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Literary Networks and the Making of
21st Century African Literature In English:
Kwani Trust, Farafina, Cassava Republic Press And The Production Of
Cultural Memory

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

KATHERINE JANE HAINES
Abstract

This thesis examines the literary production of three publishers based on the African continent established shortly after the turn of the millennium - Nairobi-based Kwani Trust, Lagos-based Kachifo and Abuja-based Cassava Republic Press. It asks how these three contemporary and connected literary institutions, and the writers associated with them, have opened up new spaces and forms for the production of cultural memory and for African literature in English.

The first part of the study offers close readings of texts by writers including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Helon Habila, Parselelo Kantai and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, foregrounding the different ways in which these give literary form to memory and geography. I highlight a particular preoccupation with historiography in the editorial agenda of Kwani Trust. Reading contemporary novels published by Farafina and Cassava Republic Press through the work of Achille Mbembe, I characterize these as opening up new forms for imagining space.

The argument that stretches across the thesis is that Kwani Trust, Kachifo's Farafina imprint and Cassava Republic Press have opened up new spaces and forms for cultural production by making memory, geography and literature material. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the second part of the study analyses the digital and physical exchanges, as well as the medium, through which these literary texts have been created, produced and validated. I argue for a particular connection between the dynamics of materiality as relating to physical form, and materiality as relating to cultural value. With chapters focused on the medium of print, and on the relationships revealed by particular literary events located in Nairobi and Lagos, I demonstrate the significance of these publishing companies in establishing the foundations of a pan-African literary network which has nurtured and brought cultural value to some of the leading voices in twenty-first century African writing in English published from London or New York, as well as inspiring and validating new literary institutions on the continent. Through this, I make a case that literary studies requires new models that better account for the global cultural flows and multiple sites of value that this study makes visible, redefining Casanova's Eurocentric conception of 'world literary space'.
For Joyce Mills and Marjorie Wallis
On the one hand is the skein of words, images, and artifacts that operate according to a complex dynamic of tradition and innovation, competition, and cooperation. On the other are writers, critics, and the theorists who produce the artifacts. While no one person working alone can swing that small universe one way or another, individuals matter in determining its trajectory, and networks of people matter even more.

N. Katherine Hayles

*Writing Machines*
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My background as an editor means that ever since I can remember I’ve always read a book’s acknowledgements first. I think in some ways this practice sparked my interest in tracing and documenting the networks out of which texts emerge. I therefore feel a significant amount of happiness in now being able to compile my own acknowledgements and thank the many people who have been part of making this study possible and enabling it to find this form.

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The thesis is dedicated to my two grandmothers, who both in different ways forged my own production of belief (Bourdieu 1993) in the value of literature.
1

Introduction

On 7 April 2016 in a speech given at London’s Free Word Centre to celebrate the launch of Cassava Republic Press in the UK, co-founder and Publishing Director Bibi Bakare-Yusuf articulated her commitment to publishing as creating ‘the archive of the future’. Bakare-Yusuf had co-founded Cassava Republic Press in Abuja ten years earlier with the particular aim of building ‘a new body of African writing that links writers across different times and spaces’ (Cassava Republic Press 2010). Her deliberate framing of literary production as contributing to the construction of history and memory in the context of Cassava Republic Press opening a UK office, offers a particularly apposite starting point for this thesis. This study is concerned to examine the way in which three interconnected publishers based on the African continent and established shortly after the turn of the millennium - Nairobi-based Kwani Trust, Lagos-based Kachifo and Abuja-based Cassava Republic Press - have opened up new spaces and forms for the production of cultural memory and for African literature in English. Through the chapters that follow I show the significance of these three literary initiatives in establishing the foundations of a pan-African literary network that I argue has shifted the exchanges of cultural value\(^1\) through which African writing in English is produced both within Africa and in the global North.

Launching Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* in Nigeria

In July of 2004 the literary magazine *Farafina*, published by Kachifo, organized a series of readings in Nigeria for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (New York: Algonquin, 2003). This event marks just one of the beginnings in the shifting trajectory of exchanges of cultural value that this thesis attempts to map, and offers a frame which enables me to bring into view key questions and theoretical frameworks grounding this study. *Farafina* magazine had launched online the previous year and, as founder Muhtar Bakare observed, by ‘being online we met a lot of people’ (Bakare 2006). One of these people was Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who was living in the US at the time, and whose short story ‘Fide’ was published in the third online edition of *Farafina* in 2003 (a later version of the story would be published in 2007 by the *New York Times* as ‘Real

\(^1\) As I will explore later in this introduction my use of the term cultural value builds on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his insight that the producer of value in a work of art is not the author but the ‘field of cultural production’ (Bourdieu 1993).
The reading tour for Purple Hibiscus was organized by Farafina in order to promote and celebrate Adichie as a contributor to the newly launched magazine, as well as more specifically to bring her novel, which had been published at the end of 2003 in the US by Algonquin and early in 2004 by Harper Collins in the UK, to the attention of a wider public in Nigeria (Feludu 2014). The tour included three public events - one in Abuja hosted by the British Council, one in Ibadan hosted by the Educare Trust Exhibition Centre and one in Lagos at the Nigerian Institute of Internal Affairs (NIIA) aimed primarily at university students (This Day 2014). In addition, there was an invitation-only ‘premier’ event for sponsors and members of Nigeria’s literati at the Yellow Chilli restaurant on Victoria Island in Lagos, featuring Adichie in conversation with Jeremy Weate, staged readings from the novel, and performances from Nigerian musical icon Fatai Rolling Dollar and the, then relatively unknown, young female singer Asa (Feludu 2014, Bakare-Yusuf 2013).

At the time the events were first being planned, Muhtar Bakare was very much focused on establishing Farafina as an online magazine, and had no intention of moving into book publishing. However, when it became apparent that other publishers in Nigeria, for the most part primarily focused on the education market, were unwilling to take a risk on a new writer, Bakare started to think publishing Purple Hibiscus ‘was something we could do’ and by the end of 2004 the Farafina Books imprint had been launched, printing 13,000 copies of the Nigerian edition of Purple Hibiscus (Bakare 2006, 2014).

The launch of Purple Hibiscus in Nigeria is significant beyond Kachifo’s own publishing history. Several of the writers and publishers I interviewed for this study identified this event as marking the beginning of a period of more incentives and opportunities for writers in Nigeria, and a growing sense of community (Ndibe 2014, Ogbe 2015, Imasuen 2014, Ogunlesi 2013). Bibi Bakare-Yusuf and her co-founder Jeremy Weate credit Farafina’s launch events for Purple Hibiscus as one of the ‘sparks’ that led them to set up Cassava Republic Press (Bakare-Yusuf 2013, 2014, Weate 2016). Bakare-Yusuf recalls the buzz of recognizing that ‘Nigeria had new talent’, the experience of collaborating with Farafina editors Yemisi Ogbe and Ebun Feludu to bring this novel published in the US to the attention of readers in Nigeria, and the pervasive sense in the audience at Yellow Chilli that this heralded a ‘new cultural moment’ (Bakare-Yusuf 2013). This is echoed in a blog post by Ayodele Olofintuade who describes how as a result of Farafina pushing Purple Hibiscus ‘like cocaine’, and the founding of the NLNG (Nigeria Liquified Natural Gas) Prize for Literature, a new vibrancy developed in Nigerian literature and ‘we all became
“writers” (Olofintuade). Similarly in an article in *Saraba* magazine, Tolu Oloruntoba describes how Farafina's publication of *Purple Hibiscus* 'electrified young Nigerian (and other African) writers' (Oloruntoba).

The events surrounding the launch of *Purple Hibiscus* in Nigeria provide a revealing entry point into this thesis which argues that more attention needs to be given to the dynamics through which exchanges in what are often labelled 'local' or 'national' literary spaces intersect with (often validating and being validated by) exchanges in what are instead labelled 'world' or 'global' literary spaces. Over the last fifteen years, studies of literary production and reception on the African continent have consistently challenged a binary distinction between “local” and “global” in relation to the creation, publication and circulation of African literature (Newell 2000, 4, 2002, 2006, Hofmeyr 2004, van der Vlies 2007, 175, Jones 2014). While the dynamics of 'local' and 'global' in relation to the production of contemporary African literature in English remain shadowed by the violent legacy of British colonialism, scholars have compellingly demonstrated that these dynamics also need to be seen in the context of the role played by 'local technologies of the intellect' in the development of print culture (Fraser 2008, 25), as well as a much longer history of the 'trafficking of ideas' (Ogude, Musila, and Ligaga 2011a, viii) and exchanges with elsewhere through which Africa’s multifaceted and ‘constantly in motion’ (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, 351-2) literary and cultural production has been and continues to be shaped. Despite this, binaries between 'local' and 'global' often persist in the structures and approaches of scholarly work about African literature in English. Although, for example, Stephanie Newell’s interventions have shown the potential of contextual studies of African popular literature to open up 'new definitions of the relationship between “local” and “global” cultures' (Newell 2000, 4), more often than not studies of Africa-based writers and publishers are positioned as contributing to debates about African popular cultures (articulated as plural 'cultures' and 'literatures') (Newell 2000, Nyairo 2007, Odhiambo 2011, Musila 2014) whereas research into African writers who are also published and circulated elsewhere is positioned as contributing to debates about African literature (articulated as singular 'literature') in the world literary space (Huggan 2001, Julien 2006, Cooper 2008, Adesokan 2012, Ojaide 2012). As a result the intersections and disjunctures between these two conversations are often neglected. This study proposes new critical models through which these intersections and disjunctures can be brought into view.

In a newspaper article published in South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* (featuring a large image
of a smiling Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) ahead of the 2014 African Literature Association held at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, Dan Ojwang and Michael Titlestad argue that ‘the primary site of African literary production has shifted to Euro-America’ (Ojwang and Titlestad 2014). Ojwang and Titlestad begin the article by making the case that while between the 1960s and the 1990s the ‘image of African literature’ cohered around Heinemann’s African Writers Series, the canon of writers that emerged out of this series was constructed in dialogue with institutions based on the African continent including universities and literary magazines, alongside Heinemann’s own branch offices outside of its UK headquarters (Ojwang and Titlestad 2014). They go on to observe that these institutions have largely collapsed and with them the image of a ‘single domain’ of African literature, its centres of production and dissemination now being or appearing much more widely dispersed. Although, alongside Kampala-based FEMRITE and Cape Town-based Chimurenga, the article explicitly celebrates the work of two of the publishing initiatives that form the focus of this study - Kwani Trust and Cassava Republic Press – it characterizes small publishers on the continent as ‘generally struggling’ (Ojwang and Titlestad 2014). It is as a result of this erosion of ‘local literary institutions and publics’ that for Ojwang and Titlestad:

The African cultural bankers of the present are largely émigré writers, such as Chris Abani, Chimamanda Adichie, Segun Afolabi, NoViolet Bulawayo, Brian Chikwava, Teju Cole, Helon Habila and Moses Isegawa. These authors’ works are generally mediated for African readers by reviewers and academics abroad, and most have acquired their status through winning international awards (Ojwang and Titlestad 2014).

Ojwang and Titlestad make an important point about the impact of ‘political and economic turmoil’ on universities in Africa (Ojwang and Titlestad 2014), and more research needs to be done to illuminate the shifting and potentially declining role of these institutions within the literary networks that have produced African literature over the last sixty years. However, this thesis seeks to show that the dynamics of exchange and validation between publishing initiatives on the continent and international publishers that these authors associate with the 1960s – when emerging writers ‘were first published in journals and literary magazines of the period, such as the Kampala-based Transition, the Nigeria-based Black Orpheus, and Drum and Contrast in South Africa’ (Ojwang and Titlestad 2014) – have much more resonance with the ways in which a contemporary canon of African literature has been constructed than contemporary scholarship allows for. For example, the Nigerian writers that Ojwang and Titlestad list alongside Adichie as ‘African cultural bankers of the present’ – Chris Abani, Segun Afolabi, Teju Cole and Helon Habila - were all published in the print edition of Farafina magazine between 2006 and 2007, with Farafina
Books publishing Nigerian editions of Segun Afolabi’s *A Life Elsewhere* (2006) and *Goodbye Lucille* (2007), and Chris Abani’s *Becoming Abigail* (2008). As I explore in the final chapter of this thesis, it was Jeremy Weate and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf at Cassava Republic Press who suggested to Teju Cole that he turn a 30-day experimental fiction project on his blog into a print book, and in commissioning *Every Day is for the Thief* provided a platform on which his subsequent writing career has been built. Cassava Republic Press also published Helon Habila’s first two novels *Waiting for an Angel* (2007) and *Measuring Time* (2007). In focusing on the significance of the physical form in which texts are published, Chapter 6 shows that even when Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have published writers who already have international acclaim through publication or receiving literary prizes in the global North, the work of producing new print editions which claim and invest this writing with cultural value on its own terms and enable it to reach new audiences in Nigeria has had a significant impact on the way in which contemporary African literature reaches readers both inside and outside of Africa.

Alongside focusing on the physical form in which texts are produced, this thesis also argues that located literary events can be read as ‘multilayered expressive fragment(s)’ (Quayson 2014, 21) through which to explore exchanges out of which writers and texts are created. Farafina’s launch events for *Purple Hibiscus* not only represent a significant moment of instantiation in relation to the literary networks this study seeks to map, but bring into view the foundations of this in overlapping interpersonal, creative and material exchanges dependent both on the located agency of individuals and the movement of people, images and information. The reading tour for Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* was not driven by financial imperatives; the events were conceived before Farafina’s decision to publish the novel in Nigeria and had two main objectives (Bakare 2014, Feludu 2014). Firstly, the desire to ‘burst the bubble’ and reach a larger public in Nigeria with news of this novel rather than just the existing literary community (Feludu 2014). Reflecting this, care was given to make the events themselves as engaging and entertaining as possible with actors performing sections of the novel, and musicians also included as part of the programme (Feludu 2014, Weate 2016). Secondly, Farafina wanted to frame the events in a way that validated a larger and more sustainable literary community or network. As the press release and media interviews make evident, Farafina emphasized that the reading tour aimed to inspire and build a literary community and new writing by giving ‘validity to other young Nigerian writers’ (Ufine 2004) and showing ‘other promising writers that the craft of writing can also be rewarding’ (This Day 2014). Equally evident is the care that was taken to reach out to existing individuals and institutions with the power to
consecrate the novel with cultural value in Nigeria, engaging with universities, arts organizations from ANA (Association of Nigerian Authors) to CORA (Committee for Relevant Arts), leading writers such Niyi Osundare and Femi Osofisan, and partnering with the British Council and the Educare Trust Exhibition Centre (Ufine 2004, This Day 2014).

Muhtar Bakare had hired Yemisi Ogbe and Ebun Feludu (then Ebun Olatoye) as Farafina magazine’s first Editor and Editorial Assistant. Although putting together this series of events was part of a larger collaborative effort, it was Feludu, a recent graduate, serving her year as a member of Nigeria’s National Youth Service Corps, who was the driving force behind it. As a recently established company set up with Muhtar Bakare’s personal capital, Farafina did not have the resources available at the time to fund this author tour. Feludu therefore put together a proposal and Farafina began to seek sponsorship for these events. Feludu, who collaborator Bibi Bakare-Yusuf describes as a ‘powerhouse’ who was ‘singular in focus’ in relation to the launch of Adichie’s first novel (Bakare-Yusuf 2014), was driven by passion (‘I was totally totally in love with her writing’) and also able to draw on her own ‘tidy network’ to make the events possible (Feludu 2014). A personal friend of Feludu’s, building contractor Kunle Ogunkoya, was so persuaded by her passion for the book that he committed the seed money that enabled the project to get off the ground (Feludu 2014). Alongside in-kind sponsorship from partners such as the British Council, Educare Trust and Moorhouse, Chris Okeke (who had been introduced to Farafina via a mutual friend of Muhtar Bakare’s Bayo Adeniji), founding partner of leading Lagos law practice Ajumogobia & Okeke, also gave a substantial amount of money without which the events would not have been possible (Feludu 2014). Feludu was similarly able to draw on personal contacts to secure high profile media coverage for the event, commissioning a review from Dr Olaokun Soyinka (Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka’s son), persuading friend Jahman Anikulapo (Arts Editor of the Guardian) to help champion the book, and securing television interviews for Adichie with popular broadcasters Adesuwa Onyenokwe and Funmi Iyanda (Feludu 2014).

In the UK, while Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus was very successful, it was the publication of Half of a Yellow Sun that ‘burst the bubble’ and brought Adichie to mainstream attention, as the novel won the Orange Prize for Fiction and was featured as part of the UK’s influential Richard & Judy Book Club. In contrast, while the launch of Purple Hibiscus is referenced as a literary moment in Nigeria, very few people I interviewed remember any

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2 At the time both Ogunkoya and Okeke asked to remain anonymous in their sponsorship (Feludu 2014).
specific events or incidents marking the publication of Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* in Nigeria (Bakare 2014, Dosekun 2014). Muhtar Bakare explained to me that the launch of *Purple Hibiscus* was so successful in establishing the profile of Adichie as a new literary name (with her second novel so highly anticipated there was even speculation that she might be a ‘one book wonder’), that Farafina felt confident that they were publishing *Half of a Yellow Sun* into an established market and didn’t need to push it in the same way (Bakare 2014). Adichie has gone on to become not only Farafina’s bestselling and most critically acclaimed author, but also arguably the most visible and commercially successful African writer in the world literary space. The international acclaim and the media coverage she receives in the global North of course influences the ways in which her work is read and reaches readers in Nigeria. Still, what I have been concerned to show here is that Adichie’s significance within Nigerian cultural production, both in terms of her own literary output and as a figure who is part of a larger literary community, was directly shaped by the way in which Farafina conceived and brought together the launch of *Purple Hibiscus* in Nigeria and in particular Feludu’s ability to draw in ‘Lagos’s cultural elite’ (Weate 2016) to fund and support this. Chapter 4 will explore dynamics of this kind in more detail, proposing a relational methodology that puts Bourdieu’s framing of the ‘network of relations of exchange’ (Bourdieu 1995, 230) that produces literature in dialogue with Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’. Through this I offer a methodology that enables me to put into dialogue the position occupied by writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor within locally-based writing communities and literary networks, with their consecration in the global North by publishers, the media and literary prizes.

**Cultural Memory**

It is striking that many of the critically acclaimed writers and publications coming out of Kwani Trust, Kachifo’s Farafina imprint and Cassava Republic Press have engaged with and explored where knowledge about the past is located and how this finds form in and as textual production. In 2006 Parselelo Kantai declared the repossession of the ‘territory’ of history as ‘the new frontier for the African intellectual’ (Kantai 2006, 249) and his story ‘Comrade Lemma & the Black Jerusalem Boy Band’ (Kantai 2004), published in *Kwani? 02*

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3 In 2005 *Purple Hibiscus* won the Commonwealth First Book Prize and was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction and the Booker Prize; Adichie’s second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* won the Orange Prize in 2007 and that year was one UK’s top ten bestselling works of fiction (Stone 2008). In 2008 she won a MacArthur Foundation Genius Award, in 2010 was named one of The New Yorker’s 20 best American writers under 40 and her TED talk ‘The Danger of a Single Story’ has been watched online over ten million times (Adichie 2009a).
and shortlisted for the 2004 Caine Prize for African Writing, is a humorous engagement with the construction of public Kenyan history. In 2009 Kwani Trust launched Kwani? 05 (Kahora 2008a, b), a double issue of the flagship journal, responding to and documenting the violence that followed the 2007 Kenyan election. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Adichie 2006), set across 1960s Nigeria and the Nigerian civil war, is a novel concerned with remembering and representing that past, while Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (Atta 2005) and Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* (Habila 2007) both explore politics intimately impacting on and unfolding in domestic and institutional spaces at particular moments in Nigeria’s recent history.

Post-millennial scholarship has explored the processes and institutions that have shaped the construction of the ‘African novel’ or ‘African literature’ through an attention to histories of publishing, readership and the physical form in which texts are published (Hofmeyr 2004, van der Vlies 2007, Fraser 2008, Davis 2013, Davis and Johnson 2015, Bush 2016). For example, Andrew van der Vlies uses ‘biographies’ to track the movement of individual texts, exploring the particular dynamics that emerge from many South African writers having been published outside of South Africa and through this highlighting the unstable categories of ‘literariness’, ‘book’ and ‘nation’ and the ‘contingent and permeable’ boundaries of metropole and colony in relation to symbolic capital (van der Vlies 2007, 8). Caroline Davis, in her study of Oxford University Press’s Three Crowns series, shows the majority of sales for this series coming from the highly profitable educational market in Africa4 and contests the assumption which she argues permeates the work of Graham Huggan, James English, Pascale Casanova and Sarah Brouillette (Huggan 2001, Casanova 2004, Brouillette 2007, English 2005) that the Western market is the only significant market for postcolonial literature (Davis 2013, 6). However, this body of work drawing on the empirical methodologies of book history has for the most part continued to be theorized separately from the work of literary studies.

The framing of my own study through relationships between memory, place and knowledge production, questioning how these three contemporary and connected literary institutions, and the writers associated with them, have opened up new spaces and forms for the production of cultural memory, enables me to show how insights from book history can enter into productive dialogue with literary criticism. I argue the shifting structures of value that this thesis attempts to map are evident not only in histories of

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4 For example Davis shows that in 1977 the Nigerian branch alone generated 22% of Oxford University Press’s overall income (Davis 2010, 71).
publication and circulation but also in the use of language and form by individual writers to explore the ways in which history and memory and, interconnected to this, geography and place, are constructed as knowledge and literature.

Jan Assmann brought into use the term cultural memory, building on Maurice Halbwachs’ seminal work on collective memory, to refer to the way in which memory is preserved through cultural formation and institutional communication (Assmann 2010b, 129). Chapter 2 will draw on and problematize Assmann’s conception of cultural memory as distinct from communicative memory, in order to read Kwani Trust’s particular engagement with history and Kenyan popular culture. Chapter 3 puts Achille Mbembe’s thinking about geographies and histories in relation to Africa (Mbembe 2000) in dialogue with Henri Lefebvre’s tripartite division of space (Lefebvre 1991), in order to explore the ways in which contemporary novelists published by Farafina and Cassava Republic Press write relationships between memory and place. Cultural memory as defined by Assmann is the store of knowledge in ‘objectivised culture’ through which ‘a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity’ (Assmann 2010b, 130). As I explore further, my use of this term is also intended to help position these texts, to use Evan Mwangi’s phrase, as ‘writing back to themselves’ (Mwangi 2009, 2). My close readings emphasize the ways in which these texts are concerned to question and find new forms for knowledge production from and about Africa that resonate with readers on the continent, rather than ‘writing back’ to ‘the European colonial center’ (Mwangi 2009, 1) or for an audience in the global North.

In Africa Writes Back to Self, Mwangi similarly uses close readings of texts in order to offer a ‘corrective’ to the ‘dominant theory in postcolonial studies’ that African literature can be defined through its preoccupation with subverting the colonial metropolis (Mwangi 2009, 2). In ways that resonate with the concerns of this study, the foundations of postcolonial studies lie in work that challenges and exposes the structures of power that have governed the definition and production of history and literature (Said 2003, Young 2004). Although definitions and theorizing of the postcolonial are multiple and contested, the political agenda that much of the work in this field coheres around analyzing structures of knowledge production in order to shift the power dynamics between non-western continents and the West (Young 2003, 2-7). While my research is inevitably in dialogue with and draws on postcolonial studies, like Mwangi I am concerned with the development of new critical paradigms for African literature which allow for its relationship with the West and the ongoing destructive legacy of colonialism, without this
having to define or form the centre of the study. As I will explore in the conclusion of this chapter, I therefore position my study within, and offering a link between, the fields of world literature and African popular cultures.

Michael Rothberg has reflected on the ‘missed encounter’ between the founding texts of memory studies and postcolonial studies, and argued for the potential insights – into the impact of violence on temporality and the ways in which memory resists and propagates violence – that could be gained from bringing these fields together (Rothberg 2013, 361).

In a similar way, Stefan Helgesson has argued for ‘mutually enriching exchange’ between the fields of world literature and postcolonial studies, and the ways in which postcolonial and colonial writers have been at the forefront of understanding and responding to ‘the ambiguous logic of literature as a globalized phenomenon’ (Helgesson 2014, 484, 499).

Neither Rothberg nor Helgesson shy away from the challenges and sometimes impossibilities of bringing together large established bodies of scholarship that have been theorized separately. These interventions offer notable reference points for this study which in turn suggests the potential for encounter and exchange between the fields of memory studies and world literature. Arjun Appadurai has argued that ‘histories produce geographies’ (Appadurai 2010, 9) and bringing together these fields enables this study to better put into dialogue its temporal and spatial concerns. As I’ve highlighted, cultural memory studies, with its emphasis on the shared knowledge through which a group defines a relationship to the past, enables me to focus on the ways in which texts published by Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press produce and are produced out of Kenya, Nigeria and Africa. However, by simultaneously foregrounding literature as inherently constructed by transnational exchanges, the frame of cultural memory enables me to also explore models that shift an idea of world literature away from centring in the global North and towards the study of locally grounded literary networks and multiple sites of value.

My research for this thesis has involved over 70 original interviews with writers, publishers, literary critics and booksellers. The approach to conducting and analyzing these interviews has been informed by guides to social and qualitative research methods which provided invaluable insights on structuring questions, designing an interview guide, getting people to talk and positioning myself (as a researcher, editor and reader) within this process (Rubin and Rubin 2005, Silverman 2006, Davis 2007, Gilbert 2008). Each of the interviews I conducted was a focused interview based around an interview guide with several core questions always included and phrased in the same way, but tailored to the
particular individual I was interviewing and flexible enough to follow emerging interests through the conversation. Each interview was recorded as an iPhone voice memo or GarageBand podcast. I engaged in several concentrated periods of interviewing: in Kenya in the autumn of 2011 and January 2015, and in Nigeria in May 2013, February 2014 and November 2015. In my first period of interviewing in both Kenya and Nigeria, I made sure I was also talking to publishers and writers who were located outside of the particular literary networks this study focuses on, for example educational publishers at the 2011 Nairobi International Book Fair and 2013 Nigeria International Book Fair. At the end of each of these periods of interviewing, I then listened back to recordings and selectively transcribed material. From each group of interviews I identified key themes, events and publications, and then coded and gathered into new documents relevant interview material around these. These documents guided and informed the evolving arguments of this thesis and the process of writing up chapters. After completing a first draft, I went back and listened again to interviews that had become particularly significant to my study in order to make sure nothing had been missed in my initial analysis and to identify additional individual quotes that could further support this. At the final stage of writing up, I also conducted follow-on interviews, sometimes by email, with figures who had played a particularly key role in the publications or events that had become the focus of my case studies (Bakare-Yusuf 2016, Ehikhamenor 2016, Imasuen 2016, Kahora 2016).

Even though interviews offer only partial accounts, their overlaps and contradictions have enabled me to construct the publishing histories that follow, and develop a methodology that allows for the multiple interactions and exchanges that are involved in the production and publication of individual texts. My decision to draw on these interviews in both my close readings of texts and my analysis of the spaces through which these texts are mediated, is also part of a deliberate reaction against the canon of African literature having been read for so long through its relationship to the global North. I believe documenting the intentions and experiences of authors and publishers in producing this work is an important first step to building new critical frameworks through which it can be read.

**Making Material**

Building on this, I argue for the idea of *materiality* as a conceptual frame for reading twenty-first century African literature, which can work to bring together and forge connections between the twin elements of this project - book history and literary studies -
that might otherwise tug in different directions. The argument that stretches through both my analysis of literary texts and the publishing processes out of which these texts emerge, is that these writers and publishers have opened up new forms and spaces for cultural production by making memory, place and literature *material*. Recent scholarship reflects an increased attention to - and emphasis on - materiality across a range of disciplines including media and communication studies (Gillespie, Boczkowski, and Foot 2014, Packer and Crofts 2011, Gitelman 2006), literary studies (Hayles 2002, Posman et al. 2013) and anthropology (Miller 2005a), as well as more broadly in cultural theory (Coole and Frost 2010). Daniel Miller, whose work has been critical in shaping the study of material culture and ideas of materiality (Miller 1998, 2005a, 2010), notably rejects any simple definition of the material:

'Is an ephemeral image, a moment in a streaming video, a thing? Or if the image is frozen as a 'still,' is it now a thing? Is a dream, a city, a sensation, a derivative, an ideology, a landscape, a decay, a kiss? I haven’t the least idea (Miller 2005b, 8).

In his introduction to the edited collection *Materiality*, Miller theorizes materiality in two ways: as a theory of ‘things’ or ‘artifacts’ and as a theory that breaks down the binary of subject and object (Miller, 3). The collection *Materiality* and Miller’s own work more broadly draw attention to the ways in which persons and things or subjects and objects are mutually self-constitutive (Miller 2010, 5, 2005b, 38-42) – ‘the things that people make, make people’ (Miller 2005b, 38). Miller shows how this ‘dialectic of mutual creation’ plays out in his own research into Internet use by Trinidadians, observing that ‘there is no such thing as the Internet’, it becomes what it is through its 'local appropriations' (Miller 2005b, 44):

It's not that Trinidadians use the Internet, or that the Internet creates Trinidadians. It's more that the Trinidadian Internet is something distinct from all other Internets and makes the Trinidadian who uses the Internet something beyond previous forms of being Trinidadian (Miller 2010, 118).

