the condition of literary production in African cities today. The three copies of the same text – one legal, printed copy which cost me 6 Bond Dollars; one illegal, photocopied version, which cost 2 Bond Dollars (and which I could have bought for 1); and one online, legal and free version – illustrate my central claim that the published book is an unsustainable form for Africa's literary future. The three encounters by which I came across these different versions of the text all trace different – though intersecting – economic, social, and technical literary spaces. These varying literary geographies suggest, I will argue, the movement away from the book-commodity as the dominant form of literary production in Africa.

I use Sarah Brouillette's argument that we need "to articulate a world-literary criticism to an as yet extremely underdeveloped political economy of literary production, which would consider how labour, property and ownership work within the literary system, and how they impinge on the writing that exists" ("World Literature and Market Dynamics" 99) as a starting point. Brouillette is rightly demanding that we consider the literary object as part of a larger economic and social interchange, which I attempt to do here by focusing on three formations of the literary in contemporary African cities: the legal book, the illegal book and the internet.

## The Legal Book

Irene Staunton, publisher at Weaver Press, laments the fact that in Zimbabwe, "[b]ooks are not, in general, valued as items one might want to possess" (50). The comment betrays her publisher's perspective on the book-as-commodity, with its focus on value and possession. Indeed, Staunton further imagines the value of the owned item as ritualized through the process of book-browsing and -buying in a store. She bemoans the fact that pirated copies "[do] not encourage the idea that books are bought and valued as personal possessions, nor that browsing in a good bookshop can be a positive experience" (Staunton 50). Instead, she writes, since "very few people can afford books; it is no wonder that they are given low priority, except insofar as they bring you closer to God, to money (self-help books are popular) and to passing an examination. This is not a context in which small general publishers thrive" (Staunton 50). What we see here is a

move away from the book-object as having inherent, literary, value, or even as a conveyer of cultural capital, to being instrumental towards a larger religious or economic goal. Given the popularity of religious and self-help books and books for financial success in Africa, we might argue that while African literary fiction, as Eileen Julien has noted, is often “extroverted” (667) and oriented towards a Western readership, the genres that face inwards towards African social life tend to be non-fictional, didactic and aimed at helping readers attain wealth, happiness, and success.

Both the extroverted literary novel and the success manual are, of course, inextricably woven into the global market economy. Staunton contemplates this state of affairs and quite rightly concludes that this may augur the end of the general publisher in Africa: “When parents can barely afford school fees or uniforms, the decision to buy photocopied books for a couple of dollars is not surprising, but those who read them for exams are unlikely to become book buyers or readers in the future. Does this matter? Do books really constitute a building block for future development?” (52) The answer to this question is, blatantly, “no.” Staunton herself admits that the publishing industry is already not sustainable, admitting that “[w]ere we to rely on book sales alone, we would not survive” (53).

But what if we reframe the question to consider literary spaces that do not participate overtly in the global market? Before we consider the illegal and alternative forms of distribution and writing that break out of this economic catch-22, let us consider legal distribution of books that have always stood outside of this market logic: the sale of second-hand books and libraries.

In a report for *News Day Zimbabwe* entitled “Harare’s Vending Time Bomb,” Tinotenda Samukange writes about what he calls the “vending crisis” of the city. During the crash of the Zimbabwe dollar in the early 2000s, Harare’s informal sector grew to unprecedented proportions. This ultimately resulted in a notoriously violent government crackdown on city vendors in 2005 known as Operation *Murambatsvina* (which translates roughly from chiShona as ‘Operation Clean-up-the-filth’). Despite the ferocity of that clean-up operation, the economic crisis in Zimbabwe has meant that street vending remains a common activity in cities. As the photographs in Samukange’s reportage reveal, vending can largely be divided into three basic categories of goods: fresh produce, cheap and mostly plastic products that are often illegally branded to mimic expensive brands, and second-hand goods. The second-hand book is, for our purposes, a commodity whose use-value is not reduced by being already read. As such, even though books on the African street are often sourced legally (Griffin Shea, for example, follows a street-vendor in Johannesburg on his routine path of scrounging charity shops for good deals), such recycling effectively unsettles the inflation of the book-product in the consumer cycle. This is especially so if the book-object is not valued as an item for possession, as Staunton points out.

