African Street Literature: A Method for an Emergent Form Beyond World Literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with the assertion that world literature is in danger of becoming a closed system, whereby literature anticipates its critical reception in both its form and content. Emergent African literary forms are often excluded from the field of world literature precisely because they demand methods of reading that challenge this anticipatory logic. We refer to this emergent literature circulating in African urban spaces as “African street literature.” This paper focuses on three such street forms: ephemeral print literature, flash fiction, and spoken word poetry. In all three cases, the literary form registers its situated-ness, and as such its location is co-constructive of the field of the literary text. The methodological intervention that the paper makes explores ways of reading context, material, form, and content as combined and codetermining without losing attention to the literariness of the text under examination.

The study of world literature at universities in Europe and North America has typically focused on texts that are readily available to the scholar. As such, the field has become determined primarily by the infrastructures of the literary establishment: that is to say, by the publication, distribution, marketing, and availability of, for the most part, books. There are a number of different stakeholders involved in this infrastructure; from the obvious ones, such as publishers, booksellers, and libraries, to various legitimating systems, such as literary prizes,
university curricula, and other mechanisms that ensure the visibility of certain texts on the global literary scene.

As many critics of world literature have noted, the problem is that world literature is complicit in maintaining the status quo of the very infrastructures its circulation and reception rely on (Apter; Brouillette, “World Literature and Market Dynamics”; Casanova; WReC, “Combined and Uneven Development”). As Pieter Vermeulen writes, “world literature is [not only] entirely compatible with the material inequalities forged and perpetrated by the market—[but] worse, by promoting world literary culture as an imaginary dispenser of equality, it is said to help entrench actual global unevenness” (79). When it comes to debates about African literature within the world literary system, critics like Eileen Julien and Akin Adesokan have noted how African world literatures produce “Africanity” as “an ornamental detail” (Julien 672); or utilize, as Amatoritsero Ede puts it, “a self-anthropologizing rhetorical style” (“Narrative Moment” 112) in an appeal to a non-African audience. Indeed, the situation all these scholars diagnose is that of the literary marketplace in an era of uneven and unequal global capital.1

What concerns us here is a methodological question: how can world literature as a field and as a canon establish critical distance from the very infrastructures it relies on? And how might we concretely establish a method for reading African literature without taking the infrastructures via which we receive texts for granted and without imposing what Julien calls an “ornamentalist interpretation” (678) on them. The methodological challenges include both the problem of selection and access, then, as well as the question of how we interpret literature that has not been run through the legitimating systems we so routinely rely on.

When it comes to the question of selection and access, Sarah Brouillette suggests in “World Literature and Market Dynamics” that we “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 upon the writing that exists” (99). We can only hope to match Brouillette’s fine-tuned attention to the material conditions “impinging upon” the writing of African fiction, for this is no simple task. Indeed, it speaks to a much more complex and sustained methodological tension between the field of literary studies and those of literary ethnography and cultural anthropology. We needn’t rehearse those debates here, other than to point to the fact that despite scholars’ attempts to find a methodological middle-ground between these two fields (see most notably Karin Barber’s Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics), neither side seems to be able, ultimately, to side-step their own disciplinary priorities. Barber’s analysis, for example, retains an anthropological understanding of literary form as a reflection of social form, an assumption that results in her paying little attention to the formal literary qualities of the texts she analyzes. We wager that this approach does not posit literature qua literature and, as such, the literary value of the text is always in danger of being subsumed under the social one.

In his methodological treatise Calibrations: Reading for the Social, Ato Quayson substantially addresses the relationship between literature and what he calls sociality, arguing—as the title of his book reveals—for close reading as reading for the social. Quayson’s argument is particularly pertinent to our work since he is also primarily interested in literature. For Quayson, “to read for the social
rather than *through it*” (*Calibrations* xv) is a method that requires us to consider the social as produced by—and in a constant state of coproduction with—the literary. While we agree with this supposition, our own methodological intervention both differs from and builds on Quayson’s. Quayson ultimately directs a literary methodology toward a reading and interpretation of the social, an idea that he realizes more fully in his more recent work, *Oxford Street: Accra*, where he close reads the street as a microcosm of both the city and the global forces that intersect it. His reading of a single street in Accra extends to the scales of the entire city and, beyond that, to the combined and uneven world-system that patterns life in that city. This thinking is foundational to our own approach, but we wish to turn the focus of this methodology and theory back toward the literary. That is to say, where Quayson reads for the social, we wish to recognize the unique and particular work that literature does in ways that distinguish it from other forms of sociality.

That said, there are methodological traps from literary scholarship that we are also keenly aware of. In this field, scholars such as Wai Chee Dimock have attempted to forge a new literary methodology for world literature based on the formal element of genre, but end up with an analysis so detached from social space that her one example of what she refers to as an “African novel” is written by J. M. Coetzee (97). Coetzee, as two-time winner of the International Man Booker Prize and winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, enjoys every privilege of the world literary system and the circulation of his texts globally can in no way be understood as representative of African literature’s place in the global literary establishment. We are prompted to ask ourselves how Dimock’s theories might have differed had she selected a different form of African literature, not one so perfectly produced and legitimized through the world literary system.

Beyond this matter of selection, though, is that of interpretation, as was addressed by David Damrosch and Franco Moretti’s early interventions into the field of world literature. Responding to the titular question of his book *What Is World Literature?* Damrosch concluded that it is a “mode of reading” (86), while in “Conjectures on World Literature” Moretti insisted that “world literature is not an object, it’s a problem, and a problem that asks for a new critical method” (55). More recently, the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) has also reiterated the significance of this methodological shift (“WReC’s Reply” 537). Yet despite these theoretical calls for new critical methods, these ideas have not been calibrated to a reading of literature produced and circulating in Africa. This may in part be due to the problem of interpretation across contexts, languages, cultures, and temporalities and their attendant ethical and political concerns. As Ato Quayson puts it: “how is a representation to be recognized when the reader or spectator cannot necessarily be assumed to share all the assumptions of the poet, or, indeed, to readily recognize what she is doing when the poetic task is precisely to disrupt dominant modes of perception? In other words, how do we psychologically grasp the representation as relevant to anything else lying beyond it?” (*Calibrations* xxiv). Quayson is attempting here to revise literary studies’ reliance on close reading as the methodological staple with which it addresses this caesura between literary text and reader. Close reading includes other problematic methodological consequences, too. As Moretti warns,
The trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon. This may have become an unconscious and invisible premise by now, but it is an iron one nonetheless: you invest so much in individual texts only if you think that very few of them really matter. (“Conjectures on World Literature” 57)

This issue is exacerbated when it comes to Africa because of the tendency in the Euro-American academy, as John and Jean Comaroff point out, to treat African thought and knowledge “less as sources of refined knowledge than as reservoirs of raw fact: of the minutiae from which Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths. Just as it has long capitalized on non-Western ‘raw materials’ by ostensibly adding value and refinement to them” (114). This extractionist metaphor works well for our purposes, since the problem we seek to describe is precisely one in which African literature is seen as so much raw material for the refinement processes of literary scholarship of the Global North. Close reading as a refinement is certainly not the model for reading African literature as world literature that we are after here.