In similar ways, the material turn in literary studies has been concerned with drawing attention to the interrelationships between form, content and medium, and establishing these as mutually self-constitutive (Hayles 2002, 31). N. Katherine Hayles defines materiality as emerging from ‘interactions between physical properties and a work’s artistic strategies’ (Hayles 2002, 33). In the close readings that follow of the literary production of Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic, I explore the way in which writers use language and space to give history and memory material form, while also exploring the materiality of these texts by making a connection between artistic strategies and a time and place of physical production. Chinua Achebe once compellingly argued for
the writer’s role in relation to memory making, observing that the storyteller creates ‘the memory that the survivors must have – otherwise their surviving would have no meaning’ (Moyers 1989). However, for the storyteller to create the ‘memory’ and ‘meaning’ that Achebe is talking about here, their writing has to be published and to accumulate cultural value: it has to be made material. Throughout this thesis, then, I argue for a definition of materiality that makes a connection between the material as relating both to physical form and to ideas of value and significance. I suggest that in order for a text to intervene in the creation of cultural memory, it needs to matter in both these senses.

In his study of mobile phone use in Jamaica, Miller argues for the materiality of communication on the basis that it is something people value in its own right and can feel bereft without (Horst and Miller 2006, Miller 2010). The idea of communication as a cultural genre or as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end, for Miller justifies its inclusion as ‘stuff’ or ‘material culture’. And yet while Miller uses the word ‘value’ in order to articulate the ‘materiality’ of communication, the idea of materiality as relating to value or significance remains under-theorized in his work and in the edited collection Materiality (Miller 2005a). Both Michael Rowlands and Fred Myers highlight materiality as relative to power, with Rowland’s chapter in particular exploring the role of colonial power in imposing ideas of form and substance in the Cameroon Grassfields (Rowlands 2005, Myers 2005). Nevertheless, their emphasis still remains on the relationship between subject and object in this dynamic, not explicitly on materiality as being produced by exchanges of value.  

N. Katherine Hayles has worked towards building new critical practices and a vocabulary for ‘understanding literature as the interplay between form, content and medium’ (Hayles 2002, 31), foregrounding the ‘inscription technologies’ that produce literary texts and advocating for ‘Media-Specific-Analysis’ as a methodology alert to the ways in which the medium and the work construct each other (Hayles 2002, 26, 6). She argues that the development of digital media enables us to ‘see print with new eyes’, making visible the ways in which the methodologies of literary studies have been ‘imbued with assumptions specific to print’ (Hayles 2002, 33). As the work of media historian Lisa Gitelman productively reinforces, a medium such as print or the Internet does not have its own inherent qualities, but is a historical subject formed by social interactions and open to change over time (Gitelman 2006, 7). This study is concerned to show how exchanges of

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5 One theoretical intervention that does conceive of materiality primarily in terms of significance or value is Judith Butler’s Bodies That Matter, in which she argues for materiality in relation to the body as being ‘rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect’ (Butler 1993, 2).
value are critical to the interplay or interactions between form, content and medium that Hayles and Gitelman highlight and through which, for example, print, language and story become co-constitutive elements in the production of literature.

As new publishing companies established on the continent since the turn of the millennium, Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press belong to a world of the present which Arjun Appadurai has described as marked by ‘electronic media and mass migration’ as forces that impel ‘the work of the imagination’ (Appadurai 1996, 4). While scholars have begun to draw attention to the ways in which digital media and the Internet have opened up new forms for expression in Kenya and Nigeria (Adenekan 2012, Ligaga 2012), more work is needed to explore the ways in which digital media and the Internet have simultaneously shifted the interactions through which literature is made material. An example that brings into view the significance of these dynamics is Kwani Trust’s founding editor Binyavanga Wainaina publishing online a ‘lost’ chapter from his memoir One Day I Will Write About This Place (Nairobi: Kwani Trust, 2012). The chapter ‘I’m a homosexual, Mum’, in which he came out publicly as gay, was first published on the Internet by Chimurenga (Wainaina 2014e). Notably, Chimurenga’s own print journal had been one of Wainaina’s points of reference and inspiration for the Kwani? journal (Wainaina 2014a, Kiome 2016). A day later it was published on the blog Africa is a Country and three days after that republished by The Guardian in the UK (Wainaina 2014d, c). The publication of this ‘lost’ chapter online by Chimurenga is particularly significant given Wainaina’s international recognition as a writer and the genesis of his subsequent memoir also began life through a piece of writing that was published both on the Internet and in print in Chimurenga. As Wainaina recounts in the memoir itself, in January 2002 he persuaded the editor of online magazine G21 – to which he was a regular contributor – to publish a revised version of ‘the Uganda story’ he had published in 1997 in South Africa’s Sunday Times and submit it as an entry for the recently established Caine Prize for African Writing (Wainaina 2002, 2012, 253). With this story ‘Discovering Home’, Wainaina became the 2002 winner of the prize, with the story praised by the chair of judges Ahdaf Soueif for its shifting ‘between different African locations with wit, wisdom and originality’ (Associated Press 2002). As literary critic Boyd Tonkin observed at the time, Wainaina winning the Caine Prize ‘without the traditional intercession of ink, glue or paper’ was the making of a ‘little piece of literary history’ (Tonkin 2002). Tonkin positioned Wainaina’s win in the context of the failure of the Internet to revolutionize the publishing of fiction in the way the UK publishing industry had expected, concluding that prize juries need to keep an eye on ‘such intrepid ventures’ and that ‘where Africa leads, the rest of the planet
can still follow’ (Tonkin 2002). In fact, as Wainaina’s memoir attests, the Caine Prize almost refused to consider his story on the grounds ‘they only accept stories published in print’ and it is unclear if Wainaina’s furious email, asking where the prize expected to find stories published in Africa if the criteria were limited to print-only publications, influenced their decision to reconsider (Wainaina 2012, 253).

In the twelve years between the publication of ‘Discovering Home’ and ‘I am a homosexual, Mum’ on the Internet, ‘Discovering Home’ was published in print in multiple forms. The same month Wainaina won the Caine Prize, the story not only ran as one of the lead pieces but inspired the title ‘Dis-Covering Home’ for the second issue of Chimurenga (Edjabe 2002a). In 2006 it was one of the first titles published in Kwani Trust’s Kwanini series. This pocket-size series of titles (135 x 115mm and under 70pp) has acted as a showcase for some of Kwani Trust’s award-winning writers and stories alongside – as Kwani Trust’s current Managing Editor Billy Kahora explained – having the function of ‘archiving’ or creating a ‘public record’ of stories that might get lost in the much larger journal that is Kwani Trust’s flagship publication (Kahora 2011a). In a revised form ‘Discovering Home’ also became part of One Day I Will Write About This Place and makes up substantive parts of Chapters 19, 20, 21 and 22. Wainaina’s memoir was published by Graywolf in the US and Granta in the UK in 2011, by Kwani Trust in Kenya in 2012 and Farafina Books in Nigeria in 2013. Strikingly, the line in the memoir ‘One day, I will write about this place’ has been added as the final line to the section of the book that started life as ‘Discovering Home’ (Wainaina 2012, 223).

On June 1 2012, Kwani Trust launched the East African edition of One Day I Will Write About This Place in Nairobi at the Kenya Railway Museum. The event, held in an old railway building complete with a disused Uganda Railways carriage and train track running through it, took the form of a party with a DJ set from Just a Band and featured Wainaina in conversation with then Deputy Editor of Granta magazine Ellah Wakatama Allfrey, followed by a book signing. When asked by Allfrey at this event how the book came about, Wainaina highlighted that its origins stretched further back than the 2002 publication of ‘Discovering Home’, commenting that it ‘came out of an email’. This reply draws attention to the ways in which electronic media have shaped the construction of a new generation of African literature not just through opportunities to publish online, but through the exchanges the Internet has enabled between writers. Wainaina’s memoir documents his experiences of finding a community of writers online and the email he is referring to is one sent to US-based Charlie Sweet, ‘a guy in a supernatural fiction writers’
group’ he began sharing his work with (Wainaina 2012, 225-6). When he sends Charlie a long email about his trip to Uganda, Charlie calls him to tell him it is ‘beautiful’ and that he ‘should publish this somewhere big’ (Wainaina 2012, 238). Wainaina then works on the piece through the early hours before sending it to South Africa’s Sunday Times (Wainaina 2012, 238). Significantly for the connections between the publishing companies that form the subject of this study, Wainaina’s memoir also highlights the importance for him of meeting and forging a friendship with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie online: ‘we critique each other’s work. Soon we are emailing everyday’ (Wainaina 2012, 254). Wainaina and Adichie met in 2001 on the Zoetrope website – an online space, associated with a US-based quarterly magazine, where writers could submit and share feedback on each other’s work. Notably, as part of their intense dialogue Wainaina ‘bullied’ Adichie into entering the Caine Prize (Adichie 2013). Her story ‘You in America’, also published online through Zoetrope: All-Story Extra, was shortlisted for the prize and in July 2002 the two writers met in person for the first time having been invited to the UK for the announcement of the winner at Oxford University’s Bodleian Library.

This brief publishing history of Wainaina’s One Day I Will Write About This Place shows the ways in which this memoir is created and produced through its shifts between different media, moving from email to the transient print media of newspaper to an e-zine, then finding physical form in print through a literary magazine and in multiple book editions before moving back to the Internet. It brings into view key questions raised by this study: What differing and interrelated roles have print and the Internet played in the construction of a new canon of African literature? How has the use and value of print and the Internet in the production of literature shifted over the first two decades of this century? What role have mediated literary spaces (from online writing forums to physical book launches) played in the creation and circulation of texts and networks? What role do literary networks and literary prizes, and their relationships to particular locations, play in giving weight to or endorsing particular texts, memories or writers? In what form is cultural memory made material?

In a keynote lecture at the 2015 ALA conference Wainaina directly addressed some of these questions raised by his own publishing trajectory (Wainaina 2015). He admitted that while ‘everything I did as a writer was happening on the Internet’ and ‘everything that has come to matter that I’ve written [was] published on the Internet’, it wasn’t until the publication of his ‘lost chapter’ that this was a deliberate strategy (Wainaina 2015). He talked about publication online in the early part of his career being an ‘accident’ and how
he had ignored the platform as 'somewhere serious' to carry work and write for (Wainaina 2015). Yet, he went on to describe how over the last three or four years he has been deliberately engaged in ‘breaking out of my psychic colonial idea of the book’ and thinking instead about how the kind of writing he wants to publish ‘interacts with platform’ and where it can reach readers. He concluded by arguing that increasingly ‘every existing platform itself will take on literary element…that literary element may or may not be traded for money, but it will certainly be traded for cultural legitimacy’ (Wainaina 2015). Across this thesis I will argue for the significance of pan-African literary networks formed out of and that form Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press's publications in creating this shift Wainaina describes in the dynamics of how and where contemporary African writing in English is published and gains cultural legitimacy - a shift in how it is made material.

In opening up possibilities for thinking dialogically about the idea of form in the language of literary texts and in their physical production and circulation, about how and where texts and histories are given significance and value, and about the challenges to ideas of form and materiality presented by different spaces, histories, publics, markets and the digital, I argue the idea of materiality offers a particularly productive framing for the study of twenty-first century African literature and history more broadly. In the introduction to a special issue of Research in African Literatures, Zoe Norridge, Charlotte Baker and Elleke Boehmer argue for ‘making the invisible visible’ as an ‘important methodology or approach’ for studying African literature and arts (Norridge, Baker, and Boehmer 2013, x). And yet, the challenges of this approach lie in how to fully address the question ‘make visible to who?’ I want to suggest here that the frame of materiality, rather than visibility, offers a more nuanced and flexible lens, one that avoids centering the study of African literature around its relationship with the Western academy and publishing industry, while simultaneously acknowledging that these flows and exchanges are one of the ways through which it is made material. So for example, the rising cultural value of literature published in digital form by UK and US publishers over the last 15 years, as well as associated academic debates about digital materiality, impact but do not define a reading of the relationship between Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press's print and online publishing over the same period. The concept of materiality allows for literature and history taking different forms and accumulating cultural value across different spaces, providing a methodology for studying this through the literary and physical form of texts, as well as the exchanges and flows out of which they are formed. The next section of this chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks I use to define the idea of cultural value on
which this project centres and through which I argue it is possible to conceptualize the idea of a literary network.

**Cultural value and literary networks**

My methodological approach builds on the work and critical vocabulary of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1993, 1995). Bourdieu importantly demonstrates that no cultural work ‘exists by itself’ or ‘outside the relations of interdependence that unite it to other works’ (Bourdieu 1995, 197), and that:

> artistic work in its new definition makes artists more than ever tributaries to the whole accompaniment of commentaries and commentators who contribute directly to the production of the work of art by their reflection on an art which itself contains a reflection on art, and on artistic effort which always encompasses an artist’s work on himself (Bourdieu 1993, 36).

His key insights then are that the producer of value in a work of art is not the author but the field of cultural production and that this is the result of a complex ‘network of relations of exchange’ between agents and institutions, circulation and consumption (Bourdieu 1995, 230). As this thesis develops through Chapter 4, I propose that by mapping this ‘network of relations of exchange’ in relation a literary text, locating these processes through a particular place and time in relation to a literary event, it is possible to conceptualize a literary network.

Given Bourdieu’s position as a French intellectual, building on a tradition of European philosophy and sociological thought, I’m conscious that questions could be raised about how appropriate his work is for mapping the processes and structures out of which African literary production emerges. While Bourdieu acknowledges the positions and hierarchies within the field of cultural production vary ‘from one period and one country to another’ (Bourdieu 1993, 47), his own descriptions of the ‘field’ predominantly retain the nation as a frame and remain preoccupied by the structures and dynamics of cultural production coming out of Europe and the US (Bourdieu 2003, 67). Recent criticism has begun to argue for the idea of a postcolonial Bourdieu and a greater acknowledgement of the ways his experiences in Algeria between 1956 and 1960 and the publication of his first book *Sociologie de L’Algérie* (Bourdieu 1958) became critical to the development of his work and key concepts (Puwar 2009, 371). Nevertheless, this doesn't alter the silences in his work that other critics have highlighted on issues of gender and race, or the accusations that his conceptions of class and art are narrow and elitist (Frow 1995, 5). And yet, a number of recent studies have demonstrated that Bourdieu *does* offer an
approach that can be both worked with and against in order to bring new insights to the study of African literary production (van der Vlies 2007, Cooper 2008, Helgesson 2008, Davis 2013, Strauhs 2013, Bush 2016). Bourdieu provides a methodological starting point for Andrew van der Vlies's study of the networks, processes and relationships that have symbolically constructed texts in the transnational production and circulation of South African literature in English (van der Vlies 2007). Caroline Davis's study of the Three Crowns series argues against the distinction Bourdieu draws between restricted and wide-scale cultural production in order to show how Oxford University Press created a highly successful 'interdependent system' for generating both economic and cultural capital and the ways in which through this the symbolic value of African literature was determined by the location of its market (Davis 2010, 4, 317). Ruth Bush defines the approach for her own investigation of African literary production from Paris between 1945 and 1967 as working 'with, and at times against, a Bourdieusian framework' (Bush 2013, 12). In particular, her project maps the relationships between the different institutional settings through which ideas of African literature emerged, and uses Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' to emphasize the 'pre-reflexive forces that shape such interventions' (Bush 2013, 192). As the work of these studies makes evident, ultimately Bourdieu’s thinking about the field of cultural production is grounded in relationality, with the meaning of the text being in constant flux, and artists and commentators continually consecrated and re-consecrated through reciprocal flows (Bourdieu 1993, 32, 36). I want to suggest that it is this relational thinking that enables Bourdieu’s methodological tools to be used in ways that are responsive to Achille Mbembe’s call for non-linear models in relation to the study of Africa (Mbembe 2001, 17) and to complicate binary periphery-centre or local-global models of cultural production, even while to do so might be to read against the grain of Bourdieu's own studies and thinking. It is important to highlight with this in mind, that my own model of literary networks draws on the 'relations of interdependence' Bourdieu's work brings into view, rather than his field-concept.

Bourdieu advocates a demanding empirical mapping of the 'field of cultural production' though the space of its positions, and is concerned through this to draw attention to the hierarchies that structure the field and the competition for these positions. Productive further research could certainly be done to locate the literary networks this thesis attempts to map within the power structures and available positions of the literary field. However, my particular concern here is not with examining the relationships between writers and cultural brokers as competitive, but better understanding the ways in which

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6 ‘Habitus’ can be defined in broad terms as the dispositions which result in those involved in the ‘network of relations of exchange’ functioning in a certain way.
these relationships have enabled a particular body of literary production to emerge.

Pascale Casanova borrows from and builds on Bourdieu’s work in *The World Republic of Letters* (Casanova 2004, xii). Casanova is concerned to develop the concept of the ‘field of cultural production’ in a way that moves it beyond a national frame and allows for transnational exchanges of value. Her work makes a critical intervention in literary studies by arguing that it is the ‘world literary space’ through which ‘what is judged worthy of being considered literary is brought into existence’, showing how ‘literature’ is constructed over time through shifting dynamics and spaces of ‘value’, simultaneously freed from and entangled with political and national histories (Casanova 2004, xii, 3).

While in part her project is driven by a concern to expose imbalances of power, she maps a history of literary legitimacy that begins with the formation of the first European states in the sixteenth century and remains fundamentally Eurocentric. As such, she describes the literary capital associated with this history as ‘universally recognized’ and ‘what everyone seeks’ (even as she describes this universality as ‘one of the most diabolical inventions of the centre’ (Casanova 2004, 154)), failing to allow for alternative non-Western histories of literary production or multiple forms and domains of value (Casanova 2004, 17). Like Casanova, I too am concerned to develop Bourdieu’s models in ways that allow for transnational exchanges of value. However, I argue that new conceptions of world literary space are needed that better allow for the global cultural flows and multiple sites of value that studying Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press makes visible. With this in mind, I propose a relational methodology that puts Bourdieu’s framing of the ‘network of relations of exchange’ (Bourdieu 1995, 230) through which literature is produced and circulated in dialogue with Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’ in order to conceptualize the idea of a ‘literary network’.

Arjun Appadurai’s work draws attention to the ways in which ‘center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)’ are inadequate for understanding cultural production. In the context of exploring the impact of electronic media and migration on the work of the imagination in the world of the present (Appadurai 1996, 4), Appadurai argues that the complexity of the global cultural economy is rooted in certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics (Appadurai 1996, 32) and proposes a framework for analyzing global culture and imaginary that explores and allows for this. His framework focuses on the interrelationships between five dimensions of global cultural flows which he calls ‘-scapes’ and that he argues act as ‘building blocks’ of ‘imagined worlds’: *ethnoscapes, mediascapes,*
techoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes (Appadurai 1996, 33). While the majority of Appadurai’s fieldwork is based in urban India, several leading scholars have highlighted the usefulness of his model for reading the multifaceted and transnational exchanges and relationships involved in the production of African culture (Mbembe and Roitman 1995, 326, Gikandi 2001). Stephanie Newell and, building on her work, Nara Improta, have both convincingly demonstrated that with modifications Appadurai’s model doesn’t need to be tied to the particular dynamics of electronic media and mass migration in the late 20th century from which it emerges, and can be productively used to analyze a longer history of West African culture.  

As I show in Chapter 4, Appadurai’s ‘-scapes’ offer a much needed counterpoint and counterpart to Bourdieu’s ‘network of relations of exchange’, and these two models can work in dialogue with each other to construct and map a literary network which takes account of global cultural flows and makes visible a (non-Eurocentric) world literary space. While Bourdieu makes a distinction between the ‘symbolic’ and ‘material’ production of the work (Bourdieu 1993, 37), in allowing for multiple flows and exchanges of persons, technologies, finances, information and ideas involved in producing a literary text, Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’ enables me to foreground more strongly the relationships between symbolic and material production. For example, a group of scholars connected to the University of Warwick have argued for a ‘materialist’ perspective being brought to the study of postcolonial literature, concerned to highlight colonialism’s ongoing legacy of inequality and to read African literature in relation to the pervasive structures of modernity and capitalism (Parry 2009, Lazarus 2011, Graham, Niblett, and Deckard 2012, WReC 2015). A framing through multiple and overlapping ‘-scapes’ allows me to take account of the structures of a capitalist world-system in the production of African literature, without its meanings and circulation becoming defined by this. I show the ways in which the exchanges of cultural value out of which texts make meaning, and the literary networks associated with Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic are constructed, are symbolic and material, and explore the complex dynamics of pan-African literary networks built on and across flows of friendship, digital technology, economics, power and creativity.

7 Both Newell and Improta argue for the existence of other relevant ‘-scapes’ in relation to their studies, with Newell pointing to the existence of a gendered ‘-scape’ and an ‘Islamic-scape’ (Newell 2006, 12) and Improta in arguing that brokerage takes place across ‘-scapes’, suggesting that there are as many ‘-scapes’ as ‘there are collective spheres of social life’ (Improta 2013, 174). However, given Appadurai’s fluid conception of ‘-scapes’ as ‘deeply perspectival constructs’ that are continually inflected by different and particular perspectives, histories and geographies, I instead work to bend and nuance his five existing ‘-scapes’ to better represent the flows of people, money, information, ideas and technology traced by this particular study.
Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press

Having shared the theoretical frameworks, key questions and methodology that ground this study, the next section of my introduction briefly introduces the origins and activities of the three literary publishers that form its focus in order to set what follows in context. In both Nigeria and Kenya, the beginning of the twenty-first century marked an opening up of political and public space following the end of military rule in Nigeria and of Daniel Arap Moi’s 24-year presidency in Kenya. Economic crisis in the 1980s had caused a contraction of publishing opportunities in both countries (Zell 1993, Williams 1997) but by the turn of the millennium increased financial stability alongside the opportunities afforded by technology, greater mobility and a growing middle class opened up possibilities for new publishing initiatives in both countries.

Kwani Trust

Kwani Trust was founded in 2003. Self-defining as a 'Kenyan based literary network', the organization evolved out of an expanding email conversation between a group of writers, artists and those passionate about literature, moderated by filmmaker Wanjiru Kinyanjui, about why new writers weren’t being published in Kenya (Kwani Trust). Out of these discussions, which moved to a series of physical conversations in Nairobi (many of which took place in the garden of The East African editor Ali Zaidi and sculptor Irene Wanjiru), came the idea to set up a new publishing house (Kwani Trust). This gained momentum in the immediate aftermath of Binyavanga Wainaina winning the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2002. By early the following year the literary journal Kwani? had been launched online with Wainaina as its first editor and a grant had been obtained from the US-based NGO Ford Foundation enabling the magazine to be published in print (Kwani Trust, Wainaina 2014a). Significantly, Wainaina had recently returned to Kenya after spending nearly ten years studying and working in South Africa, where he had met founding editor of Chimurenga Ntone Edjabe and become, as he described it, part of ‘a pan-African writing circle of some kind in Cape Town’ that fostered the ‘interactions’, ‘thinking’ and ‘vibe’ out of which both Chimurenga and Kwani? emerged (Wainaina 2014a).

Since 2003 Kwani Trust has published eight editions of the Kwani? journal. From the outset this anthology brought together a range of textual and visual forms - from fiction to photography and cartoons, from poetry to emails or blog posts. From the fifth edition onwards the content of the journal has been framed around a particular idea, with Kwani?
05’s focus on Kenya’s 2007 election, Kwani? 06 bringing together a new generation of writers born after 1978, Kwani? 07 examining connections to and discourses of diaspora, and Kwani? 08 exploring issues coming out of Kenya’s 2013 election. Kwani Trust have also published eleven titles in the Kwanini series, five full-length works of creative non-fiction, a poetry anthology and the two visual narratives *Kenya Burning* (2008) and *Nairobi 24* (2010). Alongside this Kwani Trust has published nine novels - three of which are by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and three of which came out of the Kwani? Manuscript Project. Kwani Trust have also published the 2011, 2012 and 2015 editions of the Caine Prize anthology (see Appendix 1 for more details of Kwani Trust’s publishing).

Kwani Trust’s decision to identify as a literary network reflects the origins of the organization in a pre-existing community of writers who had been brought together by a series of digital and physical exchanges (Wainaina 2014a). It also indicates an emphasis on building and maintaining this community and, alongside ‘the publishing and distribution of contemporary African writing’, the current ‘About Us’ section of Kwani Trust’s website outlines its activities as offering training opportunities to literary artists, facilitating and producing literary events and establishing and maintaining global literary networks (Kwani Trust 2016a). Book launches, readings, panel discussions and writing workshops have therefore formed a significant part of Kwani Trust’s activities and literary output with Kwani Trust’s sales manager Mike Mburu observing in interview, ‘we don’t just do a book - it has to be a process whereby the creation of that process will be a book’ (Mburu 2011).

The two literary events that Kwani Trust have most consistently organized and which have become most strongly associated with their identity as a publisher and literary network, are the monthly Kwani? Open Mic night and the biennial literary festival Kwani? Litfest. Kwani? Open Mic was founded in 2005 and is a poetry and spoken word night that takes place in Nairobi’s CBD on the first Tuesday of the month. Since 2008 it has been MC’d by popular Hot 96 radio host Cindy Ogana. While Kwani? Open Mic runs at a remove from Kwani Trust’s editorial agenda and publications, as Managing Editor Billy Kahora explained to me, when ‘literary production takes so long’ this monthly night came out of Kwani Trust’s desire to hold a more regular and immediate literary community (Kahora 2011a). Kwani? Litfest came out of a similar desire to also hold a pan-African community of writers. Wainaina observed that Kwani? Litfest was born out of the ‘frustrations’ of

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8 The Kwani? Manuscript was a one-off literary prize for unpublished novel manuscripts from African writers across the continent and in the diaspora launched in 2012.
only being able to meet other African writers ‘in Paris or New York or London’ and a desire to ‘cross-pollinate’ and create ‘platforms to meet on the continent’ (Wainaina 2014a). Kwani? Litfest was launched in December 2006 and the first two editions were organized in collaboration with Summer Literary Seminars (SLS) and hosted in both Nairobi and Lamu. Notably, given the concern of this thesis with the emergence of literary networks, the first edition of the festival included a two day workshop with editors of other literary publications including Transition, Chimurenga, Farafina and Tin House which focused explicitly on building relationships in order to ‘forge a collective identity, strengthen existing networks and investigate new linkages’ (Kwani Trust 2014a). 2008 Kwani? Litfest, held just a few months after Kenya’s post-election violence, focused on the theme ‘Writers in Conflict?’ and hosted writers from West Africa known for their engagement with civil war: Aminatta Forna, Ishmael Beah and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. 2010 Kwani? Litfest was titled ‘Tell Us What Happened’ and focused on ‘intergenerational conversations’ between Kwani? writers and the so-called ‘first generation’ of Kenyan writers: from Micere Mugo in dialogue with Wambui Mwangi, to Ngugi wa Thiong’o in conversation with his son Mukoma wa Ngugi. The emphasis of 2012 Kwani? Litfest titled ‘Conversations with the Horn’ was on putting writers from Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan in conversation with writers from Kenya and the wider continent, hosting twelve visiting writers in Nairobi including Nawal El Saadawi, Warsan Shire and Kojo Laing. The most recent Kwani? Litfest 2015 focused on starting conversations about language ‘Beyond the Map of English’ and featured Taiye Selasi, Boris Boubacar Diop and Nuruddin Farah.

Farafina

Farafina began life as an online literary magazine, set up and funded by successful Nigerian banker Muhtar Bakare in 2003, with the aim of creating a platform for emerging narratives of contemporary African culture to be distributed more widely (Bakare). Notably, Bakare cites a visit to Chimurenga’s Cape Town office as one of two decisive reference points that gave him the impetus to start Farafina and the publishing company Kachifo (the other being his longstanding admiration for the weekly magazine The New Yorker and a sense of what this had done for Western culture) (Bakare 2014). The Lagos-based magazine built a community of writers and readers online and as well as publishing the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, began to publish the work of Sefi Atta who was

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*SLS is a Canada-based initiative launched in St. Petersburg that hosts writing workshops in Kenya, Lithuania and Montreal and is premised on a belief in the benefits to writers of travel and building transnational writing communities.*
also living in the United States. Following *Purple Hibiscus*, Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) was the second novel published under the Farafina Books imprint.

By Sefi Atta

Figure 1.1: 'Native Insurance' by Sefi Atta published in the fourth online edition of Farafina.

Between 2003 and 2005 Farafina published eleven issues online. In October 2005 the magazine launched in print and Chapter 5 explores the significance of this move from the Internet to print publication. The print edition Farafina ran for sixteen issues10 with A.