However, the second-hand book trade in no way allows for the development of a literary infrastructure that can support local writing or even meet the demands and tastes of street-buyers. As the Johannesburg street-seller Mahle Mavimbela reports to Griffin Shea, “he could sell new books, if he knew where to find them cheaply. He gets requests for new titles from some of his customers, particularly for black authors, but they’re hard to source at affordable prices”. As such, street sellers resisting unlawful resale of stolen books are susceptible to the vagaries of the second-hand book trade, a dynamic that cannot be the basis of a sustainable book- and reading-culture.

The problem of sustainability also impacts libraries in sub-Saharan Africa. In the Zimbabwean context, for example, public libraries are burdened with the same economic problems that the book trade suffers from. Staunton seconds this view by commenting that while some, precarious, donor funding has helped the library sector to some extent in Zimbabwe, “public libraries have been left to fend for themselves with few resources” (49-50). Brouillette also writes of the book sector in Africa that IMF and World Bank structural adjustment of the 1980s and 1990s made it

even harder to access financing, with up to 40% interest on bank loans and overdrafts. Already impoverished populations had even less to spend on nonessential items. Low literacy continued, especially in the non-indigenous languages in which books were mainly published. Distribution systems were further weakened; public libraries all but collapsed. Parastatal, university, and independent indigenous publishing were basically all on their last legs. Only foreign publishing houses, particularly British, which continued to supply books to tertiary-level institutions and universities, still made some money despite the crisis. (“The African Literary Hustle”)

In addressing the problem of building a viable African book infrastructure in the aftermath of structural adjustment, numerous NGOs have backed literary programs of varying size and success across the region. Yet, donor support is also problematic for a variety of reasons. Sarah Brouillette observes an instrumentalisation of African literature by Western donors and NGOs in which “capital has attempted to secure the accumulation of surplus” by “[t]urning to culture as a potentially endless ‘immaterial’ resource” (*UNESCO and the World-Literary System in Crisis*). She reads what she calls the “NGOization of African Literature” (“The African Literary Hustle”) as part of the crisis of Julien’s extroverted African literature. Brouillette specifies: “[d]onor support was [...] for outward facing, extroverted literary production, rather than for the development of a local African readership,” and she goes on to discuss the ways in which African literary networks are themselves complicit in this extroverted literary impulse (“The African Literary Hustle”). Brouillette’s assessment certainly does not apply to all donor-funded initiatives in African contexts, some of which have become strategic brokers between local readers and the book industry. Yet, Brouillette’s critique certainly still applies in the majority of cases. Further to this problem of donor-funded literature being largely extroverted, African publishing houses, as Walter Bgoya and Mary Jay point out, are wary of seeing any

sustainable solution in donor support. As Brouillette writes of the Zimbabwean situation:

while direct donor aid from non-government sources, usually international, has stepped in to fill some gaps left in the wake of state-based support, it has been relatively modest and precarious. It has also supported bringing African books to international readers, instead of developing local markets, which is assumed to be a lost cause given the population's overall levels of wealth, English-language literacy, and interest in literature ("The African Literary Hustle").

In *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and Participation*, Doreen Strauhs notes the considerable increase of what she calls "LINGO's" (20), that is, literary sites of production funded by non-profit, usually non-African, organizations on the African literary scene. Both Strauhs and Katherine Haines have investigated the significance and sustainability of these LINGOs, such as Kwani Trust in Kenya, Chimurenga Trust in South Africa, and FEMRITE in Uganda. They conclude that LINGOs face the same challenges as traditional book publishers in the African context. These are language and literacy rates of local readers (Strauhs 83), national income levels (Strauhs 84), infrastructure (Strauhs 84), and absence of reliable distribution partners (Strauhs 85; Haines 146; Shercliff 55). Moreover, as Mary Jay argues, it is impossible to build cultural industries and infrastructures with donor support that is always intermittent and unpredictable (26-27). One only needs to compare the *African Small Publishers Catalogues* of 2010 (Higgs and Senne), 2013 (Higgs and Senne) and 2016 (Higgs), to see how quickly small-publishing concerns emerge and disappear in the sub-Saharan region.