This point also relates to an observation made by Sarah Brouillette, who argues that some novels gain canonical value precisely because of their “cultural representativeness,” that is, their perceived ability to “express a particular community” (Literature and the Creative Economy 119). The problem that literary scholars face is how to close read African literature without tightening this circle of compulsory representativeness. If we read for representativeness, we impose a value system on African literature that reiterates the problem of Africanity being primarily “ornamental” in these texts (Julien 672).

Instead of reading this literature as representative, then, we are interested in a process of interpretation that focuses on what Franco Moretti calls “forms as abstracts of social relationships” (Distant Reading 57). This focus on form is a crucial starting point to our methodological intervention here: if literary form is seen as what Harris, following Eyal Weizman’s methodological contribution to the field of architecture, has elsewhere called “political plastic” (Harris, “Awkward Form,” “Plastic Form”), then we start to move away from the problem of representativeness that Brouillette describes above. That is to say, we are interested in the ways in which literary form registers, rather than reflects, social relationships. Eileen Julien and WReC also use the term “register” rather than “representation,” though neither discuss the methodological implications of this preference in much depth (Julian 696; WReC, “WReC’s Reply” 544). Here, we wish to highlight this tendency to read literary form as an imprint and register of social reality and to consider in more depth how it requires us to calibrate a critique of the materiality of literature to its content and vice versa. The content of a literary text cannot be read as detached from the material or aesthetic forms that convey that content. This means that we are not only interested in aesthetic form, such as genre, but the ways in which such forms are themselves imprints of social, political, and economic forces. Our proposed method emphasizes two stages: first, one of selection that is attentive to the unequal and uneven infrastructures of the world literary system and, second, one of close reading that, even as it attends to the literary as its primary object of study, is well aware of the literary text as a political and social register of the contexts out of which it emerges.
Our understanding of form draws on Raymond Williams’s famous delineation of residual, dominant, and emergent forms (Marxism and Literature). We focus here on emergent form and argue that if we are to successfully address the methodological challenge of reading African literature as world literature today, we need an approach that will include and be able to close read emergent literary forms. The key paradox here is that emergent forms surface precisely in those contexts where dominant and residual forms are inadequate registers of everyday life: that is to say, they emerge where alternative modes of literary expression are necessary or where dominant forms are awkwardly out of synch with sociality. Yet, these same emergent forms are unlikely to enter the legitimating circuits of world literature precisely because we do not yet have the mechanisms to interpret them. This means that the infrastructures of world literature are largely closed to texts that successfully register the pressures and shifts in the rapidly changing world around them. Ato Quayson makes a similar observation, arguing that “both residual and emergent are not visible as discrete entities but only as processes within a social structure that is always struggling to mask its dominant forms as natural” (Calibrations xxxiv). Given the speed with which transformation occurs in precarious, often urban, conditions of living—conditions that are pervasive across the African continent—it seems to us that the field of African literary studies needs, quite urgently, to attend to the processes by which emergent forms come into existence to meet the demands of rapid social transformation. If emergent forms more effectively register what Williams calls “new meanings and values, new relationships and kinds of relationships” (123), then it is our task as interpreters of this form to find a methodology that can adequately describe and analyze the processes of that emergence. Consequently, the field also needs to develop a critical repertoire to make visible such emergent strategies, even as they struggle under the effacing mechanisms of dominant infrastructures and forms.

In the case of literary studies today, the novel is the dominant form: its status as a commodity means that its form has become particularly calcified in the literary infrastructures we refer to above. The celebrated plasticity of the novel’s form, still lauded in some quarters, has arguably become, via the processes of commodity capitalism, petrified in Georg Lukács’s terminology. Lukács considered the process through which forms become dominant as an ossifying mechanism and argued that a literary work in which an established form is mastered “places itself outside all communities and will not tolerate being inserted into some series of causes determining it from without” (Lukács 90, qtd. in Moretti, Signs Taken for Wonders 11). Lukács, like Moretti after him, argued that the creation of a work in which an established form is mastered “places itself outside all communities and will not tolerate being inserted into some series of causes determining it from without” (Lukács 90, qtd. in Moretti Signs Taken for Wonders 11). In this line of thinking, those texts then that are formally emergent are better imprints of everyday life than those that labor under the dictates of an established genre.

More recently Catherine Malabou theorizes the idea of plastic form, which we wish to add to the idea of emergence. She writes, “plasticity concerns form, a mutability of and in form rather than a limit of form or an alternative to form” (97). As such, “far from producing a mirror image of the world, [plasticity] is the form of another possible world” (Malabou 80). What plasticity brings to the idea of emergent form, then—in addition to providing us with a conceptual link back
to Eyal Weizman’s idea of political plastic—is to resist the assumption that the literary operates as representative or, indeed, even as representation. It also provides us with a theoretical language for our premise that form’s contingency on social relations is also the very substance of its emergence. If we read literary form in much the same way as Weizman close reads the decay and destruction of buildings (i.e., as a register of the sometimes slow and incremental, sometimes violent and devastating, social and political forces surrounding them), we start to see literature as plastic form, as an imprint of social, economic, and political forces. This means that we resist autochthonous and representative readings of African literature, since we need not calibrate our interpretation of a text according to the ethnicity or nationality of an author to justify our frame of calling writing African. Instead, literature is African because it emerges in the material and social conditions that are located on that continent and it speaks to social forms that it is both constructed by and co-constructs.