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10 It is notable that the physical form of Farafina and the Kwani? journal were very different. Farafina was published for the first eight issues in a standard magazine format (with dimensions of 214 x 280 mm - a size very slightly smaller than A4) and then following a redesign in April 2007 the format became slightly taller and thinner for issues nine to fifteen. The first issue of Farafina published in 2005 was 32pp, with the size consistently growing to more like 70pp by 2007. In contrast, the first three issues of Kwani? were published in a much smaller standard book format (Royal – 155 x 235 mm), altering to become even smaller and narrower (with dimensions of 145 x 220 mm) and so closer to a standard magazine ‘digest’ format in 2007 with the publication of Kwani? 4. The magazine also from the outset had a much larger extent: Kwani? 1 was published in 2003 with 296pp, and this has also consistently grown in size across editions with Kwani? 4 (2007) published at 430pp and Kwani? 7 (2012) at 574pp.
Igoni Barrett taking over as Managing Editor from the thirteenth issue and bringing a stronger aesthetic both in terms of form and content to the last four editions of the magazine. Issue thirteen was edited by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and focused around experiences of America, featuring contributions by Teju Cole, Muthoni Garland and E.C. Osondu. Issue fourteen published in June 2008 and was a special edition of writing coming out of the Concerned Kenyan Writers Google Group – a coalition of writers that was initiated by Binyavanga Wainaina and came together to document and respond to the violence that followed Kenya’s 2007 election. The print magazine never managed to attract sufficient subscribers to be self-sustaining and was therefore supported by the book division (Barrett 2014a). Following the global financial crisis of 2008, Farafina Books also began to struggle financially to the point where the magazine was ‘starting to drag down the books’ and in 2009 was forced to close (Barrett 2014a, 2015b).

The Farafina brand has therefore come to be primarily associated with Kachifo’s Farafina Books imprint which has to date published nineteen novels, the two volume June 12 graphic novel, five single-authored collections of short stories, three anthologies of new writing, two collections of poetry and two works of literary non-fiction (see Appendix 2 for more details of Kachifo’s publishing). Farafina also publishes a small number of books for children under the Tuuti imprint, and books for schools including a successful Social Studies textbook under the Farafina Educational imprint. The financial issues that led to the closure of the magazine in 2009 also meant that between the publication of Adichie’s short story collection The Thing Around My Neck in 2009 and the launch of Eghosa Imasuen’s Fine Boys in 2012 the only title published under the Farafina Books imprint was E.C. Osondu’s short story collection Voice of America (2011). Instead during this time Kachifo focused on building more profitable publishing models through Farafina Educational and Prestige Books – a pay-to-publish imprint. Over the last few years Farafina Books has not only begun publishing more new literary fiction, including in 2015 A. Igoni Barrett’s Blackass and Tendai Huchu’s The Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician, it has also launched new imprints Farafina Breeze to publish genre fiction and Farafina Kamsi to publish poetry, creative non-fiction and lifestyle books.

Also part of the Farafina brand is a non-profit Trust established ‘to promote reading, writing and a culture of social introspection’ (Farafina Trust 2015b). In 2007 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie independently set up an annual Lagos-based writing workshop, which she has co-taught every year since with Binyavanga Wainaina. Originally sponsored by Fidelity Bank, in 2009 the workshop became part of the activities
of Farafina Trust and a new sponsorship agreement was reached with Nigerian Breweries.
The Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop is the main activity of Farafina Trust; as Muhtar Bakare commented in interview, Adichie was looking for a way to 'give back' at a time when he was also thinking about ways to work with people who wanted to give money to support literature (Bakare, 21 February 2014 #355). Each year an open call is put out for applications to the workshop and 20-30 participants are selected. The selected writers are announced publicly on the Farafina blog,\(^\text{11}\) and the now over 150 participants in the workshop have started to be identified as a group of 'alumni' (Anya 2014) and as such celebrated by Farafina (Farafina Books 2014).

**Cassava Republic Press**

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf and Jeremy Weate credit two events as the 'sparks' that led them to set up Abuja-based Cassava Republic Press in 2006 (Bakare-Yusuf 2013, 2014, Weate 2016). The first was Farafina’s launch of Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* in 2004 and the second a visit to the University of Lagos bookshop, which left them shocked by the paucity of books available and with a feeling that 'something must be done' (Bakare-Yusuf 2013). Cassava Republic Press launched in 2006 with the strapline 'Feeding the African Imagination' and by 2007 had brought UK and US-based Nigerian writers Diana Evans, Abidemi Sanusi and Helon Habila to Nigerian readers by publishing or distributing their books and organizing author tours. They had also commissioned and published their first original book – Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* (Cole 2007). In interview Habila highlighted that when Cassava Republic Press brought him to Nigeria in 2007 for an author tour, Nigerians treated this like an 'occasion' and 'splurged' by buying multiple copies of his books for friends and family – noting that his books have never sold in such large numbers at a single event anywhere else in the world (Habila 2015).


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\(^\text{11}\) [https://farafinabooks.wordpress.com](https://farafinabooks.wordpress.com)
in 2014 launched Ankara Press, a new romance imprint with both a commercial imperative and a feminist agenda (Bakare-Yusuf 2015) which has published eight titles to date. As I began this chapter by observing, in 2016 Cassava Republic Press opened an office in the UK, where Bakare-Yusuf is now based, launching with two crime fiction novels alongside three literary fiction titles, a creative non-fiction anthology (edited by Ellah Wakatama Allfrey) and three children’s books. Bakare-Yusuf partnered with Emma Shercliff as a Co-Director to launch Cassava Republic Press to a UK audience, and also use this base in the UK to expand distribution across the continent (Bagnetto 2016).

Notably, since 2007 Cassava Republic Press have published very few titles originated in the UK or US, but rather often started working with writers including Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani on I Do Not Come to You by Chance (2009) and Lola Shoneyin on The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives (2010) ahead of these books securing publishing deals in the global North. In interview Bakare-Yusuf expressed her frustration that economic realities mean that even if Cassava Republic Press begin working with an author first they might not publish first and that consequently Western publishers end up getting ‘all the credit’ for editing and it becomes assumed Cassava Republic Press have just bought rights (Bakare-Yusuf 2014). Bakare-Yusuf described this as the ‘politics of symbolic structure, almost violence and erasure’ (Bakare-Yusuf 2014). It is this erasure that this study is in part concerned to address.

**Situating pan-African literary networks**

At the outset of her study *Women’s Literature in Kenya and Uganda*, Marie Kruger emphasizes the significance of Kwani Trust alongside FEMRITE as having ‘dramatically reshaped the East African literary scene’ and draws particular attention to the work of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, whose novel *Dust* forms one of my central case studies in Chapter 2 (Kruger 2011, 1). There have been several other significant scholarly engagements with the work of Kwani Trust which I will enter into dialogue with over the course of this thesis (Ligaga 2005, Musila 2010, Odhiambo 2011, Musila 2013, 2014). The most sustained study of Kwani Trust to date is Doreen Strauhs’s *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics and Participation* in which she highlights that the most transnationally visible contemporary writing from Kenya and Uganda has ‘been strongly associated with and partly nurtured’ at Kwani Trust or FEMRITE (Strauhs 2013). Strauhs positions these organizations as literary NGOs and through this productively connects Kwani Trust with a longer history of donor-funded literary activity on the continent including the Ibadan-
based Mbari Club in Ibadan, the Nairobi-based Chemchemi Creative Centre and the Kampala-based *Transition* magazine. However, she therefore reads Kwani Trust through the concerns of its donors with the politics of civil society and examines the organization’s role in public opinion making, for example focusing case studies on writing that engages with conflict or HIV. Significantly for this study, Strauhs criticizes Kwani Trust for its ‘mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion’ arguing it has focused on ‘promoting a certain flock of authors as well as a certain kind of writing’ (Strauhs 2013, 152), and these will be part of the dynamics I examine in exploring how Kwani Trust has worked to build and maintain literary networks. Strauhs’s study also shows the potential limitations of research which focuses on contemporary literary institutions and draws heavily on original interviews. Strauhs’s interviews for her study of Kwani Trust were conducted between 2006 and 2008, and did not include a conversation with Billy Kahora who has been Managing Editor since 2008 (Strauhs 2013, 187-88); organizations continually shift and grow and so it is perhaps unsurprising that her study reflects quite a different conception of Kwani Trust to my own.

Samantha Pinto also discusses Kwani Trust in her essay ‘The Caine Prize and the Impossibility of “New” African Writing’ (Pinto 2013). Pinto references Dobrota Pucherova’s critique of the prize as participating in ‘promoting African literature as an exotic commodity’ and contributing to its ‘“othering” while appropriating it into the Anglo-American cultural capital’ (Pucherová 2012). While Pinto comments that she ‘doesn’t disagree’, she instead draws attention to the ways in which the prize has indirectly supported Kwani Trust as ‘a material resource that is both local and global’ and argues that combined ‘forums like Kwani? and the Caine Prize can offer more and different venues for more and different….new writing from the continent’ (Pinto 2013). Set up in 1999, the exchanges of cultural value between the UK-based Caine Prize for African Writing and writers associated with not only Kwani Trust but Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have, as Pinto’s article attests, been significant to the trajectory of the pan-African literary network this thesis attempts to map. However, a methodology that builds on Arjun Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’ enables me to position the Caine Prize as one of many reciprocal flows, rather than a focus of this study. Instead of the Caine Prize which has already received some scholarly and critical attention, I’m concerned to emphasize alternative reference points for the rising cultural value of contemporary African writing.

As founder of Chimurenga, Ntone Edjabe, observed in an interview with CNN, ‘we are trying to develop our own measuring stick for excellence’ (Edjabe 2012a) - a sentiment strikingly echoed by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in a lecture given at the University of
Nairobi to celebrate Kwani Trust’s 10th anniversary:

In literature we are using our own benchmarks and this is something to feel very proud about (Adichie 2013).

As Bakare-Yusuf highlights, the work of both Kachifo and Cassava Republic Press is currently an ‘erasure’ (Bakare-Yusuf 2014) in critical studies of contemporary African literature. Daria Tunca has compiled a list of over 230 published essays about the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Tunca 2016), yet none of these have focused on Adichie’s relationship with her Nigerian publisher. Equally, some of the most prominent authors associated with Farafina Books – Eghosa Imasuen and A. Igoni Barrett - have to date received no scholarly attention. While literary critics have engaged with Teju Cole, this engagement has focused on his second novel Open City (New York: Random House, 2011) rather than Everyday is for the Thief (Vermeulen 2013, Krishnan 2015). Other texts originated by Cassava Republic Press have received scholarly attention, for example Lola Shoneyin’s The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives (Adekoya 2014, Eze 2015), but again this engagement focuses on literary analysis rather than the exchanges out of which this novel was published.

There are of course a significant number of publishers based not only in Nigeria and Kenya but all over the African continent who since the turn of millennium have begun to or continued to publish African writing in English, and whose work is not visible in contemporary scholarly discourse on African literature. Particularly important reference points for this study are Book Craft and Kraft Books, both established over two decades ago in Ibadan, who have published a significant body of Nigerian literary fiction. However, as I argued at the outset of this introduction, my particular concern in this study is with the ways in which the work of Kwani Trust, Farafina Books and Cassava Republic Press can bridge and illuminate a gap between the study of African popular cultures and African literature in the world literary space or as world literature. My interviews reveal these three literary publishers marking a shift in the publishing landscape in Nigeria and Kenya which is partly associated with a professionalization of editorial, marketing and administrative structures: authors comment on the rigorousness of editing, of receiving royalties on time and of a strong presence in the literary community created through events and activities online (Ehikhamenor 2014a, Anya 2014, Kan 2014, Barrett 2015b). What also distinguishes these organizations from other contemporary publishers based in

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12 Apart from a very brief reference in an essay by David Kaiza (Kaiza 2011) to the way in which A. Igoni Barrett’s characters interact with Lagos as compared to an earlier generation of African writers associated with the African Writers Series.
Kenya or Nigeria is a deliberate positioning in relation to world literary space. Although its primary audience is the Kenyan reading public and Kwani Trust has no established distribution structures outside of Kenya, as Billy Kahora highlighted in a plenary lecture at the 2014 ASAUK conference, from the outset Kwani Trust has been consciously concerned with ‘reaching out of the borders of our national space’, rejecting solely national structures and instead creating ‘a huge push for the universal’ (Kahora 2014) through dialogue with a pan-African and international space of writing, publishing and prizing. This self-conscious positioning within transnational structures of cultural value is evident in the framing of both the first published journals and early editions of the Kwani? website. *Kwani? 01* opens by celebrating Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor as the winner of ‘Africa’s biggest writing prize’ (Wainaina 2003b) before sharing her 2003 Caine Prize winning story ‘Weight of Whispers’. Ebba Kalondo’s editorial for *Kwani? 02* similarly celebrates Parselelo Kantai’s ‘Comrade Lemma & the Black Jerusalem Boy Band’ having been shortlisted for the Caine Prize, while also drawing attention to ‘old friend of Kwani’ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who is ‘about to go global’ and is ‘the first ever African woman to be shortlisted for the Orange Prize of Literature’ (Kalondo 2004). Drawing together Kwani Trust’s achievements in their first year, the 2003 website notes:

> We have been invited to submit stories to some of the world’s most prestigious Journals. *Paris Review* (NY), *Chimurenga* (Cape Town), *Transitions* (Boston) and *Story Quarterly* (Chicago), were so impressed by the quality of work by Kwani? writers that they have encouraged us to submit our best stories directly to their editors (Kwani Trust 2003).

Meanwhile Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have to some extent been engaged in the opposite process: taking writers such as Atta, Adichie and Habila already published and consecrated with value in Casanova’s world literary space and making them material (both by making books physically available and consecrating writers with cultural value) in the Nigerian literary space. The strapline ‘Telling Our Own Stories’ reflects Farafina’s project of claiming these writers, but also of establishing structures of publishing and literary value on the continent that are deliberately in provocative dialogue with a Eurocentric idea of literary value. As the then COO, Simidele Dosekun, commented in 2010, the idea of Nigerians publishing themselves has been very important to Kachifo, given ‘for too long, we have been misrepresented by others, especially by those who came and still come with colonizing, paternalistic and exploitative agendas’ (Otas 2010).

This study argues that equally important to the positioning of these three publishers in the world literary space are the exchanges of writing, writers and cultural value that take place between them. Chimurenga’s Ntone Edjabe has observed that these exchanges have
enabled the institutions to ‘mainstream our own aesthetics and reduce our dependency on the global publishing system’ (Edjabe 2012b). Reflecting this, Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have directly sparked and enabled a variety of new literary initiatives based on the African continent. For example, one of the founders of Kwani? Muthoni Garland went on to set up her own more commercially-focused Nairobi-based publishing company Storymoja and the pan-African writers’ collective Jalada was formed as the result of a writing workshop hosted by Kwani Trust. Equally, former Farafina editor Azafi Omoluabi-Ogosi, who went on to establish Parrésia Publishers in Lagos, observes that she considers Parrésia an ‘offshoot of Farafina’ built out of the training she received there and in the ‘same spirit’ (Omoluabi-Ogosi 2015). By mapping the network of relations of exchange and global cultural flows involved in these processes of publishing, this thesis not only problematizes the model Casanova presents for world literary space, but also argues that the intervention Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press deliberately make within this Eurocentric model of world literary space is significant enough to challenge it being able to be read in this way going forward.

While this thesis puts these three publishing initiatives in dialogue with each other in order to show the significance of their connections in the construction of an overlapping pan-African literary network, this frame also enables me to emphasize differences in the processes of creation, production and reception across histories and geographies. For example, my research reveals the conversations that go into shaping texts ahead of publication to be particularly significant to the work of Kwani Trust and their intervention in cultural memory, whereas for Farafina the emphasis is on the conversations started as a result of publication. In addition, as my close readings of texts in the early chapters of this thesis suggest, I characterize the writing coming out of Kwani Trust as being more experimental, exploring new lexicons and genres motivated by a particular concern with finding new forms for history and memory in Kenya. In contrast the writing coming out of Farafina and Cassava Republic Press is less formally innovative, but is instead engaged in creating spaces and forms for history and memory within narratives themselves that reflect a particular moment of cultural production. In each case these different emphases link in part to the structure and remit of the organization: Kwani Trust’s emphasis on creating new forms of writing comes out of their conception as both a publisher and a literary network concerned with developing new writers and communities, whereas Farafina’s emphasis on finding new spaces for conversation about the writers they publish reflects a stronger focus on building audiences for Nigerian literature.
As the collection of essays and special issue of *Research in African Literatures* edited by Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome (Okome and Newell 2012, Newell and Okome 2014b) marking its 25th anniversary attest, since the publication of Karin Barber’s ‘Popular Arts in Africa’ (Barber 1987), much of the most significant scholarly work focused on cultural production in Africa has built on the frameworks developed in this article and positioned itself in relation to ideas of popular arts or culture. Barber’s article emphasized the need to study popular arts in Africa through their ‘network of relations’ (Barber 1987, 1) – the conditions surrounding artistic production and an awareness of the ‘crucial constitutive role’ (Barber 1987, 39) of the audience. Through this article Barber constructs popular arts as a category characterized by fluidity and elasticity, located within the spaces of the urban, the unofficial and in syncretic forms (Barber 1987, 1). She emphasizes that traditional, popular and elite ‘must not be taken as empirical classes of cultural products,’ that each of these are ‘expressive fields’ with different pulls and concentrations of styles of expression rather than fixed categories (Barber 1987, 19).

Crucially for this study, Barber shows how the syncretic quality of popular arts is rooted in cultural brokerage. She describes popular arts as ‘constructed by cultural brokers’ who are ‘facing two ways’ in society and drawing on elements from ‘two different bodies of cultural resources’ (Barber 1987, 39). Using the conceptual frame of the literary network, which enables me to map connections between geographies and with earlier generations of writers, I argue through this thesis for the role of Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press as cultural brokers that face in multiple directions – both across the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ spaces of culture in Kenya and Nigeria, as well as outwards to like-minded publishers on the continent and the world literary space. In what follows I show how by self-consciously playing with literary form and emphasizing print publication, both individual writers, as well as Kwani Trust, Kachifo and Cassava Republic Press as publishers, deliberately draw attention to these texts as offering a particular form of materiality and position this alongside and in dialogue with other forms of materiality in Kenyan and Nigerian popular culture and memory. By mapping these processes, I argue it is possible to make visible alternative literary geographies and show the significance of Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press in creating the foundations of a pan-African literary network out of which the space, value and texts of 21st century African Literature in English are being made material. Through this I develop models that could productively be applied to range of texts and geographies and bring a more genuinely ‘wordly’ lens to ways in which literature is produced and received.
Popular Memory: Where is the Past Located in Kenya?

In Andia Kisia’s ‘A Likely Story’, Professor Kimani, who has been imprisoned, tortured and exiled for his writing on Dedan Kimathi, is invited back to Kenya to lead the national hunt for the Mau Mau leader’s grave (Kisia 2003). The short story’s narrator is glimpsed only in relation to the professor: a fellow teacher at the university and drinking companion who is relieved when Prof. Kimani is sent away as it avoids the confrontation of having to ‘leave him’ (83). On the Professor’s return to Kenya, this ‘friend’ picks him up at the airport, and then a year after Kimani’s death performs the ‘small service’ of telling this story of the trip’s failure to produce the bones that might have sustained a nation and validated his life work.

Through ‘A Likely Story’, published in the first edition of the Kwani? journal, Kisia draws attention to the unreliability of history and memory, and the multiple ways in which the past in Kenya has been erased, appropriated and constructed. The value of history as an academic discipline is called into question; Prof. Kimani surrounds himself with his books and has dedicated himself so single-mindedly to trying to write and locate Kimathi that it has cost him his family, but after forty years this has ‘yielded little result, unless misunderstanding or generalized suspicion be considered results’ (74) with his subject remaining ‘inscrutable, enigmatic, hidden behind a carapace of truths’ (76). The narrator shows how Prof. Kimani’s vision of Kimathi is constructed by removing ‘accidents of chance, miscellaneous imperfections (though human) and any other inconvenient facts’, and that while the Professor writes novels that are read by hundreds of thousands outside Kenya, inside the country he is not recognized by those he considers his audience (82). Kisia questions not only the value and reliability of the work of the historian, but the primary and secondary sources on which narratives of history are based. The walls of the national archive are decorated with the ‘paraphernalia of forgetfulness’, displaying faded pictures of assassinated politicians with ‘dates of birth and dates of death for each as well as convenient lack of elaboration as to the method (of dispatch)’ (77). Kisia creates a powerful image of a nation’s history not only being neglected but also being deliberately hidden or manipulated, showing the archivists physically eating their way through ‘inconvenient texts’ leaving behind only ‘half masticated’ pages and indigestion (80-1). When Prof. Kimani and the narrator try to find what they are looking for outside the national archive and in oral accounts, their source has ‘had enough of his brains being
picked and the pickings fashioned into tales that were no longer recognizable to him who
had told them’ (81).

Set in its year of publication, as Kenya celebrates forty years of independence, ‘A Likely
Story’ is concerned to explore the particular relationship between the past and the
construction of an idea of nation over this time. Kisia’s story shows the nation founded
both on its first president Jomo Kenyatta’s call for a silencing of the past in order to unite
Kenya – ‘forgive and forget’ (78) – and on a series of ‘badly built monuments to self-
indulgence’ as Kenyatta instead ‘planted the seeds of his own remembrance’ across the
country in the names of buildings and streets (76). The hunt for Kimathi’s grave by a new
government, around which the narrative is constructed, is positioned as an act of
remembrance while also forming part of a larger erasure of memory – an attempt to
’redirect the collective bile to other targets’ (82). Strikingly, no one is left blameless in this
process, and Kisia’s narrator argues for the collective responsibility of history and hero
making: ‘In this we are accessories. We allow the fantasy to outweigh the facts’ (77).

Andia Kisia’s ‘A Likely Story’, and its publication in the first issue of the Kwani? journal in
2003, brings into view many of the central concerns driving this chapter, which explores
the ways in which Kwani Trust has opened up new forms and spaces for cultural memory.
I argue that the editorial agenda of, as well as the work of some of the most prominent
voices associated with Kwani Trust as a literary network (including Andia Kisia, Parselelo
Kantai, Billy Kahora and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor) reflects a particular preoccupation
with historiography – the ways in which memory and history are constructed and take
form as texts. I explore the different ways that these writers confront and explore the
questions so powerfully raised by Kisia in ‘A Likely Story’ about where knowledge about
Kenya’s past is located, who history is produced by and for, and memory’s relationship to
literature and material form. Building on Jan Assmann’s framing of collective memory as
made up of ‘cultural memory’ and ‘communicative memory’, and putting this in dialogue
with texts that explicitly draw on Kenyan popular culture and memory to bring new forms
to literature, I characterize this group of writers as concerned with making hidden
histories material.

PART I: Memory making

The term ‘cultural memory’ was brought into use by the German Egyptologist Jan
Assmann as a way of nuancing Maurice Halbwachs’ term ‘collective memory’. Halbwachs’
seminal work had made visible the way in which individuals ‘recall, recognize, and localize their memories’ within frameworks determined by society (Halbwachs 1992, 43). Building on this, Assmann argued that collective memory was made up of two interrelated forms of remembering: communicative memory and cultural memory (Assmann 1995). Communicative memory was defined as having its basis in ‘everyday communication’. Assmann highlighted that while conventions regulate these exchanges, communicative memory can be characterized as having a ‘high degree of nonspecialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability, and disorganization’ (Assmann 1995, 126). He also distinguished communicative memory as being limited in its temporal horizon with no fixed point to locate it ‘in the ever expanding past in the passing of time’ (Assmann 1995, 129). In contrast, cultural memory was defined through its rootedness in fixed points in the past, referring to the way in which the memory of a particular time or event is maintained through cultural formation and institutional communication with ‘formation’ and ‘organization’ as central to this process. Assmann defines cultural memory as ‘objectivised culture’ – a body of ‘texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities, or even landscapes’ through which a particular society constructs its identity and relationship to the past (Assmann 1995, 128). It is in creating a connection to a sense of collective identity – equally evident in communicative memory - that cultural memory is distinct from history (Assmann 1995, 128). Assmann emphasizes that the dynamics of cultural memory, which are negotiated differently across time and place, are concerned with ‘transformation and transmissions’ particularly between communicative memory and cultural memory. Over this chapter I will argue for the ways in which this process of transformation and transmission is central to the intervention of these literary texts published by Kwani Trust in the ‘formation’ and ‘organization’ of cultural memory. The close readings of writing by Parselelo Kantai, Billy Kahora and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor that follow will both build on and problematize the distinctions that Assmann draws between communicative and cultural as two forms of making memory.

In order to consider how Kwani Trust might have opened up new forms and spaces for cultural memory, it is important to position their engagement with history and memory in Kenya as contributing to a larger conversation. A preoccupation with what Dan Ojwang has called a ‘crisis of historicity in Kenyan political culture’ (Ojwang 2009, 36) and Lotte Hughes has called ‘a crisis of collective memory’ in Kenya (Hughes 2011, 183) has been evident in the media and in academic debates across the period the Kwani? journal has been publishing. For example, in a scholarly article also published in 2003 entitled ‘Mau Mau & the Contest for Memory’, Marshall S. Clough explores the same elusiveness and
manipulation of Mau Mau memory that drives Kisia’s ‘A Likely Story’, describing how Kenyatta endorsed a ‘policy of amnesia’ and examining the ‘crisis of memory’ that followed (Clough 2003, 256, 268). Reflecting on research coming out of her 2008-2011 AHRC-funded research project ‘Managing Heritage, Building Peace: Museums, memorialisation and the uses of memory in Kenya’, Lotte Hughes notes that this ‘orchestrated amnesia’ extended beyond the independence struggle and:

continues to cloak myriad subjects such as Moi’s tyrannical rule and legacy, political assassinations, detention and torture during the Kenyatta and Moi eras, land grabbing by elites, corruption on a lavish scale, and so on (Hughes 2011, 187).

She importantly highlights that most Kenyans recognize this and ‘it is the subject of almost daily debate in the media’ (Hughes 2011, 187), with these debates intensifying in the aftermath of the violence that followed Kenya’s 2007 election. Again resonating with Kisia’s ‘A Likely Story’, in this particular article Hughes draws attention to the way in which the suppression of memory continues and co-exists with a ‘flowering of Mau Mau memorialisation’ (Hughes 2011, 183, 186).

Kisia’s ‘A Likely Story’ and the first edition of the Kwani? journal were published in print in the immediate aftermath of Mwai Kibaki, leader of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), being elected president at the end of 2002. Kenya’s previous incumbent Daniel arap Moi had been in office for twenty-four years and his presidency had come to be associated with a time of corruption and repression. The journal was therefore launching at a moment when the Kenyan electorate was hopeful that the ‘breadth and unity’ represented by the new NARC government offered ‘an opportunity for real change’ (Branch 2011, 249) – and, as the introduction to Rethinking Eastern African Literary and Intellectual Landscapes observes, Kwani? was therefore ‘born in a context of freedom and political transition’ (Ogude, Musila, and Ligaga 2011a, xi). Significantly then, the journal was publishing at a time when a new political regime signalled the possibility of discourse about the past in Kenya, and in particular its suppression and manipulation, being able to transition from informal or popular spaces to more formal public spaces. For example, James Ogude (Ogude 2007) and Joyce Nyairo have both shown how, operating ‘outside the scheme of official control’, popular music had since independence been a space where Kenyan history could be documented and ‘radically different readings of the past’ could be offered (Nyairo 2005). As I will explore through this chapter, this negotiation of a transition or, to use Assmann’s language, a ‘transmission’, between Kenyan popular culture and literary form, therefore became critical to Kwani Trust’s particular intervention in cultural memory.
The end of the Moi era signalling an opening up of space for public discourse, as well as for cultural production to engage with the past, is evident not just in the launch of Kwani Trust but a renaissance of civil society-led heritage initiatives (Hughes, Coombes, and Karega-Munene 2011, 176), the establishing of multidisciplinary arts space The GoDown Arts Centre in Nairobi in 2003 (GoDown Arts Centre 2016), and the founding of Ketebul Music in 2007 to document and archive music from the region ‘over the past six decades’ (Ketebul Music 2016). Notably, in 2007 Joyce Nyairo, who had taught for twenty years in the Department of Literature, Theatre and Film Studies at Moi University and whose own research focused on the relationship between popular music and memory, became a programme officer for the Eastern Africa Office of Ford Foundation. Ford Foundation, a private foundation headquartered in New York and ‘guided by a vision of social justice’ (Ford Foundation 2016), had provided the grant that enabled Kwani Trust to establish an office and launch the *Kwani?* journal in print in 2003 (Kwani Trust 2003). In her five years working at Ford Foundation, Nyairo created a bridge between her scholarly work and creative practice by initiating and continuing to support a series of projects and organizations in the area of media and memory, which she specifically termed ‘cultural memory projects’ (Nyairo 2015, 2011). These included Ketebul Music’s ‘Retracing Popular Music’ series, an art project at the Goethe Institut called ‘Amnesia’ that engaged with the cultural consequences of cultural memory loss, two new series of biographies around women’s lives and sporting lives, as well as encouraging Kwani Trust to do more ‘looking back’ by supporting the 2010 Kwani? Litfest themed around ‘Tell Us What Happened’ and staging conversations between different generations of Kenyan writers (Nyairo 2011).