One version of book publishing that is on the rise in Africa is self-publishing. If one looks at the Nielsen BookScan data for sales of South African fiction between 2015 and 2017, the gravity of this point becomes very clear.<sup>2</sup> The first sign of a crisis in publishing in these statistics is the markedly low rate of sales of fiction for publishers in South Africa during these years. Three of the largest local publishing houses, Jacana, Kwela Books and Picador Africa, sold on average across the three years between 2253 (Picador Africa), 10 226 (Jacana), and 11 386 (Kwela) fiction titles per year. While these numbers seem respectable for the largest of these, Kwela Books, it is worth noting that the publisher's sales dropped by more than half between 2015 (15 369 books sold) and 2017 (6948 books sold). What is striking, is the introduction of a newcomer on the book market in 2017, Hlomu Publishing. In its first year, Hlomu Publishing sold 6556 copies, just under the total sales for established publisher, Kwela. Moreover, Hlomu Publishing took in a profit of around 1,5 million ZAR in 2017, making it the second largest seller of fiction in South Africa in 2017. Hlomu Publishing, however, is a one-author outfit, run by Dudu Busani-Dube, who started the company to self-publish her trilogy of romance novels, *Hlomu: The Wife*, *Naledi: His Love*, and *Zandile: The Resolute*. That the sales of these massively popular three books could outweigh all other fiction published in South Africa in 2017 is a remarkable fact, and one that surely bodes ill for traditional publishing

houses. Indeed, while other self-published authors are not quite so successful, the head-buyer of Xarra Books in Midrand, South Africa, informed me that their self-publishing stocks have increased to the point at which they face numerous administrative problems in keeping track of these self-publishers for restocking purposes. This is an infrastructural problem that impacts even the successful Hlomu Publishing; when I checked the online shop at South Africa's largest bookseller at the time of writing this article, all copies of Busani-Dube's book were out of stock.

Nevertheless, the success story of self-published novels like Busani-Dube's is prompting established publishers to try new economic approaches. Jacana Press recently attempted to use equity crowdfunding to raise capital for a fiction-based publishing house that would work towards developing a sustainable publishing infrastructure for South African writers to tell South African stories. The pitch was a failure and the initiative only raised 83 400 of the 3 000 000 ZAR required for success ("Storied"). This suggests, once more, the unpredictability of the sector and the unsustainability of the book, even when publishers do their best to address the specific needs of local readers.

## The Illegal Book

If we return to the scene of the street-seller that began this discussion, it is not only the legal resale of second-hand books that keeps these vendors afloat. Indeed, more often than not, the books sold on the street are also stolen or pirated goods. South African Jacana Press recently faced the problem of booksellers not reordering stocks because of the high theft rates of certain titles. These titles are most often those discovered in police raids on vendor sellers in the inner-city. For Jacana Media, this constituted a problem: in the words of their Sales Manager, Shay Heydenrych, "the upshot was that a book was essentially made extinct by the bookstores' anxieties over theft." She goes on,

So for these hot books – 'hot' as in happening and desirable and 'hot' as in stealable – we arranged for sample copies of the most-stolen titles to be supplied to stores to keep merchandise on the shop floor. The sample copies were doctored, though, to ensure that they wouldn't be stolen ... we stamped interior pages, cut-out some sections too (leaving enough text – content pages, key chapters for a reader to get a good sense of the book), placed a 'hot reads' bookmark in the book and a 'hot reads' sticker on the cover to direct the reader to the counter to ask for an unblemished copy should they wish to buy the book. (Heydenrych)

The presence of malformed books in the illegal book-trade comes up in Griffin Shea's interview with street-seller Mahle Mavimbela too. Shea, who is accompanying Mavimbela to a charity store where he is sourcing new stock, notices a shelf of what appears to be new books:

There's *Tell Me Sweet Something*, the title of a local film, a romantic comedy released in 2015, about a bookstore owner in Johannesburg. Flipping through it,

the chapters had unromantic titles like 'What Fear Smells Like' and 'A Regime on the Rampage'. It was Peter Godwin's *The Fear*. "Don't buy it," Mavimbela warns. He'd bought a copy that turned out to have *Seeds of Destruction* inside the rom-com cover. "I sold that book to a lady, she was looking for a nice book by a South African author. And she came back very angry about that."