Reading literary form as political plastic allows for two important interventions in the field. First, an awareness of the forces underlying form leads us to a critique of established literary infrastructures. Secondly, this awareness requires that we calibrate close reading, as an analytical tool, to those forces. Thus, where Moretti worries about the “invisible premise” behind close reading being its dependence on “an extremely small canon” (57), we wager that if one does not ask close reading to deliver representativeness, then Moretti’s “iron” premise is loosened. In what follows we offer three examples—one from South Africa, one from Nigeria, and one from Kenya—through which we hope to illustrate how a close reading of emergent form as political plastic might operate.

EPHEMERAL PRINT LITERATURE: MATERIALITY AS A TRACE OF SITUATED-NESS

Reminiscent of the zine format popular in the early 1990s before the digitization of ephemeral print forms, Khazimla’s Adventures is an A5 folded pamphlet comic, printed in black-and-white on low-cost, recycled paper. It is printed and distributed by a small collective called Ordinary Superheroes, the name also given to the intended series of comics of which Khazimla’s Adventures is the first edition. The collective is composed of Cape Town–based writers and artists Ziphozakhe Hlobo, Lena Posch, Xolisa Tamarana, Nicole Leonards, and Pacifique King. The comic aims to bring to light everyday acts of heroism in Khayelitsha, a township on the outskirts of Cape Town, by presenting them in the mode of the superhero comic. Yet, unlike the high-gloss aesthetic that we see in the standard-defining Marvel Comics—epitomized in the recent blockbuster film Black Panther—the hand-made, low-tech, and ephemeral format of this self-produced zine reflects the “ordinariness” of the series’ title (see Figure 1).

In Khazimla’s Adventures the images are not only hand-drawn, but even the traces of the original pencil sketches remain visible under the ink strokes on the page, which gives the comic a sense of immediacy and embodiment. Furthermore, even the panel lines are hand-ruled, which results in crooked and approximate edges (see, for example, the bend in the left panel edge of the right-hand panel in Figure 1) as well as messy and jagged gutter spaces (as is particularly clear in
Further to this, the material object of the comic also shows other traces of its making. For example, the basic technologies used to reproduce this comic are blatantly revealed in the original sketch-block’s punch-holes coming through in the reproduction (see Figure 2).

In Figure 3 we also see the ghostly echoes of two figures superimposed on the head of the protagonist. It is not clear whether these are also an erased pencil sketch, or whether they are images that have come through the paper in the photocopying process: either way, they are palimpsest of the comic’s own make-do and low-tech materiality.

The protagonists of Khazimla’s Adventures live in a township that is represented as an embodied and populated space (see Figure 3). Indeed, Khayelitsha is more than the setting of this comic; it is also crucial to the conception, ambition, and circulation of the ordinary superheroes comics as we see in the collective’s own description of the series:

The project Ordinary Superheroes aim[s] … to rethink the perception of heroism by introducing superheroes who are inspired by ordinary people who uplift their communities on a daily basis. We are merging real stories with African storytelling tools and superhero narratives. So, what better way to do this than foreground positive stories that have always lived in the township, but were not told? (“Ordinary Superheroes”)
Figure 2: Khazimla’s Adventures, detail of punch-holes in sketch-block.
Figure 3: Khazimla’s Adventures, detail of township.
in a form that matches the interests of the young people living in Khayelitsha. Furthermore, the comic is cheaply produced, making it affordable to young readers, and the team aims to distribute the comic to schools and libraries nationwide to ensure free access to young readers (“Comic Book Superheroes Get African Makeover”). *Khazimla’s Adventures* is largely bilingual, with most of the key dialogues and expressions written in both isiXhosa and English. This allows both English and Xhosa readers to follow the action without having to understand the other language, which is indicative of how the content and form of the comic registers its situated creation and consumption in a particular social, economic, and lived space.

Khayelitsha also emerges in the content of this first edition in the series, which as the team writes, “is inspired by Khayelitsha’s charismatic Monde Sitole, an adventurer, educational strategist and futurist” (“Ordinary Superheroes”). Sitole is a renowned community builder and educator operating mainly in Khayelitsha. Coming to fame through his mountain climbing successes, Sitole has developed the Monde Sitole Foundation, which includes educational, inspirational, and leadership initiatives in the township. Sitole’s mountaineering is thematized in the comic as the protagonist Khazimla’s reconnection to his community and his ancestry through a contemporary version of the “going to the mountain” coming-of-age ritual practiced in Xhosa culture. Far from the ideal of the superhero, Khazimla is caught up in gang violence and drugs and has all but dropped out of school at the start of the comic. The narrative broadly follows a bildungsroman plot, in which Khazimla comes to raise himself up from the moral and economic turpitude he is surrounded by through discovering a spiritual connection with his ancestors and his culture. Yet, the outcome of this awareness is left for readers who know of the real Monde Sitole and his story of success to fill in. The comic itself simply ends with Khazimla climbing the mountain that represents his spiritual awakening and then reaching out toward the reader and the future in the final frame of the comic. Beyond this inner journey, though, Khazimla’s actions are not heroic at all, the heroism is left to the real-life figure that the story pays tribute to. As such, the comic is very much a product of its place and the visual form here is a communication to a specifically located reader; one who recognizes the social life of Khayelitsha represented in the comic.

Legibility and legitimacy become entwined concepts here and we might argue that the Ordinary Superheroes team is more interested in finding its legitimating mechanisms from within the community it engages than from the world outside. The make-shift, improvisational, awkward, and not always clear aesthetic and materiality of *Khazimla’s Adventures* is in communion with township everyday life. However, we should also note the speed with which such street aesthetics get appropriated by the literary establishment in ways that calcify the formal innovations of emergent form. For example, *Khazimla’s Adventures* already appears in its entirety in a special online edition of *The Manchester Review*, which focuses on the rise of African speculative fiction (Issue 18, 2017). This transposition from the materiality of the pamphlet to that of the internet marks a shift in the fields of meaning that accrue to the text. That is to say, as part of a collection published by the University of Manchester’s Centre for New Writing (and even its appearance in a methodological argument about African literature like the one we are presenting here), a text like *Khazimla’s Adventures* becomes assimilated into the
legitimating mechanisms of the global literary and literary academic establishment. And there is nothing preventing its aesthetic then being appropriated into those legitimating mechanisms. Indeed, the very idea of ephemeral materiality has become instrumentalized as a kind of hip-urban African aesthetic, produced simulacraly by publishing concerns in the Global North. One good example of this is the African chapbook box sets (the New Generation African Poets series) published jointly by Slapering Hol Press (New York), the African Poetry Book Fund (Lincoln, Nebraska), and the Poetry Foundation (Chicago). While these texts are marketed as chapbooks, an ephemeral form that is popular for self-publishing and is common in African emergent print, they are actually produced by a professional publishing house. The texts are paginated, have ISBN numbers, are copyrighted, are professionally printed on high-quality paper with color covers, and are edited by established African writers (both of whom reside in the US and are based at US universities): Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani.