As Hughes highlights, the nature of conversations about memory and the past in Kenya shifted and intensified when the euphoria of 2002 turned out to be misplaced and the 2007 Kenyan election resulted in ethnic violence, the death of over a thousand people and the internal displacement of over 400,000 more (Njogu 2009b, 2). Nyairo and Ford Foundation again played an active role in these conversations, for example enabling and funding a series of fortnightly debates at the Goethe-Institut under the title ‘(Re)membering Kenya’ over the summer of 2008. These debates were curated by Mbugua wa-Mungai of Kenyatta University’s Department of Literature and George Gona of Nairobi’s University’s Department of History and Archeology, and were intended to open up a space where scholars could share research and analysis that might help understand ‘how the country’s history had cut a sure path for those tragic events’ and ‘re-engage meaningfully with the Kenyan public’ at a time when universities were actively discouraging staff from speaking out about politics (wa-Mungai and Gona 2010, 18-19).
The papers presented became the chapters of a three volume *(Re)membering Kenya* book series published by Twaweza Communications. Nairobi-based Twaweza Communications was founded in 2000 by academic Kimani Njogu with the mission to ‘increase public information and action’ (Twaweza Communications 2016) and was another institution that became actively engaged in a range of projects and publications that responded to the post-election violence. These included the books *Healing the Wound: Personal Narratives About the 2007 Post-Election Violence in Kenya* (Njogu 2009a) and *Defining Moments: Reflections on Citizenship, Violence and the 2007 General Elections in Kenya* (Njogu 2011b), again funded by Ford Foundation, and concerned with documenting and making a deliberate intervention in how the post-election violence will be remembered. Njogu describes being driven by a sense that the state should not be allowed to be ‘the only one that interprets events’ and the importance of also taking into account ‘the hardly sought sources’ which reflect multiple voices and alternative viewpoints (Njogu 2011a). As I will go on to discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, the fifth edition of the *Kwani?* journal was framed as a ‘collective narrative on what we were before, and what we became, during the epochal first 100 days of 2008’ (Kahora 2008a), and the events of the post-election violence were also significant in shaping the form of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s novel *Dust* (Owuor 2013a). Seen in the context of this wider engagement of donor-funded cultural production in Kenya with questions of history and memory, driven in different ways by both the 2002 and 2007 elections, it becomes evident that this chapter needs to move beyond either characterizing as innovative or examining the reasons why Kwani Trust’s literary output reflects a preoccupation with the past. Instead this chapter explores what the particular contribution of Kwani Trust and of literature might be to the mediation and form of cultural memory within this larger environment.

*Finding form: Kwani Trust*

Kwani Trust’s engagement with the ways in which the past is constructed as history and memory in Kenya can be characterized as working across three interconnected forms of text. Firstly, several of the writers most prominently associated with and validated by Kwani Trust have shown an ongoing concern with using fiction to uncover hidden histories and explore the problematic construction of the official narratives of Kenya’s history. For example, Andia Kisia has been published in five of the eight editions of the *Kwani?* journal to date, and from 2005 was being prominently celebrated on Kwani Trust’s website for having first been published in *Kwani?* and gone on to be awarded a fellowship by the Royal Court Theatre in London (Kwani Trust 2005). Kisia had three pieces included
in Kwani? 2 (Wainaina and Kalondo 2004), all of which in different ways explored silences in the narratives of Kenya’s past. Her short story ‘1982’, referencing the year of an attempted coup in Kenya, is the narrative of a policeman responsible for logging (and then adopting) the clothing and personal effects of prisoners from the large number of arrests that followed this event (7-24). Equally, as I’ve highlighted, the success of Parselelo Kantai, one of Kwani Trust’s founders, in being shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2004 is celebrated through the website and print edition of Kwani? 2 (Kwani Trust 2005). His shortlisted story ‘Comrade Lemma & the Black Jerusalem Boys Band’ (Kantai 2004) follows Comrade Lemma, once the lead vocalist in a popular neighbourhood band and composer of ‘Joka’, a song that first becomes synonymous with the liberation movement and is then banned in the first year of independence, who is ‘discovered’ living in obscurity on the eve of the nation’s 40th anniversary by Careful Love condoms and in a complex case of mistaken identity becomes honour as a national hero. In a 2006 article for The East African, Kantai powerfully argues that knowledge about Africa’s past needs to be produced not by Western academics but on the continent, and that ‘people who import their histories are doomed by the failure of their own imaginations’ (Kantai 2006, 249). He concludes by declaring repossession of the ‘territory’ of history as ‘the new frontier for the African intellectual’ (Kantai 2006, 249) and his own fiction, which he describes as ‘an attempt to re-engage with an official or public Kenyan history’ (Kantai 2011), can be considered as a response or ‘contribution’ (Musila 2014, 250) to this.

Secondly, Kwani Trust as an institution has made deliberate attempts to support the research and writing of a range of non-fiction accounts or histories of people, events or spaces that have not previously been documented in literature or print. For example, Kwani? 01 (Wainaina 2003b) included ‘The Life and Times of Richard Onyango’ – a coming of age story of one of Kenya’s most successful artists, focusing on the relationship that inspired much of his subsequent artistic production, as told to Binyavanga Wainaina (174-209). The first piece of writing commissioned by Kwani Trust as a full length book and published outside the journal was Kizuizini, a memoir by Joseph Muthee of his time in British detention camps during the Mau Mau struggle, written in Swahili (Muthee 2006). This was followed by Billy Kahora’s non-fiction novella The True Story of David Munyakei (Kahora 2008c), a part of which had previously appeared in Kwani? 03 (Kahora and Wainaina 2005) and explores the previously untold story of the Goldenberg whistleblower.

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13 A very similar sentiment is expressed by former COO of Kachifo Simidele Dosekun, who observes that the misrepresentations of Nigerians and Nigeria by being published through others and elsewhere means ‘we have thereby to an extent lost touch with ourselves, our histories, culture and realities’ (Otas 2010).
who saved Kenya’s economy from collapse and his subsequent journey into obscurity. Kahora became Managing Editor of Kwani Trust in 2008 and placed particular emphasis on developing the genre of creative non-fiction as a way to document the 2007 elections in *Kwani?* 05 (Kahora 2008a, b). Kwani Trust has received particular critical acclaim in Kenya for its non-fiction interventions, with *Kizuizini* and *Tale of Kasaya* (Kasaya 2010), the memoir of domestic servant Eva Kasaya which goes ‘behind the closed doors of the Kenyan urban family to reveal spaces that we all recognize but refuse to acknowledge’ (Kwani Trust 2016c), both being recognized by Kenya Publishers Association’s biennial Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature.

Finally, in ways that echo and complement Kwani Trust’s use of non-fiction to document political history, everyday life and cultural production, the early editions of *Kwani?* in particular brought together a range of forms from Kenyan popular culture including interviews, email correspondence, old photographs and song lyrics that had not previously been widely available in print. *Kwani? 01* for example featured a series of photos by Marion Kaplan entitled ‘Scenes from the Past’ including images of Kenya’s first Vice-President and subsequent opposition leader Jaramogi Oginga Odinga at a rally in 1966 and the assassinated Tom Mboya in his coffin in 1969 (Wainaina 2003b, 48-50). These photos were followed directly by Binyavanga Wainaina’s interview with Kalamashaka - a Hip-Hop group changing the Nairobi music scene at that time by breaking across an East/West class divide, rapping in Sheng and combining ‘hard hitting lyrics with poetic social messages’ (Wainaina 2003b, 54) which looked back to the past and advocated for change: ‘Tell me who would be the first to say the word harambee? Dedan Kimathi or Mzee Jomo Kenyatta?’ (Kalamashaka 2003). The issue also confronted and explored the ways in which stereotypes move through popular cultural forms by reproducing and responding to an email widely circulated among Kenyans entitled ‘Vain Jango’ (Wainaina 2003b, 103-112). The original email, in a mix of English, Swahili and Sheng, is from an anonymous Luo man reflecting on meeting a woman in a Nairobi bar who he thinks has ‘some serious bootie’ until he hears her ‘rural Okuyu accent’ (Wainaina 2003b, 104, 106). *Kwani 01* republished this alongside what Grace Musila describes as a ‘biting reply’ (Musila 2014) from the perspective of the unnamed woman, composed by Binyavanga Wainaina and Muthoni Garland. This representation of a diversity of forms from Kenyan popular culture was equally evident in *Kwani? 03* which included photos of both Dedan Kimathi (Kahora and Wainaina 2005, 5) and a newly married couple taken in

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14 The *Kwani?* journal has also consistently published poetry, although this has been less central to the organization’s editorial agenda and dialogue with history and memory and so remains outside the scope of this chapter.
1963 at Venus Studios on Victoria Street (now Tom Mboya Street), noting in the caption ‘many services on Victoria Street were not available to black Africans until 1963’ (123); the lyrics of several members of the music collective Ukoo Flani Mau Mau (of which Kalamashaka were part) presented as Sheng poetry (167-190); and pages and covers reproduced from 1975 and 1976 editions of the Kenyan literary magazine *Joe*.

What I want to show over this chapter is that the interactions between these three forms of text – literary fiction, creative non-fiction and extracts taken directly from the archives or present of Kenyan popular culture – are critical to Kwani Trust’s intervention in cultural memory. Billy Kahora has emphasized Kwani?’s concern to respond to things that ‘it felt were absent on paper and in text’, characterizing an important function of Kwani Trust’s work as ‘putting forward popular memory against official memory’ (Stasio 2012). In part therefore the commissioning of this content was driven by a desire to document or make publicly available a range of different images and narratives from Kenya’s past or present that Kwani Trust felt were absent from ‘official and formal public texts’ (Kahora 2007, i). So, for example, according to Kahora, the photo of Dedan Kimathi that acts as a frontispiece to *Kwani? 3* is significant because the only images of Kimathi that had previously been widely circulating in Kenya were of him in a hospital bed having been captured by the British colonial government (Kahora 2016). However, the reason that I argue for Kwani Trust’s editorial agenda and writers reflecting a preoccupation with historiography, rather than history, is that I want to emphasize the ways in which these publications reveal intention not just to document but question and explore how memory and history are constructed and validated as texts. In bringing together a range of different forms from Kenyan popular culture, and putting these into print alongside literary fiction, Kwani Trust makes visible the forms in which histories characterized as hidden already exist. Through the next two parts of this chapter, I want to explore the different ways in which this process is echoed in the literary form of fiction and non-fiction published by Kwani Trust. Part 2 develops close readings of Parselelo Kantai’s ‘Comrade Lemma & the Black Jerusalem Boy Band’ and Billy Kahora’s *The True Story of David Munyakei*, exploring the way in which these texts draw on different forms of Kenyan popular culture. By putting Assmann’s conception of cultural memory in dialogue with Karin Barber’s definitions of ‘popular arts’ (Barber 1987), I argue for Kantai and Kahora as engaged in the construction of popular memory. Part 3 builds on this idea of popular memory to further explore the role of the writer and of literature in relation to memory-making. Focusing on the ways in which Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust* writes grief, this final section of the chapter argues for the novel as engaged in finding literary form for
memory and shows how Owuor uses intersections between private and public space to develop new narratives, images and lexicons for remembering Kenya’s past.

The use of the term ‘hidden histories’ puts this chapter in deliberate dialogue with Karin Barber’s edited collection *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and the Making of Self* (Barber 2006a). Here Barber brings together scholarly work exploring what she describes as a social phenomenon ‘happening all over colonial Anglophone Africa’ – the widespread practice of ‘do-it-yourself archiving’ or keeping a variety of innovative printed and handwritten texts, from letters to diaries to obituaries hidden in boxes or ‘tin trunks’ under their beds (Barber 2006b, 2-3). In defining cultural memory Assmann is keen to stress that the distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory does not equate to a distinction between oral and written texts (Assmann 1995, 131). However, while what Assmann makes clear is that texts can be formalized as cultural memory without becoming part of a system of written knowledge production or print, what Barber’s work instead usefully focuses attention on are the ways in which the everyday or communicative memory find form in writing or print. Significantly for what follows, through these hidden histories she reveals a blurring of lines between the public and private spheres, and the ways in which public and private spaces can be ‘joined through the creative development of those new genres of writing poised on the interface between the two’ (Barber 2006b, 18). Across the close readings of texts that follow, I argue that these writers succeed in finding new literary forms for history and memory through their engagement with an opposite but aligned process – writing published in print that is similarly ‘poised’ or constructed on the interface between communicative memory and cultural memory, private and public space, popular culture and literature.

**PART 2: ‘Let Me Tell You’**

Billy Kahora’s editorial which frames *Kwani? 04* begins with the line ‘Let me tell you...’ (Kahora 2007, i). Kahora uses this as a starting point to reflect on Kenya as a ‘storytelling space’ and describes how ‘in bars, in matatus, churches, estate corners’ he continually meets individuals that introduce themselves with the line ‘let me tell you’ before holding him ‘spellbound’ with ‘another incredible narrative’ (Kahora 2007, i). He suggests that it is in these spaces that ‘a version of the truth on most national or local matters’ can be found, while making clear that his repetition of the word ‘incredible’ has been deliberate:

And though the facts matter, it is the inducement of commonality, a feeling that I share enough with a stranger to care about a shared narrative, to believe the unbelievable, the improbable version; that is what makes me feel more Kenyan
than anything else (Kahora 2007, i).

Kahora argues in this editorial that these stories not only ‘tell about the nature of the Kenyan condition’, but are what ‘helped keep it together’ through the ‘grim’ years of Moi as Kenya’s economy was eroded by the Goldenberg scandal (Kahora 2007, i, iii). He laments twice across the piece that ‘these narratives never find their way into our official and formal public texts’, alongside emphasizing that these stories are ‘the reason why we at Kwani? do what we do’ (Kahora 2007, i, iii). E.S. Atieno Odhiambo has drawn attention to the way in which, as a result of the tight control of public institutions and absence of space for formal opposition in Kenya, a democratic space has instead been carved out in the informal spaces of funerals, ‘the peoples’ republics in the matatus,’ religious organizations, football, popular music and bars (Odhiambo 1987, 200-1). These spaces, characterized by Odiambo for their ‘vigorous forms of political consciousness’ (Odhiambo 1987, 201), are the spaces Kahora highlights as sites of storytelling and national truths.

As recent studies of East African popular culture have highlighted (Nyairo 2007, Ogude and Nyairo 2007b, Ogude, Musila, and Ligaga 2011b), it is as a result of the dynamics Odhiambo describes that a vibrant popular arts scene has emerged in Kenya which can be characterized through its creativity, innovation and energy, as well as offering ‘one of the very few vehicles...to negotiate complex issues of power away from the watchful eye of the state’ (Ogude, Musila, and Ligaga 2011a, viii). In Binyavanga Wainaina’s very first editorial launching the Kwani? journal, he begins by referencing the ‘creative energy’ of popular arts in Kenya from the Hip-Hop of Ukoo Flani Mau Mau to Joga’s art exhibition ‘all around the streets and alleyways of Eastleigh and Mathare’ (Wainaina 2003a, 6). He describes this creative expression in terms of an ‘aesthetic’ and articulates that it is the Kenya reflected in these spaces ‘that Kwani? is all about’ (Wainaina 2003a). This idea of Kwani? aspiring to an aesthetic which has its roots in Kenyan popular culture is developed in Billy Kahora’s editorial to Kwani? 03. Kahora narrates how a group of writers who came together to develop content for this issue discussed ‘how to make what they were writing reflect the language of the Kenyan street, the Kenyan shamba, the Kenyan bar, and of course the language of the Kenyan family’ and how their ‘holy grail’ - inspired by Kenyan musicians like the collective Ukoo Flani Mau Mau – became ‘to write as Kenyans speak, live and breathe’ (Kahora 2005, 6). What all three of these editorials foreground is that a relationship to Kenyan popular culture has been central to Kwani Trust’s editorial agenda, both in terms of drawing attention to the histories and narratives that circulate in these spaces, but also the development of aesthetics and literary form. This raises important questions, which have also been brought into view by Grace Musila and Tom Odhiambo
(Musila 2014, Odhiambo 2011), about Kwani Trust’s relationship to the categories of ‘local’ and ‘popular’, and particularly how this sits alongside the organization’s emphasis on establishing connections and recognition beyond national borders. This chapter uses the frame of cultural memory to nuance the complex dynamics of creative exchange, appropriation and validation involved in Kwani Trust’s engagement with both popular arts and the world literary space.

Comrade Lemma & the Black Jerusalem Boys Band

Parselelo Kantai’s ‘Comrade Lemma & the Black Jerusalem Boys Band’ and Billy Kahora’s The True Story of David Munyakei are both texts in which an engagement with public history and memory is constructed and validated through the storytelling spaces that Kahora describes. In his article declaring the repossession of history as the new frontier for the African intellectual, Parselelo Kantai highlights that ‘Andia Kisia’s ‘A Likely Story’ in fact turned out to be alarmingly prescient. Just a year after its publication, the newly elected NARC government declared their intention to find Kimathi’s remains and give him a hero’s burial (Branch 2010, 313-4). Kantai describes how a similar farce to that described in ‘A Likely Story’ ensued when, despite various witnesses coming forward and staged attempts being made to find his grave, ‘nobody can actually remember where Kimathi was buried’ (Kantai 2006). Kantai’s ‘Comrade Lemma & the Black Jerusalem Boys Band’ builds on an interrelated and similarly disastrous attempt by the NARC government to appropriate and legitimate the history of Kenya’s struggle for independence (Kantai 2011). The Lemma from which the story gets its title is Lemma Ayanu, a man brought to Kenya from Ethiopia, ‘feted in front of the cameras and the press’, and presented as the ‘long lost Mau Mau hero’ General Mathenge (Kantai 2011). However, during this government-funded visit (Branch 2010, 313-4), it quickly becomes apparent that, despite his wife having ‘joyously confirmed that this was truly her long lost husband’ (Kantai 2011), this man is not General Mathenge but an elderly Ethiopian farmer. Kantai has explained how in writing ‘Comrade Lemma’ he wanted to explore the ‘territory of collective amnesia that produces all these farcical dramas’ (Kantai 2012) and through this prompt a questioning of the silences in Kenya’s history and the different narratives that lie behind and emerge from these (Kantai 2011).

In Kantai’s story, Comrade Lemma is a ‘founder of the liberation struggle’ whose name, placed alongside that of ‘Dedan Kimathi Waciuri and ‘General Mathenge’, can only be

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15 Hereafter referred to as ‘Comrade Lemma’
whispered (210). Despite this overt silencing, Kantai shows how Comrade Lemma remains a figure that looms large in the popular imagination, dominating childhood games of war and used as a threat by mothers: 'if you don't come in now Comrade Lemma will come and take you to the forest and eat you up' (210). At the age of '15 or 16' (211), the story’s narrator, inspired by 'forbidden faraway songs' (210) he can make out through the static of his mother's shortwave radio, writes the song 'Joka' which, in its description of workers from all over Kenya making their way to 'this camp for slaves' (211) called Nairobi, captures something that resonates with this particular moment in emergency or independence-struggle history and has 'people weeping and clapping, weeping and clapping' (213). As a platform to perform the song, the narrator invites himself to join the neighbourhood band the 'Black Jerusalem Boys Band' and takes the name 'Comrade Lemma'. The haunting image of the 'bullet-ridden torso' (211) of the real Comrade Lemma has just appeared in the East African Standard, but the narrator explains his decision to adopt his name is less as a mark of respect for this man and the struggle he represents, of which his father has been a victim, but a practical decision to conceal from his mother 'that her son was a bar-room singer on Saturday nights' (213).

In this story Kantai shows the multiple ways in which the narrator's identity as Comrade Lemma and the song Joka are rewritten and appropriated. For a time Comrade Lemma and the Black Jerusalem Boys Band perform every Saturday night at Mr Ben's, with Joka always played last 'as it keeps the customers drinking' and Mr Ben's paunch growing 'steadily bigger' (213). The narrator explains how 'rumours about me grew' with speculation that he is a 'Mau Mau leader disguised as a musician' or 'actually a South African' (213). While as Kenya becomes independent Joka is being discussed as a contender for the national anthem, by this time Lemma has been 'cut loose from the song' (213): Mr Ben has become uncomfortable and paid the band off, enough to 'transform me into a vegetable dealer', and the band's original singer Humphrey, who hearsay suggests ends up working as a music librarian at the Voice of Kenya, takes credit for writing the song as it starts getting radio airplay (213, 221). Within a year of independence the song is banned and Lemma reports 'it was said that' this was because the lyrics had annoyed the new president (213).

The present tense in which the story is set shows Lemma forty years later, as he is brought out of his house on the shoulders of a delegation from the community all singing Joka and presented with the newspaper headline 'Comrade Lemma Found: Independence Musician and National Hero Lives in Nairobi Slum Squalor' (214). It is Marehemu George, a second
hand clothing salesman turned agent for Careful Love condoms, who it turns out is behind the staging of this event and the press conference that follows, attended by the Minister of Culture and set against the backdrop of a poster declaring 'Careful Love Condoms Supports the Search for a National Hero' (220). In the story’s final scene it becomes apparent that Comrade Lemma the musician has become conflated with Comrade Lemma the liberation hero, and as Lemma sits on a stage next to the Minister he hears a fabricated history of his time spent in detention camps and the deaths of the other band members ‘in the service of the nation’ (221-2). Lemma, trying to make sense of this event not as a welcome act of recognition but as a further act of misrecognition and appropriation, begins screaming 'I am not Comrade Lemma, Comrade Lemma is dead' and a riot ensues.

Kantai writes this explosion by Lemma, which goes against the script of this public event, as emanating from the silencing and manipulations of history that have defined his last forty years: he finally remembers the verse of Joka that has long eluded him and seizes the microphone to share:

the sound of an old man who is speaking out after so many decades of silence...fading in and out as if from a well that is being opened and shut (222).

What Kantai powerfully brings into view, through the multiple layers of this story’s narrative, is the variety of different spaces through which knowledge about the past and a ‘version of the truth’ is constructed. Popular music - from the hypnotic Congolese guitar rhythms Lemma spends sleepless nights straining to hear in his youth to the teenage poets whose ‘rapid verses’ (211) document his current life beside the sludge and stench of the river – is shown to have the power to capture a particular time and place, even as it equally remains open to being commercialized or taking on meanings that work against the creator’s original intentions. Often the information that Kantai shows to be most meaningful is hearsay and restricted in its circulation to the informal spaces of community or family, from the ‘stories of the quicksand torture of the prison camps’ (211) only told during nightmares, or to Marehemu George’s late father who ‘always talked about’ (217) Joka even when it was banned. In contrast, the narratives of public archives, institutions of state power and the media are all shown to be unreliable, a point vividly made by the contrast between the false account Lemma gives the police about ‘his understanding of the riot’ as caused by a pick-pocketing incident (222) and the quite different and complex histories that culminate in this as narrated through the short story itself.

It is striking that the dynamics this story examines, with rumour seen to have more validity than the narratives developed through formal or official public spaces, very much
resonate with the dynamics of ‘cultural productions of truth and knowledge’ described by Grace Musila in her study *A Death Retold in Truth and Rumour* (Musila 2015). Musila examines the variety of different narratives that surround the murder of British tourist Julie Ward in Kenya in 1988. As her research powerfully shows, in this case the disciplines traditionally associated with the production of knowledge and truth – science and the law – become compromised and unreliable as a result of their embeddedness within the ‘institutions of the postcolonial state’ (Musila 2015, 117). In response, ‘parallel “courtrooms” of the grapevine’ (Musila 2015, 111) develop in what Kahora describes as Kenya’s ‘storytelling spaces’ and Musila shows how ‘rumour’ is then able to fill in and examine the gaps left by science and law, constructing a ‘version of the truth’ with significantly more legitimacy and credibility. Notably, Musila describes the credibility of these rumours as rooted not only in their imagining of the events that took place but in their subversion and comment on state power, and the ways in which they are constructed through a sophisticated process of:

weaving together pieces of information from a range of archives, and allowing their multiple verdicts to circulate across the gaps left by the institutions of the postcolonial state (Musila 2015, 118).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Musila has also been drawn to engaging with Kantai’s work and its relationship to the past, using strikingly similar language to characterize this as participating in creating ”archives of the present‘ in so far as it weaves together and validates fragments of Kenyan histories’ (Musila 2014, 247). Reading Billy Kahora’s *The True Story of David Munyakei* in dialogue with Kantai’s ‘Comrade Lemma’, I want to explore how Musila’s concept of ‘archives of the present’ and its connections to her work on rumour’s relationship to Kenyan cultural productions more broadly might equally be used to illuminate the work and agenda of other contemporary Kenyan writers and through this Kwani Trust’s relationship to cultural memory.

*The True Story of David Munyakei*

In ‘Comrade Lemma’, the involvement of Careful Love condoms in staging Lemma’s reinvention as a Mau Mau hero not only adds humour to the story but a further layer of irony. Lemma has in fact been engaged in a campaign to draw attention to the environmental problems caused by the condoms Marehemu George has been distributing, which ‘end up clogging our already overworked drains’ and floating on and further polluting the river which the people are depending on for their ‘domestic needs’ (216). It is as a result of visiting Lemma’s house for a discussion about water pollution that
Marehemu George spots a photo of the band and starts the train of events that turns Lemma into the face of Careful Love condoms (217). Kantai shows that Lemma, as the writer of a song which captures a nationally significant moment in the social imaginary, and an environmental activist in a community of the city’s newest immigrants, which has even been named Kwa Lemma after him as their longest standing resident (216), has elements in his narrative through which he could be constructed as an heroic or iconic national figure. However, as the story shows, these are not the elements of his narrative that are validated by the state or the media. In the questioning Kantai prompts about the political and commercial interests that drive the construction of national heroes, ‘Comrade Lemma’ has striking parallels with Billy Kahora’s The True Story of David Munyakei (Kahora 2008c).

Another symbolic attempt by the newly elected NARC government to position themselves as representing a break with the past was the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry into Goldenberg. Ten years earlier David Munyakei had lost his job at the Central Bank of Kenya after sharing documents with opposition members of parliament that provided evidence of the deliberate looting of public funds through the company Goldenberg International – halting a fraud that is estimated to have cost the Kenyan economy over 600 million US dollars (Kahora 2008c). In 2003 Munyakei testified before the Goldenberg Commission and in 2004 he was recognized for his ‘courage and integrity’ with an award from Transparency International, an international NGO that self-defines as ‘the leading non-governmental organization fighting corruption worldwide’ (Transparency International Secretariat 2004). Billy Kahora’s The True Story of David Munyakei focuses for the most part not on the circumstances that lead to Munyakei exposing this scandal, but how as a result of these actions he is forced into a life spent out of view and in poverty, a situation that remains fundamentally unchanged following these acts of public recognition.

The True Story of David Munyakei is constructed from Kahora’s own experiences of spending four months with David Munyakei in 2004 and interviews conducted during this period with Munyakei himself, his family and friends (Kahora 2008c). The book is positioned by Kahora and Kwani Trust as a ‘non-fiction novella’ (Kwani Trust 2016d), reflecting primarily a practical rather than an artistic decision: the Goldenberg scandal involved a range of Kenya’s most senior political figures and, as Kahora has commented, ‘the difference between non-fiction and fiction really is that you can get sued for one and not the other’ (Kahora 2011b). Still, the form Kahora chooses for this narrative remains
innovative, working in ways that bear striking similarities to Musila’s description of the space of rumour as ‘weaving together pieces of information from a range of archives’ and ‘allowing their multiple verdicts to circulate across the gaps left by the institutions of the postcolonial state’ (Musila 2015, 118). The narrative begins with David’s ‘flight to Mombasa’ from Nairobi in December 1993, and the scene of his arrival is written in evocative detail from the bus’s turnboy who removes his shirt ‘to expose a bony chest’ to the ‘furtiveness’ of Munyakei’s walk as he exits the bus station to the ‘crumpled piece of paper’ in his pocket with the name and phone number of a potential employer at Standard Newspapers Mombasa (20). The first part of the book then tells the story of Munyakei’s four years in Mombasa with his bachelor lifestyle, ongoing hunt for secure employment, conversion to Islam and marriage to Mariam Ali Muhammad Hani told through voices and perspectives that move through Kahora as narrator, to David himself, his best friend Peter Kariuki and his wife Mariam. Kahora makes very visible the interviews that his account draws on, directly referencing the sources of particular insights ‘Kariuki describes the young David as well groomed, intelligent, confident and street-smart’ (22), while also including lengthy quotations within the text:


Across the book Kahora frequently quotes from his interviews with Munyakei’s wife Mariam, usually sharing extracts in Swahili and then offering a translation in English through the narrative that follows.

Unable to secure stable employment in Mombasa, Munyakei is forced to move his family back to the place he grew up – rural Olokurto – where they begin to make a living as farmers. Part 2 of the book is framed through Olokurto and describes Munyakei’s experiences of both living there as a child and moving back there with Mariam, where they end up living with his grandmother. The narrative again has a multi-vocal quality, with Kahora sharing insights and perspectives drawn from interviews, including those with Munyakei’s brother and ‘first-hand account[s] by the oldest living Munyakei family member, David’s grandmother Milka’ (37). These accounts are often used to offer different perspectives – for example David and his grandmother, who is Kikuyu, express the view that they lived outside of the predominantly Maasai community in Olokurto, while his brother reflects ‘We were Maasai through and through...Even though we didn’t
pierce our ears and wear blankets’ (42). Alongside this, Kahora also starts to become a stronger authorial presence in the book, as he makes evident that the descriptions of setting are now written out of his own experiences of spending time in Olokurto with Munyakei:

On this river of dust, all the way stations you pass look the same; you wonder what was going through Mariam’s mind as the young family made this final passage on their exodus from Mombasa in 1998 (46).