Print errors, remainders and other cast-offs from the formal book industry not meant for resale find their ways into this illegal market. The malformation of the book object in the interests of keeping its commodity value in check becomes a powerful symbol of the precarity of the book in vulnerable economies today.

Furthermore, as Heydenrych notes, "[t]itles most-stolen on our list were local memoirs and politics, those that would have recognition and a market further afield. There's a wide market of potential book buyers away from high-street shopping and regional shopping centres where most of the traditional booksellers are located." Two aspects of this pattern of theft are of interest for my discussion. First, the novel is not the content demanded on the street. Secondly, legal books are unaffordable for most people, despite their interest in reading.

This is no new pattern in African book markets. Referencing a 2014 statistic published by the International Publishers Association, Katherine Haines notes, "[o]ne of the biggest challenges facing book publishers in Nigeria is piracy, with estimates suggesting that 'illegal sales account for 75% of the book market'" (146). Back in Zimbabwe, an Anti-Piracy Group, which included various stake-holders from publishers and booksellers to authors and the police, reported at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair's Indaba of 2013 on the growing problem of book piracy in the country, a problem that has worsened further since then (Phiri). Greater access to mobile technologies and the ease with which texts can be digitally transferred has exacerbated the problem.

The situation certainly looks very dire for African publishers, but what does this mean for literary producers in these contexts? As Staunton notes:

while reading for pleasure and to explore other worlds has never formed a part of the curriculum, Zimbabwe is full of young people who passionately want to write – the majority, in our experience, being young men between the ages of seventeen and thirty – and publishers, ourselves included, receive three or four manuscripts a week as a matter of course. The energy and hard work they put into writing indicates a strong desire to be heard, but many have not read much more than their set books and have little real appreciation of how good or bad their novel (or poetry) is. The success of Zimbabwean writers who have gained an international reputation has spurred them on. Fame and fortune beckon. And misconceptions abound. (50)

These misconceptions emerge in the paradox of a non-reading culture that is nevertheless enthralled by the novel or published poetry as the ultimate form of self-expression. That "fame and fortune beckon" indicates precisely the ways in which such self-expression is itself associated with the idea of economic gain and success. We might disagree with Staunton and argue that rather than seeing young Zimbabweans' perception of the novel as misconceived, we could

postulate that in the purely economic sense, they are right: there is money in successful, extroverted African novels. And irrespective of whether a book sells or not, there remains a great deal of symbolic capital in the very fact of having published a book. That the symbolic capital of the printed book is not at all synonymous with its economic value fuels the actual misconception, which is a failure to see that a conception of the novel as a form of self-expression is most often incommensurate with the publishing industry's conception of the novel as a commodity responding to reader demand.

Less naïve writers are already circumventing formal publishing for a number of similar reasons. As Staunton notes of self-published authors, “[n]ot only does the experience [of self-publishing] help authors to appreciate some of the processes involved, but very often they will do better in terms of sales than a publisher would, as they are able to carry the book with them to informal selling points such as bars and cafes” (51). This is much like the success story of Dudu Busani-Dube discussed above, where the author not only distributes her texts herself to bookstores, but also to reading circles in townships and other spaces that are not usually on the formal book trade's literary map. But more than this, the self-published book circumvents the gate-keeping standards of the formal book industry. This is no doubt a cause of great anxiety for publishers and educators alike, but it does not augur the end of literary quality and production *per se* in Africa. Instead, I argue that it is a symptom of the declining relevance of the book-as-commodity in vulnerable economies. What is emerging in its stead are new literary forms and infrastructures that allow young literary talent the space to test and improve their art outside of the market economy. In some cases, this is the testing ground before publishing the work formally as a book; but increasingly, these emergent infrastructures and modes of literary production are not aimed at “fame and fortune” at all. They are, rather, sites of performing literary, linguistic, and social community.