A different example of the saleability of an ephemeral aesthetic might be seen in various Africa-based publishing concerns, such as Kwani? (Kenya) and Chimurenga (South Africa). Both these concerns require more discussion than what we have space for here, but suffice it to say that their opposition to global publishing companies has not allowed them to sidestep global literary legitimating mechanisms entirely. Both largely rely on donor funding to keep their operations running, and both sell at costs well beyond the means of the average person on the street in both South Africa and Kenya. This is not to say that all texts complicit in the global market economy lose their sensitivity to the street, but is rather an observation as to how even overt attempts to offer alternatives to the corporate publishing industry are folded into market logics in ways that warrant analysis.

What we are after here is an account of how form and the material and social conditions it emerges in are mutually reinforcing. All the elements that make a comic like Khazimla’s Adventures accessible and appealing to its intended audience—such as, affordability, language, and genre—are registered in the form and content of the text, which is to say, the form is a clear register of the comic’s situated-ness.

FLASH FICTION: COMBINED FORM AND CONTENT

Compared to the global infrastructures that turn literary writing into marketable commodities, emergent forms have an ambivalent and often unpredictable relationship to the commodity and consumption cycle. It would be a mistake to assume that new forms of African literature always actively resist commodification by refusing to yield to the forces of a literary market whose center is elsewhere. Though this is certainly true in some cases, we understand emergence as an ambivalent process, one that cannot be delimited to a relationship of resistance to the market economy or to the global literary industry. Indeed, as will be shown in the discussion that follows, emergent literature often occurs as a response to new technological innovations and the new markets that technology co-creates and participates in. As such, the emergent can also operate as a stepping-stone toward the dominant, and writers often use emergent platforms as a way to establish their names in the hopes of becoming published by an established, corporate publisher.
In contemporary African writing, one can trace the emergence of form in relation to large structural and infrastructural changes in urban and semi-urban environments. One of the most significant of these in the 2000s has been the rapid boom in mobile technology across the continent. At the end of 2019, almost half of Africa’s population subscribed to mobile services, and approximately a quarter of all connections were mobile broadband connections (GSMA 3). The migration to mobile broadband connections will likely continue in the coming years: it is estimated that the number of mobile broadband connections will double by the end of 2025 and reach 678 million (GSMA 3).

One way in which literary writing has responded to the expansion of mobile networks in Africa is the growing popularity of forms such as microfiction and flash fiction, which can be both read and written on smartphones and other handheld devices. Recent years have seen an escalation of online literary forums, blogs, and sites that publish short fiction and poetry, such as Flash Fiction Ghana, Words Are Work, Brittle Paper, Pulse, and Naijastories. In the wake of the rising popularity of short-form fiction, a number of awards and competitions have also emerged, including The Naked Convos’s “The Writer” and the “African Writing Prize for Flash Fiction.” These prizes are establishing the mechanisms and infrastructures for legitimating this writing as literature. In this sense, this writing is very much in a process of becoming an established form.

It is perhaps unsurprising that there has been a keen interest in this development from the mobile and broadband service sectors, who have invested in literary prizes and incorporated these prizes into their branding. Indeed, one of the most prestigious prizes for African short fiction is the 9mobile Flash Fiction Award (previously the Etisalat Flash Fiction Award, which in 2017 changed its name after Etisalat Nigeria went through a rebranding process). The multinational mobile service provider announced the award in 2013 as a prize aimed at previously unpublished African writers. In their 2015 compilation of longlisted contributions Etisalat Nigeria introduced the Flash Fiction award thus:

> in today’s fast paced world where communication is right at our fingertips through the use of smart devices; phones, tablets and the likes, consumers prefer to consume information on-the-go and in bite sized chunks. The Flash Fiction Award therefore seeks to marry both of these concepts together thus providing added value to mobile device users across Africa. (“Etisalat 2015 Flash Fiction Compilation”)

A longlist of contributions is published on the prize’s homepage, where the public can read and vote for their favorite texts. Normally, a winner is selected by a board of judges, composed of four established novelists and short story writers. The winner receives a £1,000 cash prize and what the site describes as a “high-end” digital device. Apart from these prizes, writers who enter the competition are offered exposure through online publication. 9Mobile/Etisalat collaborates with Okadabooks, a Nigerian online publisher of over 13,000 works of digital literature mostly written by non-established writers. Okadabooks publish the longlisted works as a digital book accessible through their web and mobile app. This collaboration provides a new and emergent infrastructure for budding writers, even though the content is clearly secondary to the marketing of mobile services.
Indeed, 9Mobile/Etisalat’s claim that the literature circulated through their prize provides added value to mobile device users is a perfect example of what Sarah Brouillette observes as the instrumentalization of literature in which “capital has attempted to secure the accumulation of surplus” by “[t]urning to culture as a potentially endless ‘inmaterial’ resource” (“UNESCO” 13).

Formally speaking, it is interesting that the content of the flash fiction published here is so closely determined by the restraints of the micro-form. These formal limits are also visible in the content of the stories. After surveying the longlisted entries for the 2016 prize, we ascertained the prevalence of violence and death as themes that recur throughout the stories (“Top Stories”). The following analysis will look at three such stories: Salvation Otubo Oghenevouwero’s “Bar Mitzvah,” Izundu Santos Amanze’s “Kohl Park,” and Ohaegbulam Fortune’s “Numbered Sausages for Lunch,” each of which narrate an explosion. Importantly, in these stories, the limits of the flash fiction form and the content are not coincidental. Instead, these texts use violence precisely because it functions as an economical metonymy, allowing writers to negotiate the constraints of the microform efficiently. That is to say, violence is used to evoke larger themes whose topicality cuts across ethnic, social, and to some extent national barriers, such as terrorism, domestic abuse, police corruption, and ethnic conflict. It offers a way to address a diverse group of readers that is not dependent on the establishment of a sense of sameness between reader and character, as we saw in Khazimla’s Adventures, or other narrative strategies that require more textual space and a more fine-tuned literary style. It is therefore impossible to disentangle content and form in these texts and any method of interpretation of them needs to account for that entanglement, as the three examples that follow aim to illustrate.