Part 3 of *The True Story of David Munyakei* moves back in time to Munyakei’s employment at Central Bank, before the remaining four parts and the epilogue of the book move forward to his appearance before the Commission, recognition by Transparency International and the impact of these events on his way of life before he passed away in 2006. Throughout the novella Kahora continues to weave together interview material and pieces of information from multiple archives, including photographs and a copy of a letter sent in January 2004 to Central Bank from a lawyer employed by Transparency International requesting Munyakei’s reinstatement as an employee. At the story’s most critical moments Kahora again chooses to let the characters speak for themselves. He shares a four page ‘unedited transcript of David Sadera Munyakei’s recorded account of what took place from the time he discovered something was wrong in the Department he worked for, then exposing it and being arrested’ (58) which finishes with the words in bold ‘End of David’s testimony’ (63). The book’s final part ends with a two page ‘transcript’ (notably just in English even though previously her voice has been shared in Swahili) of Mariam’s account of her husband’s ‘journey from sickness to death’ (117).

Reflecting on his reasons for having invested in developing the genre of creative non-fiction at Kwani Trust, Kahora observed that he felt ‘social conversation’ and ‘rumour’ were being lost in the production of other genres (Kahora 2015c). Alongside material drawn from personal accounts, the rumours that surround the Goldenberg scandal and Munyakei’s dismissal from Central Bank also form part of the narrative of *The True Story of David Munyakei*. Munyakei’s brother describes how when David was arrested he had heard through ‘Fununu za Nairobi’ (64), Nairobi gossip, that confidential information had been leaked from Central Bank but ‘we did not connect the two’ (64). Kahora explains that in the 1990s when a banker was arrested, in the popular imagination ‘it could only mean one thing – fraud’ (64). He therefore brings into view that, even though Munyakei was offered protection by the Maasai community in Olokurto, until he testified ‘word all over the countryside was that Munyakei had stolen from the Central Bank’ (71). He highlights that given the strong ethical structures of the Maasai nation this meant day-to-day he was
a figure ‘to be despised’ in his home environment (71). What Kahora shows here is not rumour in this instance being able to construct a more accurate version of events, but the ways in which the stories circulating about Munyakei in informal spaces are hugely significant to how he is able to live his life – from having to flee Nairobi and become invisible in Mombasa, to his daily interactions with a community he was both part of and distanced from in Olokurto.

The literary form of Billy Kahora’s *The True Story of David Munyakei* could be described as shape-shifting: it is a non-fiction novella that begins with a ‘Cast of Characters’ and a timeline; the author moves in and out of visibility over the book; and images and direct transcripts from conversations are similarly woven in and out of factual reflections and evocative descriptions of moments in Munyakei’s life. The novella’s form seems to echo Munyakei’s own fluid and shifting identity, and I want to suggest is reflective of Kahora’s concern to not only document Munyakei’s life, but to examine the ways in which history and memory are constructed and take form as texts. Kahora powerfully shows how ‘truth is appearance’ (28) as Munyakei shifts names, accents and values across the places in which he moves, with this shape-shifting characterized as what enables him to survive. Kahora describes how Mariam, although she distinctly remembers being ‘taken aback’ (23) by David’s Baraa (inland) accent which is very foreign to Mombasa when they first met, is able to convince herself two years later, when he wants to marry her, that he is ‘a Mbarawa, a Coastal person of Somali origins’, as this is more socially acceptable to her family (28). This ability to seemingly move between identities, to not only change the version of Swahili he speaks with Mariam’s parents, but much later in KBC radio broadcasts to be able to ‘slip into a Maasai Swahili of such guttural authenticity’ that even his wife hardly recognizes him, becomes part of how Munyakei is able to ‘negotiate his celebrity status’ (86).

Kahora shows how even in hiding, Munyakei retained his faith in the institutions of postcolonial state power: he actively wanted to testify and believed that eventually those behind Goldenberg would be brought to justice and he would finally be rewarded for having provided the physical evidence, carefully kept and concealed for ten years, that enabled this to happen (70). But this faith turns out to be misplaced, with many officials acquitted for their role in Goldenberg and Munyakei forgotten by the Kenyan media who are not interested the ‘an ordinary Mwananchi’ but instead the ‘Big Man’ Pattni, who co-owned Goldenberg International, and becomes a cult hero (72). There is little change in Munyakei’s material, daily realities as an Olokurto farmer following his appearance at the
Commission or his award from Transparency International, apart from an increased respect within the community which translates into the expectation that he might be able to buy drinks or slaughter a goat (82). However, Kahora describes how, alongside this, Munyakei is still able to be ‘transformed’ into the figure of ‘hero’ for his trips back to Nairobi, changing into ‘The Suit’ he leaves at the Transparency International office – ‘Navy blue, sky blue shirt and tie sprinkled with what looked like herons’ (88). And yet as Munyakei wears ‘The Suit’ and gets more symbolic recognition – an award from the Kenya Human Rights Commission, Kahora’s account of his life is published in Kwani? 03 and begins being serialized in the East African Standard – he becomes increasingly desperate for this to also translate into financial recognition.

Kahora’s ‘true story’ powerfully draws attention to the ways in which despite his publicly recognized heroic act for the national good, Munyakei remained at odds with the political and commercial interests that drive the construction of national heroes in Kenya. For the state, and even Transparency International and Kwani Trust, after 2005 ‘everyone wanted him to belong to the past’ (110). On the novella’s title page appears the strapline ‘To be Kenyan and survive, you need to be a Shapeshifter’ (1) and in Kahora’s account it is this ability to shape-shift and survive that is painted as Munyakei’s heroic quality. This heroic quality is positioned as reflecting a broader Kenyan Mwanchi experience, and in this Kahora’s writing of Munyakei resonates with the figure of the jua kali artisan that Joyce Nyairo constructs as a metaphor for Africa’s urban ethnicities and cultures – a figure whose ‘genius lies in the ability to appropriate and rework whatever resources are available to him’ (Nyairo 2007, 147). Yet, in some ways it is Munyakei’s essence as Kenya’s ‘Everyman hero’, expressed through an ability to creatively shape-shift and survive, that means he can’t be turned into a ‘sound bite on KTN and Nation TV’ and be ‘plant[ed] into the Kenyan psyche’ (95). The tragedy of the story Kahora tells is that Munyakei can only truly become a national hero once he has passed on from an illness that begins as gum disease but becomes more complicated as his family are unable to afford the medication or medical care he needs (117). Reflecting on those who have preceded David Munyakei – Dedan Kimathi, General Mathenge, Bildad Kaggia - Kahora laments that the most significant factor in the construction of the Kenyan hero, a hero that can ‘be texted, to enter the written historical record of Kenya’, is epitomized in a failure of recognition on the part of the State (122).
Making popular memory material

Grace Musila explains how in using the phrase ‘archives of the present’ in relation to Kantai’s writing, she very deliberately binds together what might initially appear to be opposite terms (Musila 2014, 247). Through the term ‘archive’, with its associations of recording the past within the frame of ‘institutionalized recordkeeping’, she signals Kantai’s work as engaged in a process of indexing, validating and recording social histories (247). With the term ‘present’ she signals that the fragments of Kenyan histories which his writing is engaged in indexing are those that often remain outside of official archives, ‘because they are either too inconvenient or too “everyday” to warrant recording’ (247).

As a phrase which works to describe an indexing and recording of the past that simultaneously reflects history and its implications as a ‘living presence’ in contemporary Kenyan life, I want to suggest Musila’s phrase ‘archives of the present’ can equally be used to effectively illuminate Kwani Trust’s intervention in cultural memory more broadly. It is a phrase that speaks not only to the processes engaged in by the editors of the Kwani? journal in bringing together multiple forms from Kenyan popular culture, from photographs to emails to music lyrics, but also the engagement with and validation of forms drawn from popular memory in the fiction and non-fiction of other writers associated with Kwani Trust including Billy Kahora and, as the final part of this chapter will explore, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor. Musila describes Kantai’s fiction as a site of ‘acknowledgement, recording and contestation of these transient histories and public memories’ (247). As I’ve shown, in different ways both Kantai in ‘Comrade Lemma’ and Kahora in The True Story of David Munyakei engage with the public construction of memory and particularly the figure of the national hero, contesting this through their writing and validating of the tensions and histories these official narratives work to conceal. Musila’s own research on rumour stresses that in a socio-political climate where state institutions have lost credibility, the varied and conflicting informal accounts of the past – developed in spaces noted by Odhiambo and Kahora for their capacity for democracy and storytelling respectively – become a more legitimate archive of cultural memory and history (Musila 2015). Reflecting this, in ‘Comrade Lemma’, Kantai makes evident both that it is those narratives that haven’t found form in the histories produced by the media or the state that are most reliable or meaningful, and shows the need to explore and record the impact of a continual manipulation and re-appropriation of the past on the spaces and texts of collective memory. In The True Story of David Munyakei, Kahora works to record and index the life of David Munyakei, while bringing into view, through the range of perspectives and forms he draws on, that a version of the truth can
only be captured by reflecting the ever-shifting nature of his subject. Musila emphasizes the significance of rumour as a ‘forum to comment on state power’ (Musila 2015, 89), whereas what Kahora shows and equally validates is rumour as a form of history with a living presence in everyday Kenyan life whose impact on daily-lived realities needs documenting and exploring.

Strikingly, both the idea of rumour as an archive and of these texts as engaged in creating ‘archives of the present’ problematize Assmann’s distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory. If the ‘everyday’ and transient storytelling spaces of communicative memory – the bar, the matatu, the church or the estate corners – become an archive through which a credible narrative of the past can be constructed, how can communicative memory and cultural memory be defined as separate concepts distinguished through their differences from one another? In part what this question brings into view is the genesis of Assmann’s conception of these two forms of memory-making in his own work on ancient Egypt; for Assmann communicative memory has a time structure of roughly one hundred years or three to four generations, whereas the objects of cultural memory he studies were produced thousands of years ago (Assmann 2010b, 117). His work therefore does not directly address the blurred lines or dynamics of transmission between communicative memory and cultural memory where these two forms co-exist. Martin Zierold has even argued that some of the problems that have emerged for building a robust critical terminology and shared framework for the field of memory studies more broadly have been caused by taking for granted that the term cultural memory ‘is equally suitable for the comprehensive explanation of present societies’ (Zierold 2010, 401). Musila’s essay ‘Archives of the Present in Parselelo Kantai’s Writing’ was published as part of Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome’s collection of essays marking 25 years following the publication of Karin Barber’s seminal article ‘Popular Arts in Africa’ (Barber 1987). Musila’s essay takes Barber’s original essay as a starting point to examine how Kantai and what she calls the ‘Kwani? generation of writers’ are ‘pushing the outer edges of popular arts in interesting directions’ (Musila 2014, 246). Arguably a problematizing of Assmann’s distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory can productively be read not just through these particular texts published by Kwani Trust, but further back through Barber’s original definitions of African popular arts.

In framing her article ‘Popular Arts in Africa’, Barber notes that the study of African popular texts has been pioneered by historians, highlighting in particular the work of
Terence Ranger (Barber 1987, 3-4). She observes in the context of this that when people are ‘denied access to official media’ then songs, jokes and anecdotes may become the ‘principal channel of communication’ (Barber 1987, 3) and in turn the way in which people can ‘preserve memories by formulating them’ (Barber 1987, 4). Throughout this intervention where Barber emphasizes African popular arts as unofficial, fluid, syncretic and shifting, she is concerned to argue that the study of popular arts still needs to be grounded in recognizing these art forms as having ‘their own conventions’ (Barber 1987, 36, 39). It is in the finding of form and meaning, continually negotiated in collaboration between arts and audience, that ‘real experience is transformed, articulated, and made communicable’ through popular arts (Barber 1987, 53, 34). While Barber does not use the term herself, Newell and Okome’s edited collection foregrounds the relationship between popular arts and ‘the everyday’, and in particular the documentation, construction and transformation of the everyday as collective cultural articulations (Newell and Okome 2014a, 3,14). What this body of work establishes is that African popular culture is fundamentally engaged in the processes Assmann describes as characterizing cultural memory – creating a form for shared knowledge through which a group derives a sense of collective identity and relationship to the past. Nonetheless, these processes of formation are intimately connected to and produced through everyday experiences and activities, when for Assmann ‘cultural memory is characterized by its distance from the everyday’ and the everyday communication of communicative memory is characterized by its ‘formlessness’ (Assmann 1995, 129, 127). In fact, Barber’s defining categories for African popular culture raise a whole series of problems for the distinctions Assmann draws between these two forms of memory – from his positioning of producers of communicative memory as non-specialists (126) to cultural memory as requiring organization and ‘institutional buttressing’ (131).

However, while keeping these tensions firmly in view, in foregrounding a relationship between cultural memory and everyday communication – even one that it fails to effectively nuance – I want to argue that Assman’s work offers a useful reference point for trying to articulate both Kwani Trust’s particular engagement with the past and the term ‘popular’. Musila begins her discussion of the Kwani? generation’s relationship to the term ‘popular’ through Binyavanga Wainaina’s editorial in Kwani? 01. Here he not only celebrates the creative energy of popular arts in Kenya but associates this with innovation and ‘the new’, emphasizing that this enables the development of an aesthetic that:

will not be donated to us from the corridors of the university; or from the ministry of culture, or by The French Cultural Centre. It will come from the individual creations of thousands of creative people (Wainaina 2003a, 6)
Musila notes the echoes that reverberate across this piece with Barber’s emphasis on popular arts as unofficial and ‘free to operate between established cultural systems without conforming to their conventions’, and as having an ‘air of novelty’ because of the way in which they ‘combine elements from the traditional and the metropolitan cultures in unprecedented conjunctures, with the effect of radical departure from both’ (Barber 1987, 13). Musila productively uses this traditional-elite continuum set up by Barber to explore the ways in which the writing and agenda of Kantai, and of Kwani Trust more broadly, ‘straddles’ an already blurred popular-canonical divide (Musila 2014, 245-6). In particular she notes how Kwani Trust’s ‘connectedness to the wordscapes of London, Paris, New York and Cape Town’, its position as a middle-class Nairobian project whose primary audience is other middle class Nairobians and the dependency of its activities on support from donors based in the global North, can simultaneously form part of an interrogation of the concept ‘popular’ as well as the ‘network of relations’ (Barber 1987, 1) out of which this writing is ‘widening the horizons of popular literary practice in Kenya’ emerges (Musila 2014, 251-2, 262-3).

As I have highlighted, Barber emphasizes that traditional, popular and elite ‘must not be taken as empirical classes of cultural products’ and that each of these are ‘expressive fields’ with different pulls and concentrations of styles of expression rather than fixed categories (Barber 1987, 19). Stephanie Newell makes this vividly apparent by showing how from a ‘local, reader-centred perspective’ there is little distinction made between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ West African novels, and that ‘the complexity of African literary discourse’ is undermined by ‘defining “literary” texts over and against “popular” novels’ (Newell 2000, 158). Agreeing with Musila’s claim for Kantai’s fiction as ‘widening the horizons of popular literary practice’ (Musila 2014, 263), I use Barber’s framing of the continuum between ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ to explore further Kwani Trust’s relationship to the ‘canonical’ and cultural memory – drawing attention to some of the tensions in Kahora’s claim for Kwani? as putting forward ‘popular memory against official memory’ (Stasio 2012).

As this chapter has shown, in different ways the Kwani? journal and the work of individual writers associated with it, including Parselelo Kantai and Billy Kahora, has been concerned with finding new forms in literature for histories absent from official and formal texts (making material in the sense of giving physical substance to), while simultaneously drawing attention and bringing cultural value to those histories in their existing or popular forms (making material in the sense of giving significance). Pivotal then to Kwani
Trust’s position on the continuum of, or perhaps at the interface between, the official/canonical and the popular is what Barber calls the ‘network of relations’ (Barber 1987, 1) or what Bourdieu calls the ‘network of relations of exchange’ (Bourdieu 1995, 230) through which texts are produced or consecrated with cultural value. Musila argues that Wainaina is claiming ‘absolute independence from both the academy and patron institutions’ and that this is compromised by Kwani Trust receiving funding from the Ford Foundation and Doen Foundation (Musila 2014, 251). I want to argue instead that Wainaina does not intend to position Kwani? outside of these structures of value, but to highlight that the aesthetic this new magazine was striving for was one rooted in Kenyan popular culture, an aesthetic that existing institutions of culture – from the university to government to external funders of the arts industry – were out of touch with and not validating. This idea of existing institutions of culture as having ‘lost touch’ is reflected in the ‘About Us’ section of Kwani Trust’s 2005 website, which celebrates the success of having sold 5000 copies of the journal in a context where many educators and publishers were lamenting Kenya’s lack of reading culture, commenting:

> what we have found is that the literary intelligentsia, together with African publishers and founders of literary projects have lost touch with a new generation of Africans who are sick of being talked down to; who are seeking to understand the bewildering world around them – to be validated in print (Kwani Trust 2005).

Instead, as this thesis explores, Kwani Trust has from the outset been very conscious of the multiple structures of value through which texts produce meaning, and made deliberate interventions with this in mind. When Kahora writes that certain narratives are absent from ‘official and formal public texts’ (Kahora 2007, i), he is referring not just to obvious silences in the media or forms of knowledge controlled directly by state power, but the ways in which an orchestrated national amnesia has also prevented a diversity of narratives being made evident in cultural production validated as literature and knowledge production validated as history. Reflecting on his interest in a recovery of collective memory, Kantai notes that media platforms ‘were not just limited, they were also very transient’ whereas ‘fiction’ and publication through Kwani? ‘suggested some kind of permanence’ (Kantai 2012). As I will explore further in Chapter 5, the medium of print became crucial to this idea of permanence and validation, with Kahora commenting that documenting the 2007 election through Kwani? 05 came about because he and Wainaina felt strongly ‘we need to put something down that can be looked at after a while. It might not say everything, we just need to actually record this in a book’ (Kahora 2011a).

As the introduction to this thesis explores, in part as a result of the partial histories and literature being validated in the national space, Kwani Trust deliberately pushed for
recognition in the ‘world literary space’ (Casanova 2004, xii). However, alongside this emphasis on relationships and recognition by literary institutions across the continent and in the UK and US, while having provoked antagonistic debates between writers and the academy in the local media, as an organization Kwani Trust has continued to actively pursue relationships with the space of the university and government in Kenya. In a 2013 article published in the Nation, Kingwa Kamencu reflected that it was ‘refreshing’ to see part of Kwani Trust’s 10th anniversary celebrations hosted at ‘academic institutions’ University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University, suggesting this pointed ‘to the current cordiality between the former rival groups’ (Kamencu 2013). While their relationship to the academy has undoubtedly shifted over time, lectures and public discussions at the University of Nairobi have always formed a regular part of the Kwani Litfest programme, with the launch edition in 2006 bringing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Doreen Baingana, Ishmael Beah, M.G. Vassanji and Binyavanga Wainaina to University of Nairobi’s Taifa Hall. Equally an ‘Editor’s Rant’ by Wainaina published in Kwani? 01 laments that after winning the Caine Prize neither he or Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor received any acknowledgement from the Ministry of Culture. This piece perhaps reflects Kwani Trust’s position outside of and as challenging ‘official’ structures of value; framed as a dialogue it argues that Kalamashaka or Richard Onyango ‘should be recognized for the groundbreaking work they do’ and asks whether to expect ‘the usual choirmasters, and praise-singers to be in the front line of our government’s art agenda?’ (Wainaina 2003b, 233). Still, again it shows a desire for, rather than a rejection of, the cultural value associated with recognition by the state:

Now I may be sounding much like I want fame or fortune or medals or something. No – I am simply disturbed by the refusal of our government to take what we are doing seriously. After all, they are OUR government. Like many of a new generation, I am disturbed by the way our efforts seem not to matter (Wainaina 2003b, 233).

There are certainly ways in which the dynamics I’ve described here partially work against some of the ways in which Barber characterizes ‘popular arts’. The intention to index and document the past, and to draw on structures of value that enable the creation of something with permanence, that ‘can be looked at after a while’ (Kahora 2011a), could not be described as operating within the ‘aesthetics of immediate impact’. Similarly, I would argue the conventions Kwani Trust draw on to ‘construct their meanings and communicate with their audiences’ are rather than ‘are not’ publicly legitimized; the literary magazine in print is a form with a place in Africa’s publishing history and world literary space which since the 19th century has been associated with drawing together a range of genres and artefacts from popular culture (Patten 2006, 360). And yet Barber’s
endlessly evasive, expressive field of ‘popular arts’ is critical to understanding the publishing of Kwani Trust, and in particular its relationship to history and memory.

Barber shows how the syncretic quality of popular arts is rooted in cultural brokerage, describing popular arts as ‘constructed by cultural brokers’ who are ‘facing two ways’ in society and drawing on elements from ‘two different bodies of cultural resources’ (Barber 1987, 39). The programme for the 2006 Kwani? Litfest provides a useful shorthand that spotlights Kwani Trust’s position as a cultural broker: the launch event for the festival on Thursday 14 December featured artist Richard Onyango whose ‘Life and Times’ had appeared in *Kwani? 01* and a DJ-set from Chimurenga’s editor Ntone Edjabe, with Rafael Tuju, Minister of Foreign Affairs, billed as a guest speaker (although this appearance was cancelled); the following day public lectures taking place at the University of Nairobi by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Doreen Baingana and Binyavanga Wainaina were framed under the title ‘African Writers on the Global Stage’ (Pambazuka 2006). As this thesis explores in more detail, Kwani Trust positions itself as a cultural broker that faces in multiple directions – both across the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ spaces of culture in Kenya, as well as outwards to like-minded publishers on the continent and the ‘world literary space’. What I want to suggest is that even though Barber’s definitions of popular arts might problematize Assmann’s distinctions between communicative memory and cultural memory, her work offers a model to position these concepts not as fixed categories but as expressive fields. This brings into view a continuum of communicative-cultural memory in which, as this chapter has shown, Kwani Trust is able to act as a cultural broker in a space that I will now call ‘popular memory’.

**PART 3: Finding form for popular memory**

Jan Assmann developed the terms communicative memory and cultural memory in dialogue with his wife Aleida Assmann. Michael Rothberg observes that while their work has acknowledged that inherent in ‘official archives and repositories of memory’ are forms of exclusion that work across class, gender and race, their conception of cultural memory has not ‘generally sought to uncover alternative archives or seek out non-canonical memory traditions’ (Rothberg 2013, 364). Perhaps in part in an attempt to address this, more recently Aleida Assmann has written about cultural memory as a process of forgetting alongside remembering and distinguished between ‘canon’ and ‘archive’ as two forms of remembering within cultural memory (Assmann 2010a, 99). The distinction she draws here between the ‘canon’ as an active form of cultural memory which is consciously selected, collected and circulated, and the ‘archive’ as a passive store house of culture
(Assmann 2010a, 99) perhaps offers a useful nuance to the communicative-cultural memory continuum and how this might be used to read Kwani Trust's relationship with Kenyan popular culture. When Kwani Trust publishes Ukoo Flani Mau Mau's lyrics as Sheng poetry or uses Joga's street art to create cover designs for the Kwanini series, a deliberate attempt is being made not only to document but to consciously canonize these popular art forms and move them outside of the existing structures through which they produce knowledge and are validated. These exchanges simultaneously validate Kwani Trust's own position within Kenyan popular culture, although in moving this art across an East/West divide to be published by and circulate to the Kenyan middle class it could also be considered as an act which appropriates the creative energies of a space that more genuinely represents the 'popular'. However, what I have been concerned to find a theoretical framework to draw attention to is the way in which the Kwani? editorials and the writing of Parselelo Kantai and Billy Kahora reflect a concern to document and find a form for Kenyan popular culture as literature and history, which makes visible and validates the forms in which this ‘archive’ already exists. While these texts strive to make a deliberate intervention in the 'canon', the way in which they are constructed and their aesthetics show literature and history as representing only one form of art or knowledge production. Through this they challenge the idea of a fixed cultural memory distanced and distinct from the everyday and communicative memory, opening up instead new forms and spaces for a popular memory that moves and shifts between the storytelling spaces of the bar or matatu and print.

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor has similarly been concerned to bring into view the ‘archive’ of memory that exists in Kenya. In the final part of this chapter I show how Owuor’s particular innovation has been in developing, and drawing attention to a search for, new literary forms that reflect this archive as well as memory's movement across a continuum of communicative-cultural memory. Owuor is one of the original group of writers from which the idea and impetus for Kwani Trust emerged, and her story 'Weight of Whispers' was published in the first edition of the Kwani? journal in 2003. Her first novel Dust was published ten years later and the launch of this formed part of Kwani Trust’s 10th anniversary celebrations.

Like Kisia's 'A Likely Story', Dust is a novel preoccupied by the destructive legacy of Jomo Kenyatta's call for a silencing of the difficulties of the past in order to build an independent and united Kenya. Dust shows the novel’s patriarch Aggrey Nyipir Oganda and his generation struggling with this erasure, 'shouting out the words of the national anthem' in
the vain hope that the volume of this will shield his children from the sorrows, silences and betrayals of the past and present (Owuor 2013a, 30). *Dust* opens with Nyipir’s son Odidi being shot down on the streets of Nairobi by the Kenyan police, an event that is set against the backdrop of the violence that followed Kenya’s 2007 elections and that sparks the book’s unraveling of silences and hidden histories. For Nyipir, his son Odidi’s death at the hands of the state is directly connected to a larger history of death and his shattered hopes for the new nation of Kenya.

The idea of silences and hidden histories pervades *Dust’s* form and content, from the repetition of the words ‘silence’, ‘quiet’, ‘hidden’ and ‘buried’, to the references to ‘not seeing, not hearing’ (28) or ‘keeping mouths, ears and eyes shut’ (30) that jar with Owuor’s sensory descriptive language, to the stutter of Nyipir’s daughter Ajany. While the Oganda family live in the drylands of northern Kenya outside the institutionalized spaces of the Kenyan state, Owuor shows these silences as ingrained in the structures of nation and family; ‘a habit that spread across the nation’ is also ‘the family habit of silence’ (82). Alongside the pervasive idea of silencing, *Dust* repeatedly asks the question ‘what endures?’ and, like Kantai, is concerned with where traces of the past remain visible, even when seemingly erased by official and formal public texts. The novel’s repeated line ‘Kenya’s official languages: English, Kiswahili and Silence. But there was also memory’ (286) seemingly offers an answer to this question, strikingly echoed by Owuor in interview:

> even if you’re in charge of the grand story there’s still memory. The other stories do not go away’ (Owuor 2014b).

In what follows I explore the way in which through both the story the novel tells and the language in which it is told, Owuor also creates ‘archives of the present’ (Musila 2014, 247). I argue that in this case these archives are constructed from the writing of grief and that through this Owuor shows the traces of the past located in a variety of differing and interconnected forms of private and public space.

*Locating Memory and Grief: Ajany*

In *Dust*, although Nyipir’s trauma is unspoken, it remains written not only on his body and the landscape but also on his daughter Ajany. Ajany chooses to leave Kenya and search for her ‘elsewhere’, in order to escape the ‘noisy weight of a hundred silent terrors’ (126-7). She seeks refuge in art because she is unable to express herself in words without stuttering. Throughout the novel Owuor interweaves Nyipir’s retreat into the ghosts of his
memories prompted by Odidi's death with Ajany's grief as she returns to Nairobi to search for her brother. I want to suggest that Ajany's grief is articulated and represented in the novel through three distinct but interrelated forms of memory-making.

Firstly, Owuor writes Ajany's grief through the body and sensory experience: from her recurrent nosebleeds that begin when she sees his body in the mortuary (48) to her 'chapped lips, bitten through' (190); from the acne that covers her face and neck, to the 'midriff-splitting sorrow' that knocks her to her knees (188). Dust repeatedly paints memory as lived and physically written on the body, so even when Nyipir's memories remain unspoken, the past is marked through his deformed hands 'jagged with wounding' (p. 303) from torture, and in shivers and shakes (72, 73, 318). She also draws attention to the ways in which memory shapes everyday perceptions of space, with Ajany's grief for Odidi finding form in a nostalgia for the childhood experiences that defined their relationship and closeness: when she looks at the night sky she still sees Kormaddo, the sky camel Odidi showed her (73), and she still leaps out of bed trying to avoid Obarogo the blind bogeyman Odidi scared her with stories about (149).

Secondly, drawing attention to the need for these embodied memories to find form across communicative and cultural memory, Owuor shows how Ajany's grief operates in the realm of material space. She performs her grief by physically trying to locate Odidi, putting up flyers that advertise him as a missing person and meeting his university tutor and former work colleagues to ask where he might be – even though she has seen and touched his corpse. She finds the spot where he was killed and washes the blood off the pavement, she writes and publishes his obituary, and she travels from Nairobi to her family home, Wuoth Ogik, with flowers to lay on the cairn Nyipir has built for his body. While over the novel Owuor shows each character grieving very differently for Odidi, their interactions and grief continually reveal the importance of finding a space for material acts of memory and the ritual of grief. Just as the hidden histories of tin trunk literature reveal a blurring of the boundaries of public and private space (Barber 2006b, 18), a similar blurring takes place in relation to the expressions of grief and memory Owuor describes. The novel emphasizes the relationship between naming and memory, repeating the line 'to name something is to bring it to life' (40, 264). Nyipir tries to memorize and even write down the names of those he has seen buried in unmarked graves (286, 318) and at the end of the novel Petrus only finds peace or ‘silence’ by speaking the names of the dead he has borne witness to (384). Part of Ajany's performance of grief then also involves naming as a form of making memory material: she etches Odidi's name into the walls of the red cave.
(113); when Justina tells her she is expecting Odidi’s child her response is needing ‘to speak his name’ (204); and in the map she draws for Odidi’s unborn child she writes his full name Moses Ebewesit Odidi Oganda under his cairn (257). As I will go on to explore, Owuor draws on the lived sensory experience of grief and memory marked on the personal space of the body to develop new forms of language and cultural memory; equally here she shows how acts of ritual and cultural production can be deeply personal and only find public form as cultural memory through subsequent acts of mediation.