## The Internet

Dudu Busani-Dube's popular success began by her posting chapters of her first novel on Facebook. The chapters went viral and Busani-Dube realized the commodity value of her narrative. Her strategy was then to publish online – and for free – a certain percentage of the book, and then make the complete narrative available in book form. It is no surprise that she did not turn to the formal book publishing industry for a contract: the first chapters had gone viral without the intervention of an editor or publishing house and she could bring the project to completion much quicker through self-publishing (we should keep in mind that her readers were already eagerly awaiting the next installment). What is interesting from a scholarly perspective is the way in which this material production of the narrative shaped the literary form itself. The chapters of these novels follow a serialized form – with a rise in action, cliff-hanger endings, and a sense of a



completed action in each chapter. If we were to read the novel in isolation without considering the online origins of the text, which later became a marketing technique for all three books, we might miss the ways in which social media impacts the form of the novels. Moreover, if we contemplate those who first came across the first chapters of the books on Facebook, we can imagine that they read those chapters on mobile devices or computers, and that they did so at any point in the day when they might have the time. This attitude differs from the traditional attachment of leisure to reading a book, since the short format and the fact that one need not have the book object to hand, allows reading to happen in the interstices of the day, rather than as a dedicated activity.

This notion, too, might explain the success of Busani-Dube's online success. The internet potentiates different sites of reading in modern life much as the short story, published in magazines, suited early commuters in Victorian London. Jonathan Cranfield argues that environmental factors such as increased commuter travel on trains in London in the 1800s impacted both the material and literary forms of the fiction being written and consumed at the time. Thus, in most Victorian periodicals "editorial decisions were designed to produce a product whose shape, texture and content would in some way mirror the newly reordered city as well as the changed social-economic situation of the middle-class professional who could now effectively style themselves as 'commuters'" (Cranfield 223). The same motivation is of course evident in the blockbuster commuter fictions of the 2000s, such as the *Harry Potter* series. It should be no surprise, then, that texts short enough to read on mobile devices fit the forms and flows of contemporary city-life more appropriately than the book does, especially in African cities where the dominant form of transport is on informal minibuses or tuc-tuc taxis which are hardly conducive to concentrated book-reading.

If we recall the low profits for fiction in the South African publishing industry between 2013 and 2017 mentioned above, one might at first glance see this as evidence of the lack of a reading culture in that country. But, if one then looks at the FunDza Literary Trust, a South African NGO that works to improve literacy among South African youth, a different picture emerges. Unlike the LINGOs discussed by Strauhs, where the literary quality of the product remains a key feature, literacy NGOs like FunDza are more interested in capitalizing on young people's urge to self-express than with a published product. That said, what is remarkable about FunDza's work is that they link "reading for pleasure" to "writing for expression" as a two-pronged approach to teaching literacy. The results speak for themselves: at the time of writing this article, FunDza has had 8, 806 211 "mobi readers" on their system (from April 2011), by which they mean individual readers accessing text online through their site. This is not an insignificant number given the strikingly low sales figures of fictional books in the country during those same years. The key here, as I see it, is the active participation enabled by online platforms. Not only are writers reading and commenting on one

another's texts, which develops the literary quality of the work, but this reading is an activity played out in a social space. FunDza recently noted that "[e]very day the fundza.mobi platform receives more than a hundred comments on its many stories, blogs, articles, poems, online courses and Fanz writing" ("Tapping into our readers' worlds").