William Nelles points out that the actions narrated in very short fiction “are likely to be more palpable and extreme” than the “adjustments in attitude or alterations in perception by characters” that characterize the traditional short story (91). He adds that very short narratives tend to center on radical events and big actions, “because stories in which ‘nothing’ happens depend so strongly upon our intimate knowledge of, and emotional investment in, that particular character to whom that particular nothing happens” (Nelles 91–92). As such, because “the development of psychologically nuanced three-dimensional characters with individual histories simply requires too many words,” characters “[flatten] out and [recede] as circumstance becomes dominant” (Nelles 92). Furthermore, Nelles argues that “simply as a matter of word count, the ending almost necessarily makes up a larger proportion of a microstory than of a longer story, and accordingly can—perhaps must—carry more interpretative weight” (96). These formal constraints explain the fact that many of the texts in the 2016 Flash Fiction Prize collection narrate a violent, sudden, critical event that separates a static prior time with a dynamic or even chaotic time afterward. These events tend to occur on a grand scale, with consequences far beyond the lives of the protagonists. Violence, in other words, is underscored by the formal constraints of the text. Yet, violence is not represented in these texts so much as gestured to as the assumed common ground between the text and reader.

Oghenevouwero’s “Bar Mitzvah” evokes, but does not comment on, the problem of religious violence in Nigeria. The eruption of violence happens in the street outside as the narrative focuses on a grandmother who goes into a house...
for a brief moment after talking to her grandchild outside. The grandchild has innocently lied about getting full-marks on a test in order to get his grandmother to buy him a toy airplane. Despite having seen through the lie, the grandmother goes to fetch the money while the child waits outside. While she is inside the house, she hears a noise that she thinks comes from the children playing outside and in the same moment is thrown to the floor by what turns out to be an explosion. When she goes back outside she finds “the shreds of the six-year-old” among other dead and mutilated bodies. The woman and the narrator do not see the bomb go off or the children die, but the transformation is so extreme that it does not require description: at the end of the story, no one except the old woman remains alive. It ends with the phrase, “We fight for God,” which has presumably been spray painted on a wall by religious extremists, possibly even those responsible for the attack. This fleeting reference to the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria is, because of the brevity of the form, not developed, and as such, the words become ironic in their juxtaposition with the events related in the microstory. The story itself offers little insight into the precise nature of the violence experienced, its consequences, or the reasons underlying it. Instead, what is upheld by this epigrammatic form is the incomprehensibility of such terrorist violence, and the disorientation it creates is redoubled by the overdetermined final phrase of the story.

In Ohaegbulam Fortune’s “Numbered Sausages for Lunch,” violence is also constitutive of the story but is even less tangible here than it is in “Bar Mitzvah.” The title of the story is confusing and anticipates an explanation, and this is intended to prompt the reader’s interest. The text is composed of three paragraphs separated by ellipses, which again emphasizes a sense of fragmentation and disorientation. The narrator is a young girl living in a refugee camp. In the first paragraph, the girl is playing with a group of friends. The children are called to lunch and the passage ends with them running off to the place where food is dished out. In the second section of the story, the protagonist stands in a line waiting to be served. She is jostled by another child and drops her plate. When she bends down to pick it up she sees “a pack of sausages wrapped in nylon” on the ground. She notices that there are numbers on the package and that her friend looks at her in horror. In the third section, the narrator sees bodies scattered on the ground. Before passing out (or dying), the narrator spots her friend’s head on the ground and realizes that she cannot feel her own legs. The pandemonium in the last few lines reveals that the mysterious sausages were in fact sticks of dynamite connected to a timer. Like Oghenevouwero, Fortune presents the reality of terrorist violence as incomprehensible, which is supported by the defamiliarizing focalization of the events through a child’s perspective. The actual violence in this story occurs in the ellipses—silently and invisibly. The three distinct passages also emulate the form of an ellipses itself, being three unconnected points articulating a silence.

Izundu Santos Amanze’s “Kohl Park” is also about a terror attack, and here the violence is similarly rendered as eerily silent. While the moment of violence in both Oghenevouwero’s and Fortune’s stories creates a sharp division between the everyday events before and the chaos after an explosion, Amanze uses the brevity of the flash fiction form to isolate a short space of time between two explosions. The time of the events correspond in length to the amount of time “required to
process the discourse in which those events are presented,” which Nelles identifies as a common feature in short narratives (93). In “Kohl Park,” the peaceful moment before these bombs explode as well as the aftermath of the attack exist outside the temporal frame of the story. The first sentence describes how the dust clears after a first explosion, introducing us to a group of people who had “all been lounging around the park, business as usual, when the car exploded.” The group sees an almost unscathed baby sitting in the rubble. A woman, Ekwutosi, runs over and picks the child up, despite having heard “repeated warnings on television about [the likelihood of] a second bomb” in such attacks. Following her “human instinct,” Ekwutosi grabs the child and starts to run to safety but is caught in a second explosion. We know that Ekwutosi succumbs to the second bomb because, we are told, “[s]he felt it before she heard it, a hot searing pain that scorched her back.” Yet, the action of self-sacrifice allows her to push the baby toward safety a moment before smoke envelops her. The reader is not offered any further information about what happens after this moment, and the broader ideological or moral significance of Ekwutosi’s act are not explored.

As has been stated above, Oghenevouwero’s, Fortune’s, and Amanze’s focus on violence cannot be seen merely as an opportunistic choice of content, but must also be understood as a solution to the problems caused by the form of microfiction. We might add that it is not a surprise that such violence takes the form of an explosion, an intense violent event occurring at an intensely fast speed, much like the temporality of microfiction itself. Furthermore, literary form is shaped by the technologies with which these texts are written and circulated. In these flash fictions, social reality (here, the threat of terrorism) is inscribed on both form and content in ways that fuse those terms together. That is to say, that the microform has a predilection for violence (and, we should add, romance narratives) tells us something about the materiality behind these representations, a materiality that goes well beyond any simple representativeness, or even representation. The threat of violence in these stories is used as an economical metonymy that gestures toward larger realities, but does not seek—or we should add need—to describe them. That is, if these texts say little about the nature of a specific kind of violence, it is because they speak to a specific community of readers who they assume commonality with. The intended reader here is certainly a networked reader—that is, someone with access to mobile technology and the internet. In some ways, this should imply that the reader is global, but the content of these stories implies a more locally shared context. This is the case not only in the flash-fictions dealing with terroristic violence, but also in those that deal with romantic themes or with specific kinds of street humor (in the form of in-jokes that are not always easy for an outsider to understand).