Finally, Owuor shows Ajany’s grief for Odidi finding form through her art. Ajany is an artist and the first chapter of *Dust* begins: ‘Here. She could paint this’ (23). This phrase is repeated throughout the novel, as Owuor shows Ajany using drawing and painting ‘in order to see’ (48). She discovers art at eleven years old as a ‘new way of speaking what clamored inside her’ and witnesses its power when her parents destroy her first canvases because they see in them ‘secret nightmares’ and ghosts (56). Following Odidi’s death, Ajany pastes images of him on her wall and ‘draws tales she has heard’ as she searches for him in Nairobi (187). Over the course of the novel she creates a sculpture for Isaiah of his missing father Hugh Bolton and watercolours for Nyipir of his father and brother, who never returned from war in Burma, drawn from ‘shades of longing’ within his voice (381). In a lecture given at Kenyatta University to celebrate the book’s launch, Owuor explained that:

> In the story of *Dust*, the main female character, Ajany Oganda, confronted by the horror of concealed national realities unveiled through her brother’s death learns to draw and calls forth new images and stories in which to live (Owuor 2013b).

Owuor goes on to highlight the significance of the moment at the end of the novel when Nyipir ‘asks her to paint a way out for the whole family’ (Owuor 2013b) that ‘shades even death in’ and ‘forgiveness’ (381).

*New narratives and forms of expression*

I want to suggest that the project of calling forth ‘new images and stories in which to live’ is not just Ajany’s concern in *Dust*, but a central concern of the novel. Owuor emphasizes the value of creative expression and its relationship to memory, not just through Ajany’s art but also through music: when Ali Dida Hada listens to Ajany singing Tigrinya water songs he can hear the voice of his mother (254) and Baba Jimmy teaches Nyipir how to turn ‘old stories into songs without words’ with his mouth organ (165). The novel repeatedly stresses the importance of both memory and loss finding a form in which they
can be expressed, through images, words, sounds and the imagination, even as it explores the challenges of this. The Trader recounts the story of the death of his family to the d’abeela, ‘because an unshared story can break a heart that carries it alone for too long’ (135). Both Nyipir and her mother Akai find healing in talking to Ajany about the trauma of their pasts, although their narratives are shown to be partial and incomplete: all Nyipir tells Ajany of his torture is ‘Nineteen sixty-nine was a very hard year’ (316) and ‘Akai will not speak of how Hugh’s blood spattered them’ (371).

Owuor’s writing itself reflects this concern with creating new narratives and forms of expression. In her lecture at Kenyatta University, Owuor powerfully argued that:

Over the years we have drained our national lexicon of words and images that describe, depict or explain our epic moments, our triumphs, our tragedies, our holocausts (Owuor 2013b).

I want to argue that in its use of language and form, Dust represents a deliberate attempt to explore the possibilities of finding a new lexicon for writing about Kenya’s past. This is similarly reflected in Keguro Macharia’s reading of the novel, which argues that Dust is replete with moments ‘when we realize incompleteness of narratives and images we had imagined stale’ (Macharia 2014). He points to the image of Odidi’s grieving mother Akai cradling a gun and wearing a khanga, saying ‘this image arrests me, undoes me, remakes sense-worlds, vision-possibilities’ (Macharia 2014). Out of the narratives unspoken in public memory or absent from official archives that Dust shows marked on the body, Owuor develops a multisensory language and vocabulary. Owuor colours in Ajany’s ‘landscapes of loss’ with writing that repeatedly draws on the senses from the ‘thunder in Ajany’s ears, acid on her tongue’ to the ‘longing to hear his particular voice, listening for echoes of bloodied footsteps, borrowing dead eyes to help her find him again’ (174, 23). Her descriptions across the novel are visceral and very often bodily with Nyipir ‘trying not to scratch himself out of his skin’ (180) after collecting the remains of Aloys Kamau and Odidi’s absence a ‘deep-frozen clot’ within Ajany’s heart (299). Reviewers have responded to this aspect of Owuor’s writing, with Taiye Selasi commenting ‘This language sweats. It bleeds…Owuor’s style evinces a rare and brave choice: to feel, and to make her readers feel, to strand us from our intelligence’ (Selasi 2014) and Binyavanga Wainaina writing ‘Yvonne Owuor’s prose can burn your skin off’ (Wainaina 2014b). This reaction to Owuor’s writing resonates with Zoe Norridge’s claim that literature is uniquely suited to explore the complexities and singularity of pain (Norridge 2013). As Norridge argues in relation to Yvonne Vera, I want to suggest that Owuor’s attention to the senses in her writing is a form of ‘aesthetic innovation’ that creates ‘new systems of meaning –
vocabularies, grammars and image libraries of emotion' (Norridge 2013) to express the particular intimacy of pain.

Owuor’s writing in *Dust* is built on devices often associated with poetry: the use of sensory detail, alongside fragmented and repeated sentences and images. Parselelo Kantai’s review of *Dust* in *The East African* describes the novel’s writing as ‘poetry’ twice (Kantai 2013). I want to suggest that memory taking form through poetry in the novel is critical both for the ways in which the novel explores new narratives and modes of expression and its finding form as popular memory. Short sentences, or strings of words and images that form incomplete sentences recur through the novel and create evocative imaginaries: ‘Heat, dust, and hope; murmurs and songs; whistling, laughter, and spare words’ (124). These imaginaries are often deeply rooted in the everyday: ‘Agrovet centers, rubble and tattered clothes, Gospel enterprises, Mutigwo Iganjo Hotel, street vendors selling tomatoes, shoes, Jesus- Mary- and- Joseph clocks, and windshield wipers. A school sports field’ (187). Owuor continually uses repetition, of phrases – whether across a short section such as ‘fog – amalgam of mistlike griefs’ (35-36) or across the novel as a whole with ‘what endures?’ or ‘she could paint this’ – and of images – such as the ‘batleur eagles – prophet birds’ (9. 24) or ‘doum palms’ (46, 85). Through this she creates for the reader familiar shared reference points and new collective forms of expression.

Anne Whitehead’s work emphasizes the recurring literary techniques, including ‘repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice’, that novelists draw upon to ‘mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma’ (Whitehead 2004, 84). The relationship of Owuor’s *Dust* to history and memory could certainly be read through Cathy Caruth’s theorizing of trauma as making possible a resituating of history that allows for erasures, experiences that are ‘not yet fully owned’ (Caruth 1995, 151) and incomplete narratives, and of trauma as permitting ‘history to arise where immediate understanding may not’ (Caruth 1996, 11). Nevertheless, I have very deliberately argued for Owuor’s novel as writing grief not trauma, and her use of these literary devices not as representing traumatic experience but as a deliberate intervention in finding new forms for popular memory. As Selasi comments on writing and memory in relation to the novel, ‘this is form as content, a text in the shape of its subject’ (Selasi 2014). Owuor plays with language and form to explore the complexities of remembering and the relationship of memory to cultural production. Pivotal to this are interactions or transmissions between the different forms of memory-making I’ve described: Tigrinya water songs become part of lived experience and communicative memory, Ajany’s hunt for Odidi may be a performed or
material act but through it she is able to create a narrative which helps her make sense of his loss, and Nyipir physically carries with him the images of his father, brother and Odidi that Ajany has created. Not only are images and sentences repeated across the novel, but key moments in the story are often repeated and retold, for example Ajany reuniting with her father at the airport: ‘Rained-upon earth mingling with smoke and age and dust and sun and cows on a father’s coat, and her head tucked into its folds in welcome at the airport, the scent of coming home from all her Far Aways’ (26) is remembered twenty pages later as ‘She remembers the warm light, the clouds that caught the edge of her left eye, the smell of rained-upon earth mingling with smoke and age and dust and sun and cows on her father’s coat. She remembers her head on his shoulder and tears that would not stop’ (54). Through this use of repetition, Owuor explores the process of memory finding form, questioning why certain things are remembered, how memory make us feel, how it frames our day-to-day experiences and then finds expression.

Richard Werbner in the introduction to his edited collection Memory and the Postcolony identifies a ‘postcolonial memory crisis’ caused by memory’s contested role in the creation of power and new nations (Werbner 1998, 1). Werbner argues that the political violence inherent in the construction of postcolonial African nations fundamentally impacts the way that these nations remember and forget. A significant body of scholarly work has explored African literature’s relationship with trauma, grief and pain in this context (Durrant 2004, Woods 2007, Walder 2010, Craps 2013, Norridge 2013). Notably, through this work, African and postcolonial literature have been characterized as ‘necessarily involved in the work of mourning’ (Durrant 2004, 1) or as engaged in ‘an obsessive return to history and the past’ through which writers try both ‘to raise consciousness of the traumatic past and to cure the consciousness of that trauma’ (Woods 2007, 6,14). While the particular ‘crisis of collective memory’ in Kenya (Hughes 2011, 183) that writing published by Kwani Trust engages with and responds to of course has its roots in Kenya’s colonial history, as this chapter shows I am concerned to root this work in relation to a particular time and place of its cultural production rather than define it through a colonial legacy of trauma. Notably, in different ways what each of these scholars foregrounds is the way in which reading texts by African authors that engage with history, pain and trauma can play a role in raising the global reader’s awareness of suffering and injustice, create identification and community, and make possible social action and change (Durrant 2004, Woods 2007, Walder 2010, Craps 2013, Norridge 2013). In contrast, the frame of popular memory enables me to foreground the ‘network of relations’ (Barber 1987, 1) through which these texts are produced and consumed in Kenya rather than reading these texts
through Africa's relationship to the global North.

Tom Odhiambo has suggested that the ‘desire to “localize” Kwani?’ runs counter to ‘the expectations to reach and be read beyond the borders of Kenya, especially considering that the reception of Kwani? outside the country probably matters more than what local readers think of it’ (Odhiambo 2011, 34). However, I want to argue for reading Kwani Trust’s position as a cultural broker between Kenyan popular culture, African cultural production and the world literary space as part of the syncretism which locates their work within the field of African popular arts. As I have shown, Kwani Trust’s reach beyond the borders of Kenya is significant to the ways in which their publications are produced and validated, while the primary audience through which these texts are concerned to be read and make meaning remains in Kenya. Kwani Trust currently has no established distribution systems outside Kenya, and this specific address to local readers is also evident in the literary form taken by the writing of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Billy Kahora and Parselelo Kantai. Dust is infused with a mixing of Kenyan languages and historical references that remain untranslated and explained; even the book’s last lines are Swahili song lyrics from Fadhili Williams’ ‘Hakuna Mwingine’ (385). As Evan Mwangi asserts in an article on new African writing for Kenya’s Sunday Nation, ‘Owuor’s Dust doesn’t appear to be addressing a Euro-American audience’ (Mwangi 2014) and as a review in the Washington Post highlighted the novel ‘makes no concessions to any reader’s ignorance’ (Charles 2014) of Kenya’s history. It is therefore a text that, although co-published with leading international publishing house Knopf in the US, outwardly resists reading through the Western-gaze and the ‘we’ of the global reader. This mixing of languages and lack of concession to any reader’s ignorance is similarly evident in Billy Kahora’s The True Story of David Munyakei. The novella’s shape-shifting form focuses squarely on Munyakei and does not explain the events of the Goldenberg scandal or even who Pattni is; while longer passages of Swahili text are translated, their inclusion makes clear Kahora’s intention to reach a readership who can read the nuances of language evident in these direct transcripts. As Grace Musila observes, ‘for a Kenyan readership’, Kantai’s work is ‘etched with a range of recognizable fragments of popular memory’ (Musila 2014, 260). Yet these fragments are not signposted or made legible for a non-Kenyan reader. As Martin Kimani observes in a blog post that reflects on hearing Kantai read ‘Comrade Lemma’ at the Oxford Literary Festival:

I suspect that the Oxford audience was hearing a great story of a lost hero found, and an amusing take on the absurdities of African nation-building. The poor urban Kenyan, on the other hand, would have received the reading like the re-opening of a wound… The fate of Comrade Lemma, ignored one moment, exploited the next,
would have reminded most Nairobians of what their government does to them daily (Kimani 2005).

Even though ‘Comrade Lemma’ may be productively read without the intertext of Lemma Ayanu’s visit to Kenya, Kantai’s positioning of his own writing as ‘an attempt to re-engage with an official or public Kenyan history’ (Kantai 2011) and the forms through which this is constructed reveal his primary concern is with addressing a reader already engaged with the lived experience of that history. Evan Maina Mwangi in *Africa Writes Back to Self* argues for the need to correct ‘the impression circulated in mainstream postcolonial theory that African literatures “write back” to the colonial center’ and demonstrates the ways in which the contemporary African novels he studies are in fact ‘writing back to themselves and to one another’ (Mwangi 2009, ix). Throughout this chapter, I have explored the ways in which through making material what I have described as popular memory, Kwani Trust have opened up new forms and spaces for cultural memory. My use of the term cultural memory in itself intends to signal this writing as engaged in *writing back to self*. Through this term, I examine the ways in which these texts write the past in a way that ‘preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity’ – an engagement which reveals history as only one form through which knowledge about the past is produced. Tom Odhiambo has argued that ‘the burden of history could easily undermine or over-determine’ (Odhiambo 2011) the founding vision of Kwani Trust to ‘say something new’ (Wainaina 2003a). Instead, what this chapter has argued is that Kwani Trust’s innovation needs to be read *through* its engagement with the past.
Mapping Memory: Where is the Past Located in Nigeria?

Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* describes an unnamed protagonist’s return to Lagos after an absence of fifteen years. Across its twenty-seven short chapters, the novel creates snapshots of and reflections on the first-person narrator’s encounters with family, friends and the city, moving through the spaces of transport, trade, home and cultural production. *Every Day is for the Thief* was first published in Nigeria in 2007 by Cassava Republic Press, and in 2014 was republished in a revised form by Random House in the US and Faber & Faber in the UK. The Cassava Republic Press edition includes an ‘Author’s Note’, absent from subsequent editions, in which Cole states that the impetus for the novel stemmed from ‘real-life events’ and was written after he visited Lagos – the city where he’d grown up but left to study in the US at seventeen - following his own ‘long absence’ (Cole 2007, 6). The ‘Author’s Note’ stresses that he and the narrator ‘are not the same person’ and reflects on the challenges of creating a text that can ‘compete’ with the complexity of Lagos’s ‘reality’, while expressing the hope that the fictional story he shares ‘is in the deepest sense of the word, true’. The multi-faceted relationships Cole brings into view here between author and narrator, place and memory, home and abroad, fact and fiction are strikingly exemplified through the novel’s final chapter. Now back in his apartment in the US, surrounded by snow and suffering from insomnia, the narrator is revisited by the memory of a hot Thursday afternoon in Lagos. He relates losing his ‘geographical bearings’ and ending up in a ‘sun-infused’ street which feels to him ‘like a return, like a centre’, despite him never having been there before (125-6). What he first thinks are boats, jutting out from the buildings on one side of the street, turn out to be coffins and this alley where the ‘people of old Lagos, across the social classes, come when someone dies’ is a space described as almost magically abundant with life. He lists the ‘glistening bodies’ of the carpenters, a man working ‘rhythmically’ over a ‘butter-coloured plank’, the wood shavings or ‘curls of gold’ that fall in a nest, while children play on the other side of the road and a woman cooks beans (126-7). Throughout the rest of the novel the narrator has remained somewhat distanced from the Lagos he describes, insisting, against his family’s wishes, on taking public transport as an ‘exercise’ through which he can experience the life of the city, rather than as a daily necessity (32). However, in this final scene, there is an immediacy of experience and a sense of the narrator at last sharing something from his past that enables him and the reader to ‘connect to the city as pure place’ (125). NoViolet Bulawayo’s review of the novel finishes with praise for the beauty of
Cole’s writing in this ‘poetic final shot’ where ‘Lagos holds her head with dignity’ (Bulawayo 2014), and Helon Habila hails it as ‘perhaps the best section in the book, bringing us closer to the unspeakable mysteries and magic of place’ (Habila 2014). And yet, in interview, Teju Cole has commented that although as he was writing this scene he thought ‘that a lot of that stuff was true’, he has been back since to try to look for the street again and ‘can’t find it’ (Kassel 2014). The success of Every Day is for the Thief in capturing Lagos’s complexities and realities is then achieved by capturing a mutability between the visible and invisible, author and narrator, home and abroad, fact and fiction – even as Cole works to explicitly draw attention to these boundaries. It provides an apposite starting point for this chapter, which explores the different ways in which contemporary novelists published by Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have opened up new forms for memory and history in Nigeria by making space material. Putting Achille Mbembe’s thinking about space, boundaries and histories in relation to Africa (Mbembe 2000) in dialogue with Henri Lefebvre’s tripartite division of the perceived, conceived and lived dimensions of space (Lefebvre 1991), I trace case studies across the writing of the overlapping space of the city, home and the university in six novels: Sefi Atta’s Everything Good Will Come (Farafina, 2005), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun (Farafina, 2006), Teju Cole’s Every Day is for the Thief (Cassava Republic Press, 2007), Helon Habila’s Waiting for an Angel (Cassava Republic Press, 2007), Eghosa Imasuen’s Fine Boys (Farafina, 2011) and A. Igoni Barrett’s Blackass (Farafina Trust 2015a). Examining the shifting forms and exchanges through which urban, domestic and institutional spaces are created in these texts, both in terms of literary style and cultural value, I characterize these writers as forming part of a broader project of presenting ‘a new cartography for Africa’ (Chimurenga 2015).

New Cartographies and Representational Spaces

In March 2015, Chimurenga, in collaboration with Kwani?, published an edition of The Chronic that was framed as a direct response to Achille Mbembe’s essay ‘At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality and Sovereignty in Africa’ (Mbembe 2000). In this essay Mbembe highlights that little attempt has been made to understand the varied ‘imaginaires and autochthonous practices of space’ in relation to Africa (Mbembe 2000, 262). He compellingly draws attention to the multiple histories and changing politics and economics through which the continent’s ‘visible, material and symbolic boundaries’ have expanded and contracted over the past two centuries. He notes, for example, that to see the current African boundaries as just ‘a product of colonial arbitrariness’ is to ignore their
multiple geneses and erase the ‘relatively long-term social and cultural processes’ out of which these boundaries were formed (Mbembe 2000, 265). He goes on to explore dynamics of power and space across the continent, drawing attention to the diverse configurations that emerge from the redefinition of internal boundaries post-independence, and the contemporary significance of networks of trade, religion and access to natural resources rooted in the nineteenth century. He argues that while these lived realities create new forms of imagining space, time and territory, that ‘the discourse that is supposed to account for these transformations has ended up obscuring them’ (Mbembe 2000, 261). The ‘new cartographies’ issue of The Chronic offered an explicit attempt to begin ‘mapping’ these forms of imagining in words and images. Asking the question ‘what if maps were made by Africans for their own use, to understand and make visible their own realities or imaginaries?’ The Chronic responded by putting a series of hand-drawn maps in dialogue with creative and critical texts to ‘make visible networks of trade, power structures, movement of people and ideas as we experience them’ (Chimurenga 2015).

At a launch event for the issue in Nairobi, Ntone Edjabe (Chimurenga’s Editor-in-Chief) was concerned to foreground two things that this work of creating new cartographies of Africa intended to recognize: firstly that the production of knowledge on the continent historically and today is ‘tied to multiplicity, is tied to mobility, is tied to mutability’ and secondly that ‘life across this continent happens more in spite of policy than through it’ (Kwani Trust 2015). He described how a tension between cartography’s project of placing things, and wanting to create maps that could ‘liberate us from the fictions of objectivity and exactitude’, fed the issue’s editorial approach (Kwani Trust 2015). In producing eight new maps of Africa that trace flows as diverse as the networks of optic fibre submarine cables alongside the continent’s entertainment complexes, or the movement and economies of drugs and soccer stars, Chimurenga developed working methods that allowed for imprecision and movement: the maps were deliberately drawn by hand and developed from information that was conveyed only through speech and not mediated by writing or computers. Edjabe and the issue’s editorial also talk about representing ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ that can’t be measured by ‘scales, set squares and compasses alone’ but require ‘hands, feet and hearts. And memory.’ (Kwani Trust 2015, Chimurenga 2015). A piece by Kwani Trust’s Managing Editor Billy Kahora, which uses quotations from Mbembe’s essay to structure its three parts, shows particularly vividly the limits of knowledge produced as ‘geography’ or ‘history’ in accounting for the experiences and imaginings of place. Kahora combines multiple visual and textual forms - from reportage and memoir to printed and hand-drawn maps to notes on a workshop, email
correspondence and photo captions - to tell the story of his 2005 investigation into land ownership in Kenya's Mau Forest. The story not only reveals a disconnect between the way this land is represented on a map, what is bought and sold, and the day to day experiences of those who live there, but ‘reality’ is shown to be multiple, mutable and constructed: a man called Kamikil or Salaton can simultaneously be part of an indigenous community evicted from its land and a land broker, pieces of land can be sold twice, and a forest can be ’eaten’ into. What Kahora makes visible is the investment and manipulation of different forces - from the Kenyan government to Granta magazine to a European NGO - in the singular narratives circulated by those living in the Mau South forest and the ways in which this masks the histories and livelihoods at stake. Although written as non-fiction, Kahora uses the literary devices of character and setting to engage the reader in the lived experience of his narrative: ‘the straight, dusty road we travel on to meet this man, Kamikil, is of the kind that grinds the bones and the drive shafts of a car’ (Kahora 2015b). Like Teju Cole, Kahora prompts a questioning of what reality or truth, fact or fiction might mean in relation to writing geographies or histories of Africa, and the role that literature can play in this.

While The Chronic brought together multiple forms of non-fiction, I want to suggest that a preoccupation with the relationship between cultural memory and place evident in a range of novels published by Farafina and Cassava Republic Press can also productively be read through the frame of Achille Mbembe’s thinking about space and the African continent. By introducing Mbembe’s ideas through the explicit responses they have provoked from Kwani Trust and Chimurenga and weaving this material through the chapter, I deliberately signal that, although this thesis draws on literary texts from opposite sides of Africa, there is potential for aesthetic conversation between them.

Mbembe writes from the perspective of a historian and political scientist, and his essay is not directly concerned with the role literature might play in understanding the ‘imaginaire’ and autochthonous practices of space (Mbembe 2000, 262). However, the multiple, mutable and conflicting forces he shows to be at play in the construction of space on the continent enter into dialogue in productive ways with the work of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, through which the role of the artist or writer in this process can be brought into view. Mbembe highlights that his own definition of Africa as ‘territory’ – as an intersection of moving bodies – is informed by Lefebvre’s idea of space as a ‘set of possibilities that historically situated actors constantly resist or realize’ (Mbembe 2000, 261). In The Production of Space, Lefebvre argues that every society produces its own
space and in order to theorize this sets up a triangular relationship between the realms of perceived, conceived and lived space (Lefebvre 1991, 33). The perceived realm, which Lefebvre calls 'spatial practice', is concerned with the way in which space is performed in daily life, and in particular 'daily routine' or 'the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure' (Lefebvre 1991, 38). The conceived realm, which Lefebvre calls 'representations of space', is the space of 'scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers' (Lefebvre 1991, 38). This 'conceptualized space' which tends to be constructed through verbal signs and derived from a mixture of knowledge and ideology, Lefebvre argues is the 'dominant space in any society' (Lefebvre 1991, 39-41). The lived realm, which Lefebvre calls 'representational spaces' is space 'as directly lived through its associated images and symbols' (Lefebvre 1991, 39). This is space as experienced through imaginary and symbolic elements which 'have their source in history' and as such are relational and mutable (Lefebvre 1991, 41-2). It is in this space, which 'overlays physical space', that the writer or artist can intervene (Lefebvre 1991, 39).

Lefebvre’s arguments about space in The Production of Space, and his subsequent interventions The Urban Revolution and Rhythmanalysis, are highly complex, contested and seemingly shifting (Lefebvre 2004, 2003). Edward Soja observes that The Production of Space is:

a bewildering book, filled with unruly textual practices, bold assertions that seem to get tossed aside as the arguments develop, perplexing inconsistencies and apparent self-contradictions (Soja 1996, 8).

Despite this, his tripartite frame offers a useful reference point across this chapter which is concerned to explore the relationships between memory, location and literature, and in particular provides a frame that can allow for, if not illuminate, what Ato Quayson describes in relation to Accra as space ‘overdetermined by seemingly contradictory spatial logics’ (Quayson 2014, 32). Lefebvre’s model remains flexible and fundamentally relational, intending to make visible the way in which space is not stable but produced differently in every society through the interactions between these three different forms (Lefebvre 1991, 46). Read through Lefebvre’s conceptual vocabulary, Mbembe’s essay problematizes the way in which ‘representations of space’ – cartography and other forms of knowledge production – have produced Africa’s geography. In highlighting the ways in which the networks constructed through trade, religion and access to water that inform ‘daily routine’ are rooted in a history that extends much further back than European
colonial intervention, Mbembe shows ‘spatial practice’ informing the spatial markings through which Africa was divided into states. However, while the nature of Lefebvre’s model suggests perceived and lived space remain in tension with or obscured from conceived space, Mbembe highlights a particular disconnect between the way in which Africa is mapped as knowledge production, and ‘spatial practice’ and ‘representational spaces’ on the continent. Mbembe describes a society in which conceived space is not the ‘dominant space’. Equally, the terms Lefebvre uses to characterize ‘representational spaces’ - directional, situational, fluid, dynamic – have a particular resonance with the way in which Mbembe describes ‘spatial practice’ on the continent. The plural territorialities and temporalities Mbembe makes evident in the production of space are not purely symbolic, but are an inherent part of day-to-day realities and livelihoods (from conflict to resources to commerce).

While Lefebvre’s theorizing of space might be contested and open to different interpretations, it has formed the foundations of a significant body of subsequent scholarly work (Soja 1996, Quayson 2014, Harvey 2006). Out of Lefebvre’s tripartite conception of space, Edward Soja builds his idea of thirdspace. Through thirdspace, which has a particular affinity with the fluidity and imaginary of ‘representational spaces’, Soja develops a critical strategy that rejects binarisms (Soja 1996, 5), and argues for each layer of spatiality being seen as both ‘real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical’, bringing together ‘subjectivity and objectivity…everyday life and unending history’ (Soja 1996, 64, 56). Conceptualized by Lefebvre as having its roots in history and as the space occupied by the writer, this chapter is particularly concerned to explore the workings of ‘representational spaces’. Soja’s idea of thirdspace helps bring into view that it is in ‘representational spaces’ that a continuum of communicative-cultural memory operates; ‘representational spaces’ are the space of everyday life and imaginary, as well as where those imaginaries find an objectified, metaphorical or representational form in cultural production.

In a reflection on ‘space as a key word’, David Harvey also takes Lefebvre’s tripartite conception of space as a starting point. From this Harvey proposes his own tripartite conception which better allows for the relationship between time and space, arguing for absolute space-time exemplified through ‘the cramped physical structure of the exhibit’; relative space-time exemplified through ‘the sequential motion of the visitor through the space’; and relational space and time, exemplified by ‘the memories, the voices, the psychic tension, the intangibility and ephemerality, as well as the claustrophobia’ (Harvey 2006,
Harvey proposes a matrix through which perceived, lived and conceived space are each overlaid with absolute, relative and relational time-space. Significantly for this chapter then, Harvey develops critical tools to explore the relationship between space and memory, positioning history as a relative temporal concept and memory as a relational one (Harvey 2006, 285).

Notably, David Harvey describes 'spatial practice' as 'material space' (Harvey 2006, 279). However, this thesis is concerned to develop an idea of the 'material' that allows for both materiality's relationship to physical substance or form (as Harvey uses it here to refer to 'the world of tactile and sensual interaction with matter' (Harvey 2006, 279)) and materiality's relationship to ideas of value or significance. What Lefebvre calls 'representations of space' make space material by giving it value in relation to a particular form of knowledge production and mapping. What this chapter is primarily concerned to explore is the way in which these novels, as 'representational spaces' in dialogue with 'spatial practice', make space material by giving it symbolic value and form in the lived imaginary and through art. Read through the frame of Lefebvre's model, what Mbembe's essay reveals are disjunctures between the way in which the space of Africa is materially (physically) experienced, and the way in which this space is made material (imagined and mapped). In what follows I explore the different ways the novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, A. Igoni Barrett, Teju Cole, Helon Habila and Eghosa Imasuen can all be read as responding to these disjunctures. Through this, I show how this body of texts published by Farafina and Cassava Republic Press draw on similar literary strategies in their writing of space - in particular dissolving binaries between author and narrator, fact and fiction – and through this locate themselves within a particular time and place of Nigerian cultural production.