Another grassroots success story, enabled by an NGO online platform, is the African Story Book. This NGO, funded by Comic Relief UK, provides children's stories online for free in numerous African languages. They have their own free app reader, for ease-of-use and to easily display the illustrations accompanying the stories. But the most interesting aspect of African Story Book is its activation of the reader. African Story Book uses four keywords to sum up this reader-intervention approach: "Read. Create. Translate. Adapt" (African Story Book). The idea is that readers can be as active or passive as they wish in engaging this material. One can simply download and read the material. One can use the platform to create one's own stories and illustrations. One can translate other authors' stories into one's own language. And, finally, one can adapt a story to different levels of readership. This open access model of literary transfer is not only extremely productive – at the time of writing, African Story Book has 941 story books online in 150 languages and boasts an unbelievable number of 4301 translations – it also shows the extent to which African readers are prepared to engage in the work of writing. In a time when traditional publishers are bemoaning the impossibility of African language literary sustainability, this commitment to keeping African languages alive by engaging the work of translation is remarkable. This site alone illustrates a significant number of African readers who are themselves literary producers, who are active and prepared to invest their time and work in the creation of African literary spaces.

That said, it is worth noting that similar online production strategies have been used by mobile delivery service companies, such as 9 Mobile in Nigeria, to capitalize on the fact that emerging literary talents are likely to use mobile phones to compose, distribute and read fiction. The 9 Mobile (previously Etisalat) flash fiction award, at best, develops young literary talent, but there is a more cynical aspect to this developmental commitment too.<sup>3</sup> Here we must agree with Sarah Brouillette who points out that

it may be that the expansion of the cultural economy [...] has in part to do with the fact that *someone needs to produce the content that helps to circulate other kinds of goods*, for instance personal electronic devices, by persuading us that those devices are integral to our lives as our means of access to content we would otherwise miss out on. (*UNESCO and the World-Literary System in Crisis*; my emphasis)

What better way of selling mobile phones and contracts than getting young literary talent to produce free content for those devices?

Other grassroots infrastructures standing at more oblique angles to the consumption cycle, and without any NGO or funder support, offer yet another vision of the spaces of the sustainable literary future. One

example is Street Poetry Kenya, which, as we read on their Facebook page (their only online presence), “is an event that gives wordists a place to be heard, a place to express and a place to belong. The event happens on the 4th Sunday monthly.” The event requires no formal infrastructure or funding, since it is advertised only on Facebook and by word-of-mouth and it takes place at the same time and place every month (Uchumi Agha Khan Walk in Nairobi). The publicness of the space of these events means that, apart from a developing audience of performers and fans, the audience is mostly passers-by. This street scale means that there is no need for other infrastructural costs, such as audio equipment. Uchumi Agha Khan Walk also has a low wall running along its pavement that functions as seating for the audience. Other audience members stand or sit on the floor. The simplicity of the organization of this event, involving no overhead costs and free performances for an itinerant audience, is precisely what makes this grassroots form sustainable, I argue. Furthermore, the circulation of filmed performances on YouTube takes the significance of these literary performances beyond the street.<sup>4</sup> While there are numerous such events or informal organizations in African cities, the problem of course is that they are usually driven by individuals who cannot always sustain the time and effort it takes to keep them running. As such they emerge and disappear quickly. Yet, what is common is that such events are part of a broader network of similar literary events in the city, so the disappearance of a single event does not necessarily destabilize the literary network as such. Street Poetry Kenya, for example, works with more formal, partly funded initiatives such as “Poetry Spot Kenya.” With overhead-free initiatives, with free and open access to audiences, emerging in various parts of the city, the street becomes a sustained site on which youths sharpen their literary skills.

## The Literary Future

An obvious point that requires mention is that Africa’s street literatures have been provided an alternative to the publishing industry for a long time. Ruth Bush and Claire Ducournau’s *Awa Magazine* online is just one such initiative to ensure the longevity of what was, at first, a somewhat ephemeral form: a popular women’s magazine, which was produced in Senegal from 1964 to 1973. But what of the archive of the emerging literature in the African city in the present? If scholarship is to enable the longevity and sustainability of these initiatives, I would argue that it must approach the present by developing new methodological paradigms for the analysis of such African street literature. The first methodological shift requires us to move away from the book as the primary site of the literary. Many scholars of popular culture (Stephanie Newell, Onookome Okome, Karin Barber, amongst others) have been doing this since the cultural studies’ turn. But, as I and Nicklas Hållén have argued elsewhere, the approach of these scholars has remained largely directed to popular cultural studies,