These flash fictions are not only made possible and formally defined by the mobile networks that they are created and consumed on; their elliptical content—whether violent, humorous, or romantic—also presupposes a situated reader who does not need further explanation to understand the text. As such, the form itself reinforces the idea of a networked reader: networked not only by mobile technologies and shared experiences, but by an emergent form that speaks to and from the level of the street. In other words, these flash fictions do not simply or only represent a social reality; rather, their materiality, form, and content all emerge out of that sociality.
STREET POETRY: THE STREET AS CO-CONSTRUCTIVE OF THE TEXT

The form least complicit in, or reliant on, the formal literary establishment is surely spoken word poetry. This is partly because it enjoys an infrastructure today on the African subcontinent that, while often also supported by NGOs and international cultural organizations, is largely run by poets themselves, with little to no running costs and for no profit or earnings. In its street forms spoken word poetry is also a genre that cannot be easily exploited by capital for the sale of consumer items (although YouTube is changing this too). That literary spaces thrive without the incentive of earning money is testament to the continued social relevance of the literary. Yet, it is these informal, often spontaneous, versions of street poetry that are perhaps the hardest for scholars to analyze. For one, if we are not on the street when the poem is performed and there is no video footage of it, we quite simply miss the opportunity. The poems are are also often articulated to an immediate linguistic and social context, which challenges the interpretative possibilities from outside the community of reception.

Mamboleo Kimitta, known simply as Mamboleo, is a spoken word poet based in Nairobi, who works primarily in Kiswahili. We take as our third example an amateur filming, posted on YouTube (“Mamboleo”), of the poet performing an untitled poem on a street in Nairobi. The poem is filmed by a member of the audience and the filming begins in medias res. As such, it takes a few lines before we can make out the topic of the poem. This performance is part of Street Poetry Kenya, a small collective of poets who run street events on no formal infrastructure or funding: the events are marketed by word-of-mouth or social media, the venue is a public space (Uchumi Agha Khan Walk), and the time is regular (the fourth Sunday of every month in the afternoon). There are no microphones, no amplifiers, and no seats for the audience. But the simplicity of this organization also ensures its sustainability. Without overhead costs, the performances remain free, which in turn encourages public participation. The ease with which mobile phone technology enables an archive of these performances, and subsequent circulation on YouTube (see “Street Words”; Chira; Poeta Dennis), means that this initiative has gained popularity and is beginning to organize more formal events, such as the “Street Disciples” public event, organized in collaboration with “Poetry Spot Kenya”—a more established, Christian, poetry collective that has had a consistent presence on Facebook since February 2015. In the ever-changing formations of poetry collectives, events, and collaborations in African cities, any organization that runs for as long as “Poetry Spot Kenya” might be considered established. This highlights a major challenge in being able to research the emergent literatures of African cities: the informality of the sites in which those literatures emerge make it very difficult to keep track of this ever-changing literary scene. What one does notice, however, is that certain performers reappear across different platforms and events, and, therefore, a more sustainable mode of keeping up with what is happening on the street is to track individual poets and then trace the changes in these informal organizations post-hoc.

This is precisely what we did with Mamboleo, yet even if we track one poet across different street events we find that the variation in the contexts of their performances demands different framing questions for any analysis of the poetry.
For example, there is a YouTube clip of Mamboleo performing the same material from his street performance—although differently structured and, as is common in spoken word, slightly altered—on Churchill TV (“Kiswahili changu kigumu huenda usikielewe”). Here the performance is professionally filmed, has a better sound quality, and the poem is given a title: “Kiswahili changu kigumu huenda usikielewe” (“My Kiswahili is difficult; you may not understand”). But here the formality of the setting as well as Mamboleo’s use of a unidirectional microphone mutes the audience’s responses. This tangibly alters Mamboleo’s performance, which is itself muted by comparison to his street performance.

Furthermore, as interpreters from afar of these poems, we should also consider the mode through which we have accessed them, as online videos. The online views of these two performances of Mamboleo’s “Kiswahili changu kigumu huenda usikielewe” combined amount to, at the time of writing this article, close to 12,000, thereby extending the street and studio audiences to a much more significant viewership. These multimodal, multiply situated and framed poems present us with certain methodological challenges. We need to read the poem across modalities and consider how those modes shape audiences. We should, too, consider the extent to which views of the online videos have been drawn to the poems via Mamboleo’s other online materials, though it is worth noting that his poetry has had more views than his music videos. Either way, we are expected to read across modes. We must allow for a plasticity of form, then, in which our reading takes into account the various projected (filmed, internet) modalities of a street performance. Also, we need to acknowledge the extent to which the medium through which we access texts, and the contexts in which we receive them, frames the interpretative space. Watching, transcribing, and trying to interpret Mamboleo’s partially and amateurly recorded performance is not the same experience as that had by the audience of the street itself.

The other obvious limitation to a globally accessible reading of a street performance is linguistic. Where the internet potentiates global distribution, language limits global access, and in this sense, the location of the street remains crucial to the audience’s capacity to interpret the poem. Street Poetry Kenya is invested in building the infrastructures of Kiswahili poetry and this is one of the key ways in which street literatures, as we have defined them here, resist the global publishing industry and its privileging of the English language. Whereas the global Afropolitan novel is published in English or French (and to a far lesser extent, Portuguese) and, as such, shifts its linguistic medium for the sake of global access, street literature places the onus on the audience to understand the language. The same is true for the scholar, who must have the work translated if they cannot understand the language and wish to access this body of work. Of course, as we enter the realm of comparative literature, we open up another set of methodological complexities, not least relating to the politics of translation. Yet, given the relatively low numbers of translations from African to dominant global languages, it seems premature to problematize translation when this is the most obvious way to enable the sustainability of African literatures in African languages. For now, we are required to speak and write about African language literatures in cosmopolitan academic languages (in our case, English). Although this is not the only way of doing academic work, for now it remains the most effective way of maintaining at least scholarly global visibility of texts that are not supported by the global literary
establishment in other ways. That said, we must acknowledge the extent to which our own translation and scholarly analysis of a literary text participates in a series of legitimating mechanisms that can calcify literary form.