**Making Lagos Material**

In a later essay, co-authored with Sarah Nuttall, Achille Mbembe argues for the metropolis as an archive which can be used to disrupt or 'throw people off their routine readings and dominant imaginings of Africa' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, 352). Writing the city is certainly not a new preoccupation in African literature or African literary studies. Significant scholarly attention has focused on representations of the city in African literature, with the urban space of Lagos characterized as one of moral corruption and entropy (Dunton 2008), and Nairobi written as a site where tensions between 'tradition and modernity' (Kurtz 1998, 158) or a 'crisis of modernity' is most visibly played out.
(Ogude and Nyairo 2007a, 13). More recently, often in response to or in dialogue with Mbembe and Nuttall’s essay, the city’s relationship to cultural production has begun to be written and read as a space of energy associated with informality, diversity and creativity, and through the frame of its continual exchanges with multiple elsewheres (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, Nyairo 2007, Dunton 2008, Primorac 2008, Newell 2008, Quayson 2014). However, in an introduction to the first African Cities Reader published by Chimurenga in 2010, editors Ntote Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse argue that representations of African cities in scholarly or popular publications remain predominantly one dimensional - with urban Africans represented as ‘either bravely en route to empowering themselves to attain sustainable livelihoods or the debased perpetrators of the most unimaginable acts of misanthropy’ (Edjabe and Pieterse 2010, 1). This collection of texts seeks to ‘call this state of affairs to order’ while simultaneously suggesting that the ‘overproduction of thought, intention, agendas and relations in African cities’ creates an epistemic problem and that, as Edjabe also explored through The Chronic, conventional forms of knowledge production are unable to account for its multiplicity and mobility (Edjabe and Pieterse 2010, 1). In response to this, the African Cities Reader defines as working towards an ‘aesthetic agenda’ that can ‘capture something about the stylisation of thought and practice’ emerging from the city and many of the texts included are works of fiction (Edjabe and Pieterse 2010, 1). In what follows, I explore the ways in which the novels of Sefi Atta, Teju Cole, A. Igoni Barrett and Helon Habila engage with Lagos as archive, and explore what it might mean for fiction or literary form, as Habila and the African Cities Reader suggest, to ‘bring us closer to the unspeakable mysteries and magic of place’ (Habila 2014).

Spatial practice

Sefi Atta’s Everything Good Will Come (2005) was the second novel to be published by Farafina, following Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus (2004). Enitan, the first-person narrator of the novel, is born in 1960 - the year Nigeria gained independence from the violence of British colonial rule. The novel is divided into four parts by the dates 1971, 1975, 1985 and 1995, and Atta very explicitly frames Enitan’s narrative of growing up and the shifting interactions of her domestic, social and work life through Nigeria’s political history and Lagos’s geography. One of Enitan’s most significant relationships is with Sheri, the daughter of Chief Bakare who lives next door to her parents by Lagos Lagoon. The two girls meet aged eleven through a hole in the fence, having grown up in very different circumstances – Enitan lives with her bickering lawyer father and devout Christian mother, both mourning the loss of her younger brother to sickle-cell anaemia, whereas
Sheri has grown up with her Grandma in downtown Lagos, having never known her British mother, while her Muslim father now has two new wives and seven children. Sheri brings laughter, music, dancing, lipstick and romance novels into Enitan’s life. However, this ebullience is cruelly shattered when aged fifteen the two girls attend a summer holiday picnic in Ikoyi Park and Sheri is raped. In the immediate aftermath of the rape, Enitan describes the physical space around her becoming smaller: ‘We began to walk home. The palm trees shrunk to bamboo shoots, the headlights of oncoming cars were like fire-flies’ (Atta 2005, 66). The second part of the novel, ‘1975’, builds towards this incident, with the novel’s structure working to signal this rape as an abrupt ending of childhood and its traumatic repercussions for both characters across the rest of the narrative. Still, even when Enitan’s senses are so absorbed in this incident that she is unable to concentrate on a television broadcast announcing a military coup in Nigeria (69), Atta shows how her relationship to space remains intimately connected with national politics and a larger geography of Lagos. Enitan craves time to herself to reflect on and even erase the rape, but immediately after the coup there is a dusk to dawn curfew so her parents are always with her in the house. Following this, on a journey to church with her mother (where it is not clear if she intends to atone, cleanse or punish Enitan for what has happened to Sheri) they pass through military road blocks and witness a driver being beaten by soldiers. As Enitan watches the beating, Atta describes the way in which the violence of this and what has happened to Sheri merge into the ‘landscape’ of Lagos in her mind:

I remembered my own fate again, and Sheri’s, and became cross-eyed from that moment on. The driver blended in with the rest of the landscape: a row of rusty-roofed houses; old people with sparrow-like eyes; barefooted children; mothers with flaccid breasts; a bill board saying “Keep Lagos clean.” A bread fruit tree; a public tap; its base was embedded in a cement square (73).

In Oxford Street, Accra, Ato Quayson engages with literary representations of Accra, to show how in this particular group of novels space is not ‘just setting’ and ‘readily effaced in the course of its traversal’, but instead marks a movement between ‘ethical domains’ (Quayson 2014, 214-5). In Everything Good Will Come, Atta provides detailed descriptions of Enitan’s own navigation of Lagos’s spatial practice – her ‘routes and networks’ (Lefebvre 1991, 38) through Lagos – showing how these are structured by ties of family, friendship and trade as well as by politics. Enitan moves around the city by car and describes Lagos as experienced through her car window: the smells of ‘animal cadaver, sweet fruit and burnt tires’ (194) as she passes Lagos Lagoon on the way home from visiting her father, or the various forms of trade she observes - ‘a man hawked small plastic bags filled with drinking water. Someone had hung four fake Persian rugs over a
Atta has commented that in *Everything Good Will Come* she ‘attempted a panoramic view of the city’ because she was writing from the perspective of Enitan ‘who knew the city by air-conditioned car’ (Atta 2008). In Enitan, Atta creates a narrator who is simultaneously experiencing and distanced from the Lagos she describes: unlike the narrator of Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief*, Enitan navigates Lagos as part of her daily routine, and yet her observations through the window of an ‘air-conditioned car’ write urban realities and informal economies that she passes through but is separated from. Through this first-person perspective, Atta self-consciously brings into view Enitan’s perspective on Lagos as providing a small window with a limited gaze on a multiple and mutable cityscape. Enitan’s routes through the city to work, to visit family or to shop are governed by networks constructed through her own multiple identities, and the complex interactions of class, gender, ethnicity, religion and lived experience, which Atta explicitly positions within a very particular historical moment. Having grown up in Lagos, Enitan is able to observe changes in the urban landscape over time: ‘new houses and condominiums stood where the park once rambled and most of them were now sinking in marshy land’ (108). Through Enitan’s relationship with Sheri, Atta shows how Lagos can be navigated very differently even by another woman of the same class and generation. She describes Sheri and Enitan shopping for groceries together at the market (201-3). Sheri, having grown up in downtown Lagos, relishes the performance of haggling for the best fruit and vegetables, banters with the butcher as she instructs him on how to cut the meat, and stops to buy roasted corn from a hawker. Pregnant Enitan meanwhile leaves Sheri to bargain, and always positions herself at a distance from the transactions - whether this is to avoid the flies and the sun, the smell of cow’s intestine or catching typhoid from the roasted corn. So while these descriptions of routes through the city and daily life in Lagos are central to
Atta’s own ‘aesthetic agenda’ in *Everything Good Will Come*, in very consciously drawing attention to these as written through a single character’s experience, and to the city as a space that is shifting and experienced differently by different people, the novel signals some of the ‘complex indeterminacies of city-making’ (Edjabe and Pieterse 2010, 1).

The significance of *Everything Good Will Come* in making Lagos material – not only giving spatial practice a literary form but making an intervention in how the city is read, valued and imagined in representational spaces – is evident in responses to the novel from other contemporary Nigerian writers. For example, both Lagos-based Toni Kan, author of *Nights of the Creaking Bed* (Cassava Republic Press, 2008) and London-based Chibundu Onuzo, author of *The Spider King’s Daughter* (Faber & Faber, 2003), have highlighted this novel as a point of inspiration for their own writing because of the way in which Atta writes Lagos. For Kan the novel is significant not only because it evokes ‘the spirit, the sounds, the smell of Lagos’ but because it is a ‘love story to a city I love’ (Kan 2015). Onuzo describes the book as a ‘Lagos novel’ and suggests that for her what is so remarkable is the way in which Atta ‘lights Lagos’ (Atta does include multiple references to light – the Ikoyi street lights shimmering (91) or the crowded market stalls that ‘blasted out bluish fluorescent lights’ (102) – although Onuzo also intends this construction to stand for the role lighting plays in creating atmosphere on screen), arguing that through this she succeeds in writing the city as ‘beautiful’ without erasing its inequalities (Onuzo 2015).

Another more recent novel which can be characterized through its detailed and evocative descriptions of ‘spatial practice’ or ‘routes and networks’ (Lefebvre 1991, 38) across Lagos is A. Igoni Barrett’s *Blackass*. *Blackass* is the story of Lagos-born Furo Wariboko, who wakes up one morning and finds he has turned into a white man (except for his ass which remains black). Barrett shows how this physical transformation changes the way in which Furo is able to navigate Lagos, how now ‘everywhere he turned he made discoveries about this new place he had lived all his life’ (Barrett 2015a, 104), with the familiar becoming unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar. Barrett describes Furo’s first journey as a white man from his home to the bus stop: the ‘stocky Adamawa man’ who Furo usually pays to take away his garbage stops drumming his garbage cart with a metal rod, and averts his gaze (7); the naked toddler with coloured plastic beads round her waist, who belongs to the ‘Isoko woman who ran a buka’ in the street next to his, starts to howl (8); the attendants at his local grocery store gawp and his barber freezes (9). Furo lives in Egbeda – an area of Lagos that is ‘outlying – economically as well as geographically’ – and people here have never seen an ‘oyibo’ (white man), ‘except on screen or paper’ (10). The places
and people that previously formed part of Furo’s daily routine of trade and personal relationships are no longer accessible to him. Later in the novel, oppressed by stares as he tries to navigate the daily realities of paying for bread, water or transport (47), Furo makes the decision to seek refuge in Lekki - ‘stamping ground of the Lagos rich’ (48) – where there will be others that look like him.

Barrett has called *Blackass* ‘my Lagos story – a book written for Lagos, about Lagos, and, in a sense, by Lagos’ (Barrett 2016b). The literary form in which Barrett writes Lagos reflects the multiplicity, mobility and mutability of life on the continent emphasized by Edjabe in his positioning of *The Chronic’s* new cartographies project. Edjabe observes that in part this mutability is a reflection of living in a place that ‘refuses to be marked’: ‘people don’t have numbers [marking streets or buildings] not because they can’t afford them - they refuse them’ (Kwani Trust 2015). Echoing this, Barrett shows a city that is not best written through the representations of space constructed by urban planners or government: Egbeda Bus Stop is ‘marked out by collective memory’ and the script on its signpost has rusted away (10). The bus stop is instead distinguished by the activity and trade that surrounds it - the roadside market with its ‘noise, the raw sound of money, of haggling and wheedling and haranguing,’ ‘the heads and limbs in a swirl of motion’ and vehicles passing on the motorway ‘from rusted pushcarts to candy-coloured mopeds to sauropod-sized freight trucks’ (10-11). Throughout the novel Barrett repeatedly finds different modes of language to depict Lagos’s traffic, as well as the activity and trade that permeates this. These descriptions are often carefully located in time – ‘it was mid-June’ or ‘late afternoon’, and create a vivid sense of the multiplicity of Lagos’s urban realities, from the universal language of cars honking made up of ‘short warning honks, long angry honks, continuous harrying honks’ (30) to the taxis that might be ‘ordinary yellow, special red, metro black, or unpainted kabu-kabu’ (103-4). Barrett strikingly illustrates what it might mean for representational spaces to reflect a spatial practice developed ‘more in spite of policy than through it’ (Kwani Trust 2015). As Furo looks out over the skyline from the balcony of his office at book distributor Habal, Barrett uses the metaphor of Lagos as a ‘city of millions of warring nations’ (212) to characterize the landscape and disorder he sees. In a city that requires ‘everyman solutions to everyone’s problems’ (211) and where public infrastructure fails to provide electricity, water and security, each house has become a sovereign nation. Barrett shows how literature can offer new forms for imagining space, as Furo sees ‘battalions of plastic [water] tanks mounted on towers of rusted rigging’ and ‘fortressed houses, their concrete fences crowned by glass shards and
metal spikes and razor wire’, while listening to ‘the smoky fury of countless generators’ (211).

Representational spaces

Notably, Sefi Atta’s Everything Good Will Come and Teju Cole’s Everyday is for the Thief use a very different register to reflect the daily realities of a city where public infrastructure fails to provide light, water and security. In both novels there is an observable movement back and forth between imaginative literary descriptions of space, and passages with a more factual register that repeatedly characterize Lagos as a violent and harsh environment in which to live. Witnessing two men fighting over a traffic incident, Enitan reflects on the way in which justice is meted out straightaway ‘on a Lagos street’ (149). She comments on the number of people dying from hardship, explaining ‘no water—no—light we called it in Lagos’ (189), and shows the way in which this ‘hardship’ impacts not only the lives of the poor but also the affluent:

We were in the middle of another water shortage...Power cuts turned our meat rotten and our pots black with kerosene soot, unless we owned electricity generators. At night mosquitoes bored holes into our legs and every year there was another death to mourn: someone shot in the head by armed robbers; someone crushed by a wayward lorry; someone suddenly taken ill with malaria, typhoid, they-don’t-know (196).

It is notable that Atta herself occupies a conspicuously similar position to Enitan in relation to the city. Not only is she also a middle-class Nigerian woman, but she writes from a position both of experience – she was born in Lagos in the 1960s and grew up there – and distance – the novel was authored from the US where she now lives. Writing through a narrator who is similarly removed from while experiencing the city she describes, Atta draws attention to her own position as author in mediating the ways in which Lagos is written through the novel. When Enitan offers commentary on the state of Lagos or Nigeria, it can then be easy to mistakenly assume her opinion is that of the author.

These indefinite lines between author and narrator, home and abroad, fact and fiction are played with still more explicitly by Cole in Every Day is for the Thief. The ‘Author’s Note’ draws attention to the similar position occupied by author and narrator, with both approaching Lagos from the perspective of home – having grown up in Lagos – and abroad – now living in the US and sharing the experiences of returning to the city as a visitor after spending time away. Cole blurs these lines still further by giving the narrator no name,
using the narrator's voice to fictionalize the author's own 'real-life events', while creating a character who is explicitly preoccupied by the difficulties of documenting Lagos through writing or photography. The narrator is frustrated that he finds it impossible to write in the evenings as planned and reflects on 'the disconnect between the wealth of stories available here and the rarity of creative refuge' (56). On encountering the 'sun-suffused street' filled with carpenters making coffins, the narrator reflects that he wants 'to take the little camera out of my pocket and capture the scene' (127). However, he is 'afraid' both of disturbing the moment and that this will 'bind to film what is intended only for the memory' (127): while nineteen of the novel’s chapters include Cole's own photographs, this is one of the few that doesn’t. And yet Cole simultaneously distances himself from the narrator, and distances the narrator still further from the city, by giving him an ‘oyinbo’ mother. This has the effect of making more visible the ways in which the narrator's relationship with the West, and the time he has spent in the US, colour his view of Lagos. Like Enitan in Everything Good Will Come, the narrator of Every Day is for the Thief adopts quite a factual and almost essayistic tone to reflect on the difficulties of living in Lagos:

Combined with the traffic congestion, which is a serious problem in Lagos, and with the thousand natural shocks that the average Nigerian is heir to – the police, the armed robbers, the public officials, the government, the total absence of social services, the poor distribution of amenities – the environment is anything but tranquil (56).

Alongside this, Cole draws attention to the fact that this critical portrayal and the narrator's judgments on the city are mediated through a Western-influenced value system embedded within capitalism and patterns of consumption. A visit to the Muson Centre – an auditorium and music conservatory where Molière is being performed and individuals can learn the cello – is represented by the narrator as one of Nigeria’s most ‘convincing signs of life’ and a sign that in returning to Lagos he hasn’t after all ‘wandered into a region of hell’ (71-2). The Ikoyi music and book shop Jazzhole is praised for its presentation which is 'as well done as many Western bookshops' (100) and the narrator is excited to encounter Lagos's Chinatown because it offers a sign ‘we are in a normal place, or a place that aspires to normalcy, like New York, London, Vancouver, San Francisco, with their Chinatowns’ (112). In some ways what makes the novel's final scene so compelling is that the ‘wholeness’ and ‘deep-structured order’ of place he experiences on that small street is finally described and valued on its own terms rather than through a dialogue or comparison with the US or Europe.

AbdouMaliq Simone’s For the City Yet to Come: Urban Life in Four African Cities has shaped scholarly discourse on the heterogeneous configurations and dynamics of Africa’s cities.
In this study he makes the important observation that the majority of people who spend their days in markets are ‘not selling or buying anything specific’, describing instead ‘markets as spaces of information, impressions, manipulations, and diffuse opportunities’ (Simone 2011). What Simone’s work brings into view are the intersecting dynamics of visible and invisible exchanges of value. This is a theme that is similarly explored by Teju Cole, and resonates with the narrator’s encounter with the market in *Every Day is for the Thief*. He describes the market as a space where everyone goes ‘not to buy or sell’ but ‘to participate in the world’, asking:

If you sit in your house, if you refuse to go to the market, how would you know of the existence of others? How would you know of your own existence? (48).

In Chapter 12, the narrator goes to the market specifically to see where six weeks earlier a crowd has meted out its own justice by setting fire to an eleven year old boy accused of stealing a baby. Across the novel the narrative moves between the narrator’s own routes through and reflections on Lagos and Nigeria, and acts of imagination that collapse the distance between the narrator and the daily routines of Lagos life. This chapter offers a particularly vivid example of this, with Cole providing a sensory present tense description of the violence inflicted on the child: ‘the splashing liquid is lighter than water, it is fragrant, it drips off him, beads in his woolly hair’ (51) and after the boy has burned to death ‘the air smells of rubber, meat and exhaust’ (51). The narrative highlights that this incident was recorded by a man with a ‘digicam’, and that the video disc has been copied, circulated and played on national news ‘to outrage and an instant forgetting’ (52). However, the narrator explains he ‘cannot find the will to hunt the VCD down’ (52). In multiple ways Cole emphasizes this description and others of Lagos in the novel as acts of imagination, narrated from a distanced, partial and Western-influenced perspective. And yet somehow this doesn’t undercut the visual and emotive power of these snapshots and of fiction to offer a meaningful engagement with and representation of a particular time and place. Perhaps then this is what Cole means by writing something that is in the ‘deepest sense of the word, true’ (Cole 2007, 6)? Using literary form and the voice of a constructed narrator to try to capture Lagos’s contradictions and complexities, he makes sure the reader is able to see the novel’s writing of place for what it really is - an act of fiction and imagination. Nonetheless, it is an act that has the capacity to find new forms for capturing the lived experience of Lagos in ways that non-fictional accounts or forms of knowledge production such as geography and history can’t – even as it makes visible the ways in which space is produced rather than an a priori given, and the national and transnational structures of value through which this process is mediated.
It is notable that recent scholarly work on contemporary African literature in English has repeatedly positioned or read the writing of Teju Cole, Sefi Atta, Helon Habila and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie through their location as migrant or Nigerian diaspora writers based in the US (Cooper 2008, Ojaide 2008, Ouma 2011a, Harris 2014). When in 2006 Muhtar Bakare attended the African Studies Association of the UK, a narrative of these writers as migrant writers preoccupied by the ‘themes of leaving, journeying and managing cultural difference’ was so pervasive in the framing of the conversations he was part of that he was compelled to contest this, and highlight that for him these themes are ‘marginal’ in the novels of Adichie, Atta and Habila, arguing:

These writers and some others, might have journeyed, they certainly have not left. They wrote and continue to write novels about Nigeria and Africa, which are firmly rooted in Nigeria and Africa (Bakare 2006).

Nuttall and Mbembe argue for the metropolis as an archive that can disrupt dominant imaginings of Africa in part because it is a space that makes visible the multiple ways in which Africa, like everywhere else, ‘has its heres, its elsewhere, and its interstices’ (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, 351). Perhaps it is a failure to recognize this entanglement (Nuttall 2009, 1) of elsewhere in the literary and cultural production of Africa that has led scholars to continually frame their readings of this group of writers through their relationship to the UK or US rather than Nigeria or Africa? Even though the location of these writers outside of Nigeria highlights questions that are central to this thesis in relation to the literary networks and the structures of value and publishing through which texts are produced, for me it doesn’t offer a lens through which their writing and its relationship to space should be exclusively analyzed.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s second novel Half of a Yellow Sun, set across 1960s Nigeria and the Nigerian civil war, is a novel very explicitly concerned with remembering, representing the past and creating cultural memory. Framing the novel as a space of memory, Adichie begins with a dedication to the memory of her grandparents – her grandfathers who both died in the war and her grandmothers who survived it - and concludes her ‘Author’s Note’ at the end of the novel with ‘May we always remember’ (Adichie 2006, 435). I want to suggest that critical to the novel’s work of memory-making are the ways in which Adichie engages with both the spatial practice and representational spaces of this period in Nigeria’s history. In ways that resonate with Edjabe’s call for Africa’s reality to be mapped not by ‘scales, set squares and compasses alone’ but by
‘hands, feet and hearts. And memory’ (Chimurenga 2015), *Half of a Yellow Sun* shows war impacting on not only where the novel’s characters can live but their daily navigation of this space from preparing food to washing to having sex. This emphasis on domestic space also resonates with what Cassava Republic Press’s Publishing Director Bibi Bakare-Yusuf describes as a larger trend in contemporary Nigerian fiction. As part of a BBC Radio 4 documentary on ‘Writing a New Nigeria’, Bakare-Yusuf argues for ‘domestic issues’ as the big topics being addressed by today’s writers, with the political becoming a ‘background melody’ to ‘the politics of everyday life’ (BBC Radio 4 2016).

The book opens with Ugwu’s arrival at Odim Street on Nsukka’s university campus to begin work as a houseboy for Odenigbo – a lecturer in the Mathematics Department whose house in the evenings becomes a social hub and ‘political club’ (p. 36) for intellectuals from across the university. The novel is divided into four parts and time moves forwards and backwards between ‘The Early Sixties’ (Part 1 and Part 3) and ‘The Late Sixties’ (Part 2 and Part 4) in chapters that alternate between the perspectives of Ugwu, Olanna and Richard. In the first part of the novel, initially as a way of atoning for burning his sock, Ugwu begins cooking for Odenigbo. The preparation of food becomes a significant and valued part of Ugwu’s daily routine, one that he forges for himself and works to expand rather than relinquish when Olanna moves in and as she teaches him to:

- fry eggs with a little milk,
- to cut plantains in dainty circles rather than ungainly ovals,
- to steam moi-moi in aluminium cups rather than banana leaves (86).

Through Ugwu’s careful observations, Adichie highlights the role the consumption of food and drink plays in the self-definition and enjoyment of Odenigbo’s guests. As he clears the dining table, Adichie shows Ugwu being able to tell who sat where from Odenigbo’s ‘rice-strewn’ plate or Professor Ezeka’s ‘foreign looking [beer] brown bottle’ or the ‘onion slices’ Miss Adebayo has left in her bowl (83). By drawing attention to the material detail of food preparation and consumption within the domestic space in the early part of the novel, Adichie heightens the impact of the war in disrupting these daily routines and the food scarcity that follows. Odenigbo, Olanna, Baby and Ugwu are forced to flee their home in Nsukka when it falls to the Nigerian army, first for Odenigbo’s home town Abba, and then, when Abba falls too, moving to Umuahia where they eventually end up all living in a single room. In Umuahia, Baby gets thinner and her appetite disappears. Adichie shows the intense discomfort Olanna feels at now having to queue in relief centres for ‘food donated by foreign strangers’ (267) and her desperation to be able to find some dried egg yolk for Baby (269). Now instead of frying eggs with a little milk, Adichie describes how Ugwu ‘squirmed’ as he scooped up the dried egg yolk and ‘poured it into the dough mix
and stirred', and how he has difficulty imagining that this powder comes from the egg of a chicken. A similarly powerful contrast is made by Adichie’s descriptions of Baby splashing in a foamy bath tub in Nsukka singing with Olanna and ‘pressing a squawking plastic duck in her hand’ (122), before she then writes the very different lived realities of Baby's bath in Umuahia interrupted by an air-raid alarm and Olanna dissolving ‘ash in a basin of cold water’ in order to make soap. Just as Zoe Norridge highlights how loss in the novel is articulated through the ways in which the sexual contact between Odenigbo and Olanna changes over time as a result of their experience of living with conflict (Norridge 2012, 33), these evocative descriptions of the changing material realities of daily life have the effect of making more concrete and affecting the suffering and loss caused by the war.

Adichie shows Olanna grieving for the physical objects associated with her sense of self and home which she is forced to leave behind in Nsukka ‘her books, her piano, her clothes, her china, her wigs, her Singer sewing machine, the television’ (185). Adichie has written and talked about Half of a Yellow Sun being a book she ‘had to write’ in order ‘to digest for myself this legacy that I carry’ (Adebanwi 2007) and of the Nigeria-Biafra war as ‘not mere history for me’ but ‘also memory’ (Adichie 2008, 50). The memories that have ‘haunted’ her family become the compelling human details of the novel, so for example in an essay for Transition Adichie explains that, while her mother has never talked about losing her father in a refugee camp, she has often talked about the things she lost during the war:

...her wig, the china she had brought back from the United States, how she went from making toast and scrambled eggs for her two little daughters to standing in line and fighting for dried egg yolk from the relief center (Adichie 2008, 50).

Marianne Hirsch has coined the term ‘postmemory’ to characterize ‘the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth’, describing a connection to the past that is mediated not by recall but by ‘imaginative investment, projection, and creation’ and where ‘the idiom of family can become an accessible lingua franca easing identification and projection across distance and difference’ (Hirsch 2009, 107, 112). Reading Half of a Yellow Sun as an act of ‘postmemory’, it is perhaps unsurprising that Adichie’s imaginative investment in representing the Nigeria-Biafra war foregrounds the impact of this on the space of the family or home.

In A New Generation of African Writers, Brenda Cooper similarly draws attention to the ways in which Adichie writes the ‘details of material culture’, and the way in which this creates a ‘profound sense of the consequences of war on the everyday material realities of life’ (Cooper 2008, 135, 137). And yet, while I am concerned to position Adichie’s
engagement with material culture as part of a pan-African group of writers using representational spaces to develop new cartographies of Africa, Cooper is instead concerned to highlight the author’s location in and relationship to the West. Cooper positions Adichie as part of a new generation of African writers that she characterizes as mobile, transnational and as translating between cultures, and who she argues use ‘the everyday of material reality’ to explore their ‘mixed cultures and identities in Europe or America’ (Cooper 2008, 6). Through this framing, Cooper criticizes *Half of a Yellow Sun* for being ‘sucked into’ the discourse which produces ‘Western misrepresentations of Africa’ (Cooper 2008, 1, 139).

Christopher Ouma similarly situates Adichie as part of a group of contemporary diasporic Nigerian writers (including Sefi Atta, Chris Abani and Helen Oyeyemi), arguing that in the work of these novelists, childhood becomes a site through which their present migrant sense of identity and location in the diaspora is negotiated (Ouma 2011a, 299). In his reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ouma positions Ugwu as a child narrator and shows how his evolving consciousness through the novel is defined through Nsukka and Odenigbo’s house (Ouma 2011a, 90, 2011b, 16). He argues for Nsukka’s significance in the novel as moving beyond setting and instead representing a space of nostalgia and belonging constructed out of Adichie’s own childhood memories of growing up there. Although I might contest Ouma’s foregrounding of Ugwu as a frame through which Adichie can ‘grapple with her contemporary migrant identity’ (Ouma 2012, 33), his work offers important insights into the role topography and space play in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Olanna and her twin sister Kainene are daughters of a wealthy businessman, and in the first part of the novel Adichie shows them moving easily and freely over Nigeria’s large landmass for work and to visit family – from Lagos in the south west to Kano in the north to Nsukka and Port Harcourt in the south east. Adichie similarly creates a sense of the geography of Biafra as Odenigbo, Olanna, Baby and Ugwu flee from Nsukka to Aba to Umuahia. Yet what Ouma draws attention to is Adichie’s writing not just of the space of home and family, but Nsukka as the space of home and family through the novel. Odenigbo’s house in the novel is mapped not only through the routines of spatial practice, but through the representational spaces of Olanna and Odenigbo’s books and the consumption and intellectual exchanges of their guests in the evenings. As Ouma argues, it is through Nsukka that Ugwu gains ‘access to a critical consciousness’ that enables his ‘epistemological evolution’ from servant to pupil to teacher to child soldier to authorial voice (Ouma 2011b, 16-17). At the very end of the novel Adichie describes the characters returning to Odim Street after the war – even the shelves, carpets and windows have been
taken from the living room and of the books all that remain are burnt fragments and pages ripped out of *Drum* magazine to be used as toilet paper (418-419). As they return to the routines of university life, colleagues overseas sending Odenigbo boxes of books to replace his lost library and Olanna taking long walks past the tennis courts and Freedom Square, Olanna reflects ‘how quick leaving had been and how slow returning was’ (432). Through her careful emphasis on shifting daily material realities, Adichie powerfully shows the losses of war to be both ‘physical and metaphysical’ (Adichie 2008, 53) and how the images and symbolic structures through which Olanna constructed her *lived* relationship with space have been fundamentally altered – from her relationship with Odenigbo and their house as a site of consumption and intellectual debate, to the loss of her sister and the loss of her books. While Ouma is primarily concerned with unpacking what Nsukka represents for the novel and its characters, I want to also argue for the significance of Adichie writing the institutional space of the university in Nsukka on its own terms. The University of Nigeria in Nsukka was founded in 1960 and was the first university to award degrees from Nigeria. Through Ugwu’s ‘epistemological evolution’ and debates that take place between faculty members in Odenigbo’s sitting room, Adichie writes the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the novel as a space whose history is not only significant in the lived experience of the Nigeria-Biafra war but also more broadly to Biafra and Nigeria’s cultural production and exchanges of global knowledge production.