rather than to formal analysis on these works as literary texts (Harris and Hållén). Indeed, literary scholarship, despite its nods to the ground-breaking work of scholars like Karen Barber, continues to privilege the book-commodity as its primary source of analysis. Furthermore, as Haines points out, not only is it the book-as-commodity that is favored in contemporary African literary studies, but more than that the book published outside of Africa. Illustrating this point, Haines notes that not one academic article in a “list of over 230 published essays [compiled by Daria Tunca in 2016] about the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ... focused on Adichie’s relationship with her Nigerian publisher” (42).

There is an obvious reason for this: ease of access. We all know the difficulties of putting texts on a curriculum that we cannot then get hold of for our students because of the resource problems experienced by African publishers. So, short of relying on the print-on-demand strategy of the African Book Collective, in collaboration with a wide range of African Publishers, what are literary scholars to do? I would argue that, like Bush and Ducournau, we should put our efforts into creating new archives, or curating existing online material, to increase ease of access for students and scholars of African literature. Initiatives like Kwame Dawes’ Digital Portal and Badilisha Poetry X-change are exemplary in this regard. The ‘African Street Literatures and the Future of Literary Form’ project based at Uppsala University, Sweden, is similarly working on new ways of compiling curricula of the African Street in collaboration with the Nordic Africa Institute’s librarians.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, scholars need to turn to the work of blogs like “Brittle Paper,” “Africa in Words” and multiple others that are already doing the work of mapping the field as it emerges. Interestingly, these blogs are often created and organized by academics, suggesting that these scholars experience a disconnect between traditional channels of publishing and this body of emerging work, which seems to fit the genre of critical blog more naturally. While these blogs often take up multi-modal literature or work other than the novel, there remains a problem in being able to map what is already out there on the internet and it is this mapping that, I argue, could provide the basis of a sustainable view of African literature from the perspective of the academy.

In conclusion, and to return to the anecdote that began this discussion, I ask myself: why would a writer consider publishing a book in the current economic climate of the African city? Over and above the misconceptions mentioned by Staunton about finding fame and fortune, a serious literary producer has little to gain in trying to get their work published and distributed through the formal African publishing industry. A better investment of their time would be polishing up a short story for entry into a major, established and prestigious prize like the Caine Prize for African Writing and then gambling on the possibility of breaking into the international book market. But this market is so removed from the African street, that literary practitioners are expressing their frustration with the

compulsory form of the book in that global literary network. Publishing in print means inevitable piracy, which leaves one wondering why one would go through the hoops of the publishing industry only to see one's book photocopied and sold without gain to the author on a street pavement. It seems to me that young literary producers are more aware of this situation than the literary establishment gives them credit for. What is emerging in the spaces left by the irrelevance of the formal publishing industry in Africa, then, is not, I argue, a vacuum, but rather new literary geographies encoding new infrastructures and social protocol of literary production. While the book will certainly continue to have a role in these emergent literary spaces, its role will be fundamentally altered, and its dominance certainly disrupted.

## Notes

1. The Bond Dollar was the country's response to the lack of US dollars in circulation after the crash of the Zimbabwean currency in 2009; Bond Dollars were intended to be pegged at an inflation rate fixed to the U.S. dollar.
2. I am grateful to Scott Morton at Nielsen Book Scan for compiling and sending me this data.
3. Nicklas Hållén has recently discussed the 9 Mobile Flash Fiction award and its impact on literary form in a forthcoming article 'Okadabooks and the Poetics of Uplift' in *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2018.
4. See for example, the poet Chira's "H\_art the band," which at the time of writing this article had received 121 682 views on YouTube. A more modest, though nevertheless significant example from Street Poetry Kenya is the poet Mamboleo's performance, which has reached 4785 views. These numbers clearly expand the street audience considerably.
5. For more information about this project, see "African street literature enters the library," The Nordic Africa Institute, 29 November 2017, [nai.uu.se/news/articles/2017/11/29/112629/](http://nai.uu.se/news/articles/2017/11/29/112629/).

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