With this in mind, then, we approach Mamboleo’s street poem. And our approach is tentative, since the context of the poem’s performance—the street—unsets a key assumption that dominates the field of literary studies: that is, the assumption that if a book is published by a globally recognized publishing house it, per definition, deserves the attention of scholars. This leads to a methodological laziness in the field of contemporary literary studies when it comes to justifying the selection of materials. Reading from and on the street puts pressure on these sorts of assumptions and will require that we develop models of selection that help us navigate our way through the body of emergent and extant work that has largely fallen under the radar of literary analysis hitherto.

What might a reading that pays careful attention to the scale of the street look like then? In this case, the street in question is Uchumi Agha Khan Walk: a public promenade in Nairobi. Muhor, Moirongo, and Njuguna note that where, “[a]ccording to UN-Habitat, urban areas should ideally allocate 45–50% of land to public space including streets. Nairobi presently has about 20% of its land allocated to public space” (United Nations Human Settlements Programme; qtd. in Muhor et al. 4). Given the pressure of a growing urban population on this already strained public space, it is no surprise that spaces like Uchumi Agha Khan Walk come to take on a variety of different social functions. Muhor et al. describe the space as such:

Aga Khan Walk is a promenade located towards the south end of the CBD covering approx. 6,900 sq.m. (length approx. 350m; width approx. 20m). Its north and south edges are defined by roads while its other edges are bordered by buildings and open spaces, including the Nairobi City County (NCC) Sunken Car-park…. It is surrounded predominantly by office buildings with commercial activities (retail shops and service businesses) being located in the ground floors of buildings surrounding the space. Banks and financial institutions are also found surrounding the Walk …. Approx. 31% of the space is covered by grass with the rest of the surface covered predominantly by concrete block paving. (6)

The multifunctionality of the promenade is clear in the various economic sectors it cuts across. The space is inhabited by informal vendors, kiosks, the national Uchumi supermarket, and established banks, thereby running the entire gambit of the economic sector from illegal hustling to international banking. On weekends, the parking lot that adjoins the promenade is used as a roller skate park for children in the day, whereas the walk is frequented by groups of men in the evenings, making it unpopular with families, old people, and women at those times (Muhor et al. 6). The plasticity of this public space is therefore prompted by the fact that there is a significant lack of public space in the city. Muhor et al., once again, state:

Kenya’s National Urban Development Policy (NUDP) of 2012 recognises that public open spaces play a central role in the formation and consolidation of an urban culture, and that in view of the rapid growth of urban population, existing open public spaces, including pedestrian walkways and paths, are inadequate. (Government of Kenya; qtd. in Muhor et al. 3–4)
Given the inadequacy of these open and public spaces, it is no surprise that Agha Walk serves as the location of Street Poetry Kenya’s monthly event as well as numerous other community-based events.⁸

If we direct our analysis of Mamboleo’s street performance to the location of the street itself certain kinds of information filter that text in ways we might not appreciate if we simply watch the YouTube video without exploring the physical street on which the performance takes place more carefully. Uchumi Agha Khan Walk is a public space that intersects different sectors of Nairobi life in ambivalent ways. On the one hand, it is a space that is molded to the needs of consumers (Uchumi supermarket, Standard Charter Bank, street sellers selling used and cheap clothing and shoes) not only of goods, but of cultural capital (local artists sell work here on the weekends, and, as mentioned above, the space has been used for exhibitions and other art and community events). The space is also clearly directed toward urban youth. Dance, poetry, and skating events all take place here, a fact that is reiterated by the free Wi-Fi offered on the walkway. But again, consumption and connectivity are not straightforward here, as the benches on the walk are lined with advertisements for money lenders, under the shadows of the formal banking economy, and street children roam the walk, hoping for cast-off food or money. The failures of the urban infrastructure also press up against these attempts to turn the walk into a recreational space: large rubbish tips overflow onto the parking lot adjacent to the walk. Agha Khan Walk is about as far from the established publishing industry as one can imagine. It is a plastic space, one that adapts to the social forms that find expression there. As such, it is a space molded by the literary event as much as it, in turn, shapes the form of that literature.

If we close read the poem in situ then, the poetic elements that are articulated toward a close interpretative community come to the fore. In this example, this is most evident in Mamboleo’s use of proverbs, which resist translation yet clearly draw the appreciation of the situated audience, who become visibly animated in the video when the poet shifts into idiomatic speech. This is apparent at 01:02, where Mamboleo indicates his shift in register by declaring “Chabilecho waneni” ‘Like the griots/speakers say’ and then presenting a series of proverbs: “one who ridicules a deformed person, becomes deformed themselves. you disrespect a mongoose, but it wins over a snake without a knife or an axe. A cow is big, but why was a goat given a beard? And an ant is small: it is a surprise that it throws down an elephant” (01:02–13).⁹ The audience’s response to this section of the poem articulates the way in which Mamboleo uses the street context of his performance to reinforce the message that the people of the street, from the scales of the street (the ant of the proverb), can speak truth to power on national and global levels (the poem’s elephant).

It is not only the poem’s content that links the scale of the street to the nation and beyond. Indeed, by virtue of the fact that Mamboleo performs the poem on Churchill Television as well as the street performance appearing on YouTube takes us beyond the immediate location of the street. As such, the poem operates across immediate, emplaced communities, but within a single language group. While Kiswahili is spoken in many countries, and is the national language of three, the content of the poem is overtly directed toward a Kenyan audience. “Young people,” Mamboleo implores, “it is time to rise up. Time to change” (02:18): the change he refers to is political change on a national level. The audience is even more situated
as the poet evokes a community of citizens of Nairobi in the closing section of the poem where he says, “Jamani! Tufanye mtaa huu kuwa ni mtaa wat aa” ‘Friends, let’s make this city a city of light’ (02:55). This call for change is articulated as a critique of a national government whose failings are more keenly felt in the city. It is also worth noting that the poetry event takes place next to Electricity House, which literalizes the metaphor of light in a way that allows Mamboleo to wryly critique the inefficiency and mismanagement at Kenya Power, resulting in regular service delivery problems and blackouts.

Furthermore, Mamboleo’s directed address to the “young people” of Nairobi is given greater ballast due to the ways the space of Agha Khan Walk is producing a text of youth culture. Indeed, at 01:08, Mamboleo’s message is made even more poignant by a street child carrying a large bag (possibly for collection of recyclable bottles for deposit), who crosses the frame behind the poet, seeming to listen to his words before leaving the frame. At 01:33 another child enters the scene and sits down on the ground, next to a bench. Mamboleo’s poem directly addresses the problem of child poverty when he says that, on coming to the city of Nairobi, he

... saw children worn out like charcoal
while their peers were glowing
with joy and comfort.
Seeing children
who had been made to carry machetes
but they are young.
Seeing children
sleeping in shacks
while the greedy leaders
steal billions.
Seeing children half-naked
They eat uncooked food while their peers
are healthy with stomachs like gourds as they jump on the beach
Seeing children who are sick,
while others are healthy like banana trees.
Friends, many children have been left as orphans
They sleep,
anywhere.
They eat,
anything.
They wear,
anything. (0:08–49)

We should be cautious not to read meaning in coincidence and we do not wish to allow our literary reading to segue into a social one, but what the filmed version of Mamboleo’s poem enables—in ways that the studio version of the same poem does not—is an insight into the very social forms that shape his work. As such, the street scene enables a contextual frame that helps us as literary interpreters do the work of joining the dots between the poem’s form and the context that shapes it. This approach sees the context of the literary event as co-constructive of the text. Co-construction is used in the way it appears in the field of linguistics as a joint creation of a semantic entity, or, for our purposes, form. The difference is that instead of two people co-creating a sentence, what we have here is a literary
event that is co-constructed by its context. This is not necessary to the reading, but rather enables the kind of methodology we are prioritizing here. Moreover, what strikes us about this particular scene is that it shows how street poetry creates a literary public that includes the subaltern subject—here, the street child—as audience, listener, and participant in the literary event, a space that the novel or short story, because of the material conditions of their production, have largely failed to do. As such, by observing street children listening to a poem about the conditions of life for street children, we cannot deny the importance of how the poem creates public literary space and, we argue, that space requires inclusion in our analysis.

It seems to us that the literary publics enabled by street poetry like Mamboleo’s provide us with a vision of sustainable literary spaces for the future. The investment driving the creation of these spaces is deeply entangled in the spaces themselves. If we include this literature in the field of world literature, we imagine a sustainable literary ecology of the future, in which criticism is not caught in a self-serving loop that has little relevance to the literary publics that exist outside of the academic world.

CONCLUSION

The methodological concerns we raise here are already the priority of a number of different scholars and initiatives in the field of African literary studies. Historical collections include Claire Ducournau and Ruth Bush’s digital archive of *Awa: la revue de la femme noire*, one of the first independent African women’s magazines, while more contemporary archives are being formed by blogs such as *Brittle Paper* by Ainehi Edoro. The “African Street Literature and the Futures of Literary Form” project at Uppsala University is also collaborating with the Nordic Africa Institute’s library to compile a searchable archive of emergent African literatures so as to enable students’ access to texts other than those available at their local bookstores. There are, of course, numerous other scholars articulating their frustration with the patterns by which the global publishing industry valorizes a certain version of the African novel over other forms of African literary production.

It seems to us that the first and most concrete step toward reading African-located literature as world literature is to compile alternative archives, such as those mentioned above. This certainly requires an embeddedness in the field that is perhaps closer to the methodological expertise of anthropology, but scholars like Emily Callaci, Karin Barber, Stephanie Newell, and Onookome Okome have been doing that work for some time, and if there is a greater investment in this work of refiguring the archive, we believe that the methods of reading this work as literature will soon follow. Howsoever we access the emergent literatures of Africa, what we are claiming here is that the global field of African literary studies cannot exclusively rely on the current legitimating systems of the book publishing industry. Furthermore, on the level of interpretation we argue that literary scholars of such emergent African literatures need to calibrate the interpretative act with a reading of the sociality of form. This calibration will, most likely, require comparative linguistic knowledge, or, at the very least, the help of a translator (as we have employed in the Kiswahili text for this paper). But, further to that, this also requires us to read across different modalities and to understand how these
different modes both relate to the sociality in which they emerge and frame our interpretative work from afar.

Unlike literary ethnography or cultural anthropology, though, we are insisting that this interpretative work can be literary. That is, we argue that it is in close attention to the semiotics and materiality of literary form that we can approach the situated-ness of the text that we are proposing in this paper. We are not seeking to understand the social conditions out of which texts emerge so much as to understand how those social conditions shape literary form. Ultimately reading African literature as world literature cannot be complicit in the wholesale separation of the literary from the underdeveloped world. Therein lies the subaltern paradox that we need not be complicit in. If we begin from the sociality of the literary in situ, rather than the ways in which the book commodity represents those spaces, we will open our archives and modes of readings to the futures of literary form not only in these spaces, but globally.

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NOTES

1. The question of Africa’s relationship to the globe is also the source of much theoretical debate in discussions of the term “Afropolitanism” (see Coetzee; Ede, “The Politics of Afropolitanism”; Eze; Gehrman; Harris, “Afropolitanism and Unusable Global Spaces”; Membre; Selasi; Wainaina).

2. Sarah Brouillette argues that the terms “culture” and “literature” are co-constructed and geographically cast—culture is perceived as a premodern, unrefined resource of the underdeveloped world, literature as a refined and modern product of the developed world (“UNESCO”).

3. See, for example, Adesokan, who (albeit tentatively) still acknowledges the novel’s status as “the most inclusive of literary forms” (I) and Julien who, even as she revises a Eurocentric historiography of the novel’s rise, appreciates the “modern novel [as] creole, a literary ‘forma franca’” (675).


5. These blogs can be visited at the following URLs: flashfictionghana.com, wordsarework.com, brittlepaper.com, pulse.ng, and naijastories.com.


7. See Mamboleo, “Mamboleo—Africa Mama,” “Kumekucha—Mamboleo ft. Vamp K,” this latter being a video with an anti-Female Genital Mutilation message.

8. Indeed, the walk hosts other informal gatherings, such as Streetdance Kenya; meetings of the society of Kenyan agnostics, atheists, and humanists; and has hosted art exhibitions, most significantly a project by Jimmy Ongonga that he developed into
the Mombasa billboard project (see Vierke and Siegert 143), a project that launched the artist into international acclaim.


11. See “African Street Literature Enters the Library” for more information about the archive.

12. Including Brouillette; Bush; Haines; Harris, “Plastic Form”; and Julien.

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“Kiswahili changu kigumu huenda usikielewe.” YouTube, uploaded by Churchill Show, 5 July 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7i45qIWM2Q.