The spatial practice and representational spaces of the university are similarly critical to Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys*. Farafina published Imasuen’s first novel *To St Patrick* in 2008, and in 2011 published this second novel from the then Benin-based medical doctor. *Fine Boys* follows a group of students enrolled at the University of Benin during 1990s. Told through the first-person perspective of medical student Ewaen, Imasuen foregrounds his daily routines from the ‘struggle to get food’ (Imasuen 2011, 35) to mopping the floor with the ‘deck blasting out the Bini shuttle bus special: Shaka Demus and Pliers’ (168) to waking up at nine ‘tapping the fellow who had spent the night playing Street Fighter II with me’ (180). One of the novel’s most distinctive features is its use of Nigerian English - the ways in which Imasuen works to accurately recreate the dialogue and language of a particular time and place. Describing the routes Ewaen takes around campus to socialize, chase food, drink and girls, and study, Imasuen shows the ways in which his ability to navigate the space of the university is intimately connected both to larger political events and the power dynamics of cofraternities that shadowed university experiences of this time.
Ewaen arrives at the University of Benin in January 1993. Nigeria has been under military rule for the past ten years and the academic staff union ASUU has just finished a strike campaigning for 'research facilities, salary increases, and reduced government interference on the campuses' alongside a pro-democracy agenda (Kew 2016, 179-180). Immediately after registration, the non-academic staff union NASU goes on its own strike; the generator operators take the keys to the generator houses and families of staff now have to 'make ends meet' by running illegal stalls outside Uniben's halls of residences selling food, drinks and cigarettes (20-21). This impacts on the way in which Ewaen navigates the university's spatial practice, and his first year on campus is characterized by evenings spent hanging out with his friends in the car park with refreshments from the 'Six Candles' market or on the rarer occasions when he is studying, choosing between the 'party atmosphere in the lecture theatres at night' or 'refilling the room's lantern with kerosene and reading in the room' (132). Over the course of this year as Nigeria's June 12 election results are annulled and Abacha seizes power, strikes continue, the campus looks like an 'army camp' (84) and by the end of the year riots have broken out. While the narrative continues to focus on the day-to-day of student life from organizing a house party to watching World Cup football, from getting his first proper girlfriend to dissections of the class cadaver Thriller in anatomy class, Ewaen's second year of university is disrupted still further by political events. Demonstrations begin on campus when M.K.O. Abiola, the purported winner of the June 12 elections, is arrested and the university is closed for 'preventative security' (204). When classes resume, Ewaen and his friends can no longer move freely around the university town:

> Bus rides to town had become cautious affairs, a 180-degree turn from the way we handled them before the strike: as opportunities to gist about how the country was spoiling, which politician was stealing money, who had a big house in Scotland or a bank account in Switzerland. Everyone had heard rumours of state security personnel who rode on the shuttles and arrested students who were too opinionated at the bus stops (236).

Protests break out again in February with properties being burnt and Imasuen vividly describes Ewaen's involvement in looting Goldland's warehouse – the 'cacophony' and 'carnival' of the 'shopping mall from hell' as he loads 'laundry irons, deep fryers and boiling rings into a small freezer' while his friend Preppa is 'bent double with a freezer on his back' (244-6). The outcome of these riots is horrific police brutality and another university closure – this time for six months. Ewaen argues with his flat-mates over the spoils of the Goldland looting, and so is excited, when university finally resumes, to move into a new place with his friends from the first year and bring back to life 'the fun, the jokes, the brotherhood' and a 'time before confras and politics and other nonsense' (272).
And yet just as Atta shows Enitan’s relationship to space as intimately and unavoidably connected to national politics, the nice new flat he describes 'located beside the University Palace Hotel and two NEPA poles after Goldland, on Federal Government Girls College Road, the main thoroughfare that ran through the Osasogie axis of Uniben's off-campus residences' is only available for rent because the lecturer who previously lived there has left the country as a result of the demonstrations (287).

Ewaen’s hopes that the flat can remain outside the power dynamics of the confras are similarly misplaced, and the novel ends with the tragic death of his best friend Wilhelm on the kitchen floor – killed for being a member of Black Axe in a Cosa Nostra space. Right from Ewaen’s arrival at the University of Benin, Imasuen shows the power exerted by the ‘banned university confraternities’ (24-5) or confras and the pressure for new students to undergo initiation ceremonies and ‘blend into one of the university gangs’ (27). The confras are shown to have more power over the university's spatial practice than its administration or the police and, like Wilhelm who ‘blends’ Black Axe, many students end up becoming part of the cofraternities for protection. When Ewaen’s room in halls is robbed in the first year he visits the university's suburbs for the first time to meet the head of Cosa Nostra and find out how he and his friends can get their things back. Ewaen not only describes his route to Ekosodin - ‘the roads were unmotorable – steep lanes, the gradients of which would draw a gasp from a fit Ethiopian runner; abrupt cut-offs caused by gully erosion, cut-offs being a euphemism for craters and vast chasms’ - but how these suburbs have become student residences as a result of the university refusing to build any more campus hostels after the ‘confra crises’ of the previous decade (44-45). These tensions continue to be played out in the suburbs of Ekosodin (Black Axe territory), BDPA and Osasogie (Cosa Nostra territory). When Yibril, Wilhelm’s cousin and a member of Black Axe, drinks in an Osasogie Bar and flaunts a shirt that shows he was behind the robbery of a Cosa Nostra house, he sparks a series of violent retaliations between the two groups which ultimately result in Wilhelm’s death.

Like Ewaen, Eghosa Imasuen grew up in Warri and studied medicine during the early 1990s at the University of Benin. He describes the novel as a ‘roman à clef’, acknowledging that many of the events and characters draw directly on his own experiences (Imasuen 2014). So, like Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*, Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, this is a novel in which the lines between author and narrator, fact and fiction are blurred. Ewaen describes his frustration at the international news not reflecting the Africa he lives and experiences:
There was no sign of my Africa, my Africa of music and video games, of Generation X. No sign of Africa’s version of Prozac Nation: teenage angst, translatable anywhere in any medium; funky guys and gals; books and medical school and difficult, hard-to-impress lecturers and arguing parents (270).

Arguably this could be read as reflecting Imasuen’s own frustrations and this novel written as his response - writing the university experience and production of space of his generation, with its carefully observed language and musical soundtrack, into the canon of Nigerian literature. Like Adichie, in interview Imasuen has framed the novel as an act of memory, commenting that it was ‘one of those stories you knew you were always going to tell’ and that the novel came out of a promise to a friend ‘that I would tell our story’ (Luso 2012). As I’ve shown here, what Imasuen foregrounds within this act of memory-making is what Bakare-Yusuf calls the ‘politics of everyday life’ (BBC Radio 4 2016). By focusing on Ewaen’s daily routines as a student on the university campus, Imasuen engages with the spatial practice that characterized university experiences of this time, reflecting the ways in which this is shaped by government and university policy (representations of space), and everyday forces that operate very much outside of those structures.

Where is the past located? Where is the writer located?

Helon Habila’s novel Waiting for an Angel, first published in the UK by Penguin in 2002 and in the US by Norton in 2003, was published by Cassava Republic Press in 2007 as one of their first titles. Like Fine Boys, it is set across the backdrop of the political unrest and military rule of 1990s Nigeria and brings into view the university as a site of protest. The novel’s protagonist Loomba drops out of university in Lagos in the wake of student agitation for democracy and the removal of General Babangida from power. He is fed up with university closures and when, after his room-mate goes mad from the grief of losing his parents and sister to a road accident, he returns to campus and finds his poems and stories torn, scattered and trodden through their room as part of violent police retaliation to the demonstrators, it becomes a space of violation and control that he can’t return to:

As I turned and surveyed the gate and the fences beside it, I saw the fences suddenly transform into thick walls, standing tall, top-tufted with barbed wire and broken bottles, arms widespread to restrain and contain and limit. I wanted no more limits; only those I set for myself ((Habila 2007, 74).

Loomba moves to Morgan Street where he supports himself teaching English while he works on a novel. When after two years ‘still no single sentence made sense’ (106) he visits James Fiki, Editor at The Dial, who had once published one of his student essays, and asks him for a job. To prove himself as a journalist, he is asked by James to write an article
about disillusionment in the country and in response, Loomba writes his own space - using Morgan Street ‘as a paradigmatic locale’ (113). Notably, this act has striking parallels with Ato Quayson’s study Oxford Street, Accra in which Quayson draws out ‘moments of communication’ from the spatial practice of Oxford Street and uses these ‘multilayered expressive fragment[s]’ to ‘encapsulate a larger social totality’ (Quayson 2014, 21-22). As a result of Loomba’s article, two years later again, a man called Joshua visits him at The Dial and asks him to write about a peaceful demonstration being made by residents of Morgan Street (190) – marching to the Local Government Secretariat and drawing attention to the hardships they are experiencing, from lack of water to overcrowded and under-resourced schools to run-down healthcare clinics (170). Habila himself writes the demonstration itself through the eyes of fifteen year old Kela, a pupil of Joshua who is living for a year at his Auntie Rachel’s restaurant at No. 20 Morgan Street. He describes how the residents carry placards with the words ‘Poverty Street’ and the closing message of Joshua’s speech, made standing on a garbage drum outside the gates, having been ordered to leave, is that the residents want to change the name of their street from Morgan Street to Poverty Street. Their demand to the government is to be able to create their own representations of space, to name their space in a way that reflects their reality: ‘We don’t know who Morgan is or was, but we do know what poverty is’ (171).16

The protest ends with police batons and tear gas – and Loomba, having been persuaded by James that the role of the media is to support speaking out against oppression despite the risks, is one of the people arrested.

The form in which Habila writes Waiting for an Angel is fragmented and non-linear. In the opening chapter the narrator brings together several diary entries written by Loomba in prison and the book ends with him stepping out of a car to cover the demonstration at the Local Government Secretariat – The Dial’s offices having been burnt down earlier in the day and a warrant issued for James’s arrest. Time moves forwards and backwards across the novel’s seven chapters each of which forms a separate coherent narrative and the novel could equally be described as seven interlinked short stories. Each chapter or story informs other sections while also leaving questions and silences – for example the penultimate chapter ‘Kela’ shows Loomba leaving the demonstration in a taxi with Kela, Hagar and Joshua, emerging safely into the shadows two blocks later; his arrest is absent from any of the chapters. Habila wrote Waiting for an Angel while living in Lagos working as a journalist in the 1990s. He describes Lagos at that time as a ‘large, sprawling suburb

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16 Quayson highlights that the name ‘Oxford Street’ does not appear on any official maps of Accra. It is the strip of much longer Cantonments Road and its renaming as Oxford Street ‘is partly an improvisation and chimerical projection of popular desire’ (Quayson 2014, 10).
of hell’ and how it was ‘hopeless to try to write my novel in a linear, continuous way - I just couldn’t see that far into the future’ (Habila 2012). Structuring *Waiting for an Angel* as a series of self-contained stories enabled him to complete the novel in an environment where it felt like every day had to be ‘brought to a closure because there was no guarantee it wouldn’t be the last day’ (Habila 2012). So Habila argues for *Waiting for an Angel* as a novel that very explicitly reflects the ‘network of relations’ (Barber 1987, 1) out of which it was constructed, with its literary form developed directly out of spatial practice.

*Waiting for an Angel* is another novel that blurs the boundaries between author and narrator, fact and fiction – with Habila acknowledging that the character of Loomba is informed by his own experiences of working in Lagos as a journalist in the 1990s (Habila 2009). Habila describes the novel coming out of ‘real things, real people that I sat with and talked to’ and how he was motivated by a sense of the writer as ‘archivist’ and wanting to ‘document history for the future’ (Habila 2009). Habila’s relationship to the particular time and place in which the novel is set is made explicit through his appearance as a character, a device that is also used by A. Igoni Barrett in *Blackass*. In the final chapter as James tries to avoid the men looking to arrest him, he and Loomba seek refuge at the house of poet Emeka Davies and find themselves in the middle of a gathering of ‘every writer in Lagos’ (211). Loomba with his ‘head reeling’ (213) from the events of the day with its arson, murders and arrests, along with the beer he has drunk and the number of people trying to talk to him, goes out onto the balcony and vomits. As he is recovering someone else rushes outside and is sick over the railings: ‘Hi,’ he says to Loomba, wiping his mouth with his hand. ‘I am Helon Habila’ (215). After this another six writers follow, vomiting over the balcony and introducing themselves; each of these, like the arrested poets Akin [Adesokun] and Ogada [Ifowodo] for whom the reading is being held, represent significant voices in a new generation of literary production from Lagos. Chris Dunton has argued that what distinguishes the contemporary Lagos novel from an earlier generation of writing about the city is the emphasis on ‘the possibilities inherent in the act of writing (or some other form of expressive activity) as a means to assert a meaningful existence’ (Dunton 2008, 73). He argues that even as Habila writes the harsh realities of 1990s Lagos under military oppression that, from Loomba’s prison diaries to the writers and journalist he shows willing to risk arrest in order to speak out, the novel is ultimately a ‘celebration of the positive energies enabled by the written word’ (Dunton 2008, 75). His argument resonates with the way in which several of the novels examined in this chapter
engage with the role of the writer. As Dunton highlights, central to the narrative of Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* is an alliance of 'lawyers, journalists and editors', that includes Enitan's father, speaking out against the Abacha regime (Dunton 2008, 74). Enitan herself is arrested for attending a reading in support of writers in detention where journalist Grace Ameh advocates for the importance of writing as 'activism' in a state where 'words are so easily expunged' (257). In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie emphasizes the role of the writer not in relation to protest but in relation to memory. At the end of the novel it becomes clear that it is Ugwu who has authored the sections of another account of the war that have been interspersed through the main narrative - 'The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died'. Adichie shows Ugwu asking Olanna to tell him about the incident which has formed this book's prologue – her experience of travelling back to Nsukka having witnessed the deaths of her aunt, uncle and cousin through horrific ethnic violence in Kano and sitting next to a woman who is carrying her daughter's head in a calabash:

> Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of (410).

However, I want to argue that in drawing attention to the role of the writer these novels do more than celebrate the act of writing. This attention to the act of writing and authorship also works to highlight these narratives of memory and place as partial and constructed, and write into their form the ways in which they are rooted within a particular time and space of Nigerian cultural production. Adichie, for example, makes explicit in her 'Author Note' (434) the importance of other books in her research and follows this with a list of 31 books about the Nigeria-Biafra war, predominantly by Nigerian writers, that informed her writing of *Half of Yellow Sun*. The narrative of the novel is interrupted by the sections of 'The World Was Silent When We Died' which move through poetry, biography and history, and prompt a questioning of who it is that writes the history and memory of the war and how it is written. Through this Adichie highlights the plurality of memory and positions her own voice as just one among many. Equally when Helon Habila appears in *Waiting for an Angel* alongside Toni Kan, Obi Nwakanma and Maik Nwoso, Habila draws attention to his narrative of 1990s Lagos as both representing and emerging from exchanges with a particular literary network located in the city at that time. Chielozona Eze makes a similar observation in arguing for the contemporary Nigerian novel as 'transcultural' when he writes that 'the most important aspect of this intermeshing of fiction and reality is the depiction of the state of Nigerian cultural production' (Eze 2005, 103). Highlighting that for writers such as Habila,
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Chris Abani ‘community’ is no longer defined by ethnicity, Eze's concern is to draw attention to this list of writers that appears in Waiting for an Angel as reflective of ‘the country’s divergent ethnic composition' (Eze 2005, 104).

In A. Igoni Barrett’s Blackass, when Furo seeks refuge in Lekki, he heads to The Palms and in the mall’s food court sits at the same table as a writer called Igoni, who ends up buying him coffee. Sensing that there is ‘one hell of a story' (55) in this oyibo who speaks some Kalabari and whose father is from Abonnema, Igoni uses Twitter to track down Furo's sister and even visits his parents as part of his novel research. During this time Igoni undergoes his own transformation, becoming a woman. In the novel's final section entitled ‘Metamorphoses' which is narrated by the female Igoni, she and Furo end up kissing and when Furo asks to see her breasts she reflects as she takes her blouse off:

He was the hero of a story that had set me free, and knowing him felt no different from knowing me (260).

When asked by Nnedi Okorafor as part of a conversation at the 2015 Ake Arts & Book Festival if the character Igoni in the novel was ‘him’, Barrett, echoing this sentiment, explained that ‘every character in that novel is me, it comes out of my head’ and argued that instead the question that needs to be asked is ‘What version of me - is it the version I show my mother? Is it the version I show the audience at a book festival?’ (Ake Arts & Books Festival Live Stream 2015). Blackass is a novel which is fundamentally preoccupied by the ways in which identity can be constructed and transformed through interactions in literary, digital and physical spaces. By introducing himself and his Twitter handle into the narrative, Barrett makes explicit his relationship with the constructed narrative of the novel, as well as his relationship with its characters and his own identity as ‘author'. As the character Igoni reflects:

Long before Furo's story became my own, I was already trying to say what I see now, that we are all constructed narratives (83).

So @_igoni becomes the title of the second part of this work of ‘fiction', which includes an accurate ‘factual’ history of the way in which this Twitter handle has until now been used by the writer A. Igoni Barrett:

My handle is @_igoni and I was born into the Twitter stream in January 2009. Apart from tweeting links to my online publications, as well as other articles I'd enjoyed reading, I didn't have much to do in my short existence (86).

Barrett uses Igoni to make visible the spaces and histories he shares with his characters. At the Ake Festival, reflecting on his decision to include a character called Igoni in the novel, he described how as he wrote Furo deciding 'to gravitate to a part of The Palms that
I usually hang out’, he just thought ‘Why not? I will like to meet this character and find out what he is thinking at this exact moment’ (Ake Arts & Books Festival Live Stream 2015). Similarly through Igoni’s relationship with Furo’s sister Tekena, Barrett brings into view the similarities between his own background and that of the novel’s main characters – having both been born into the military dictatorships of 1980s and 1990s, and grown up in cities reading the same Pacesetter novels and watching the same NTA shows (162).

As in Waiting for an Angel, Igoni’s appearance in the novel has the effect of making evident the book as emerging from a particular time and place of cultural production in Lagos. Barrett has written about finding in Lagos ‘a self-sustaining tradition of creativity and enterprise’ and how arriving in 2007 he was:

flung into a community of writers, editors, publishers and booksellers. I met people whose work I had read, whose work I wanted to read, and whose conversations I noted down so others might someday read them as fiction (Barrett 2016a).

When characterizing this community he describes book readings at Jazzhole (the bookshop praised for its presentation in Every Day is for the Thief), writing workshops by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and spoken-word poetry performances at Bogobiri (Barrett 2016a). In Blackass there are glimpses that position the novel within this writing community and the networks of African literary production in English that this thesis seeks to explore. When Furo first meets Igoni he is reading Carlos Moore’s Fela This Bitch of a Life, a book published in Nigeria in 2010 by Cassava Republic Press. Furo’s second meeting with Igoni then takes place at Bogobiri – a hotel, restaurant and bar in Lagos known for its live music and for hosting literary performances and readings; a venue where in November 2013 A. Igoni Barrett and Eghosa Imasuen appeared as part of the Etisalat Prize Literary Weekend and where in November 2015 Cassava Republic Press launched Elnathan John’s novel Born on a Tuesday. Barrett evocatively describes Furo’s arrival at the two-storey building with its entrance through a wrought-iron gate set in a fence ‘streaked with creeper plants and daubed with protest graffiti’ and how inside above the ‘mahogany trunk that served as tables’ were ‘canvases of Ehikhamenor iconography’ (223). Furo is there to deliver books for his employer Haba! and through this description of Furo’s navigation of Lagos, Barrett not only draws attention to their sharing of the city’s spatial practice but to the work of Victor Ehikhamenor. Ehikhamenor is a Lagos-based writer and artist who not only – perhaps significantly given the novel’s emphasis on the ways in which identity is constructed - took many of the photos of Barrett circulated to promote Blackass but, as I discuss in Chapter 6, created the artwork used for the covers of
both Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (Farafina, 2004) and Habila’s *Measuring Time* (Cassava Republic Press, 2007).

**Conclusion**

In *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City*, Filip de Boeck makes the case that urban reality has over time ‘turned into a world in which fact and fiction are interchangeable’ (de Boeck and Plissart 2013, 58). He argues while every city is made up of spaces that are mapped and visible, and lives and spaces that are not mapped and visible, that in Kinshasa the ‘invisible’ has come to take the ‘upper hand’ in terms of the daily experience of living in the city (de Boeck and Plissart 2013, 23, 56). This complex relationship between the visible and invisible, the material and immaterial is something that can similarly be seen playing out in AbdouMaliq Simone’s research on urban life in Africa, and that in both cases resonates with Edward Soja’s concept of thridspace and a rejection of these terms as binaries. Bringing together a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* focused on ‘African City Textualities’, Ranka Primorac makes an important connection between what is visible and invisible, formal or informal in the space of the city, and the ways in which these same dynamics play out in relation to literary production (Primorac 2008, 4).

Strikingly Cole and Atta both write into their novels an absence of literature or knowledge production in print that is located in or reflects the spaces they write. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Enitan reflects on the scarcity of books in the economic and political climate of 1990s Lagos and that the only places she has encountered books by African authors have been in London, with even these not offering ‘characters as diverse as the people I knew’ (254). Cole arguably writes a relationship to Nigerian cultural production through both absence and presence; when his narrator visits the CMS bookshop on Lagos Island he is disappointed by the lack of fiction by both Nigeria-based Nigerian writers and international writers and reflects:

Other than a few tattered copies of plays by Shakespeare and Soyinka, all that is available is a handful of recently published novels: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*. Both of these are first novels by young Nigerian women based in the US and they are here most likely because they have an energetic young Nigerian publisher behind them (93).

As I have shown, in different ways each of these six contemporary Nigerian novels engages with the production of space. I argue that through this these writers can be characterized as responding to the disjunctures Achille Mbembe identifies, disjunctures that have explicitly preoccupied Kwani Trust and Chimurenga, between daily life in Africa as experienced (through spatial practice) and as imagined and mapped (through what
Lefebvre calls ‘representational spaces’ and ‘representations of space’). In a variety of different ways these novels draw on the daily routines of spatial practice, the imaginaries, symbols and memories of representational spaces and the policy and mapping of representations of space across the overlapping locations of the city, domestic life and the institution of the university, to find expressive literary forms that can in turn become located back within representational spaces and popular memory.

This body of novels published by Farafina and Cassava Republic Press since 2005 reflect striking aesthetic commonalities: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* both make a deliberate intervention in cultural memory that engages with the production of space through the site of the university, and foregrounds what Bakare-Yusuf calls the ‘politics of the everyday’. A. Igoni Barrett’s *Blackass* and Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* both experiment with finding new literary form that can better reflect Lagos in its language and structure, simultaneously inserting themselves in the narrative and making explicit their relationship to a particular time and place of cultural production. Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* and Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* through the partial and distanced perspectives of their narrators, draw attention to what of Lagos is visible or experienced and what remains invisible or imagined within the space of novel.

Through this chapter I have been concerned to show how often by blurring the lines or dissolving the binaries between fact and fiction, author and character, these texts draw attention to the location of their writers and self-consciously position themselves within a particular time and place of Nigerian cultural production. Through this they write into their own form an engagement with the ways in which space and literature is made *material* both through the process of finding form and through acquiring cultural value and resonance. The second part of this thesis explores the ways in which, through their interactions and exchanges of cultural value as part of a pan-African literary network, this group of writers is also engaged in producing new *literary* cartographies.


4

Exchanges in Nairobi and Lagos: Conceptualizing a Literary Network

In Lagos early in 2010, A. Igoni Barrett – who had until recently been working as an editor for Farafina magazine – launched a monthly literary event called Book Jam at an upmarket shopping mall on Victoria Island. Barrett had decided to leave his role as Managing Editor of Farafina magazine to focus on his own writing, and the initial motivation to start this event came from the need to sell more copies of his self-published short story collection From Caves of Rotten Teeth to recoup the capital he had invested in it (Barrett 2014a). The bookshop in Silverbird Galleria had been selling just two copies of his book a month, and Barrett felt that bringing more people to this shop could only increase the chances of it selling in greater numbers. In response he designed a tightly managed yet entertaining format for a literary event that began to take place on the last Saturday of every month between 3 and 5pm: building on established formats for ‘book club’ meetings hosted by Lagos bookshops (Newell 2016), three writers were in conversation with each other and a host, followed by ‘brutally moderated’ questions from the audience and a book signing, alongside musical performances. To encourage book-buying Barrett used Silverbird’s connections to source high profile ‘gifts’ from sponsors – from designer shirts to mobile phones – and everyone who bought a book was entered in a raffle draw to win that month’s prize. The event became hugely successful, showcasing high profile authors from Helon Habila to Tsitsi Dangaremba, Uwem Akpan to Karen King-Aribisala, and with audiences growing from 50 to 300 people (Barrett 2013b). Book Jam became so successful in fact that Silverbird tried to appropriate it in different ways rather than, as agreed, leaving aesthetic and curatorial decisions to Barrett and after seven months the relationship broke down and the event (and shortly after the bookshop itself) folded (Barrett 2014a).

Book Jam not only made a lasting impact on Nigeria’s literary scene, it also arguably had a significant impact on Barrett’s subsequent career as a writer. The fourth edition of Book Jam held in May 2010 featured Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina, alongside Nigerian writers Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chuma Nwokolo and Sade Adeniran. At the event Wainaina bought a copy of From the Caves of Rotten Teeth and encountered Barrett’s writing for the first time. A few months later Wainaina emailed him to say how much he

18 Wainaina was in Lagos at the time to co-teach with Adichie as part of the Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop.
liked the book and to ask him what he was doing following his departure from *Farafina* (Barrett 2014a). This began a conversation between the two writers out of which Wainaina, at the time Director of the Chinua Achebe Center at Bard College in the US, offered Barrett the Chinua Achebe Center Fellowship; this enabled him to spend three months writing in Mombasa and complete work on his second short story collection *Love is Power, Or Something Like That*. A condition of the fellowship was that Barrett would submit what he had been working on to Wainaina at the end of the residency. On receiving his manuscript Wainaina very quickly forwarded this to his agent Sarah Chalfant at The Wylie Agency in the UK with the strong recommendation she take on Barrett. A few days later Barrett received a call from Chalfant offering to represent him, and accepted (Barrett 2014a).

This story, rooted in a literary event located in Lagos, demonstrates the potency of trans-continental exchanges in the production of African literature: exchanges that not only have implications for the economics that enable writers to write and publish on the continent, but also for the validation and circulation of certain forms of writing in what Pascale Casanova calls the ‘world literary space’ (Casanova 2004, xii). Barrett’s short story collection *Love is Power, or Something Like That* and his novel *Blackass*, through The Wylie Agency’s negotiations, went on to be published in the US by leading non-profit independent publisher Graywolf Press, and in the UK by Chatto & Windus – an imprint now owned by Penguin Random House which since its founding in 1855 has been associated with prestigious literary authors from Mark Twain to Marcel Proust and currently publishes Nobel Prize winners Toni Morrison and Alice Munro. This snapshot of the interactions that enabled Barrett to move from an author struggling to sell copies of his own self-published work to an author with the financial freedom to focus on his own writing as well as an audience outside Nigeria, provides an entry point into this chapter, which develops my argument that more scholarly attention needs to be given to the dynamics through which exchanges in what are often labelled ‘local’ or ‘national’ literary spaces intersect with (often validating and being validated by) exchanges in what are instead labelled ‘world’ or ‘global’ literary spaces. Focusing on the launch of Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* by Farafina in Lagos and the launch of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust* by Kwani Trust in Nairobi, I show how located literary events can be read as ‘multilayered expressive fragment(s)’ (Quayson 2014, 21) through which to explore the relationships and flows out of which writers and texts are created. By mapping these exchanges, I suggest it is possible to make visible alternative literary geographies and demonstrate the significance of a new pan-African network of publishers and writers.
through which the space, value and texts of 21st century African literature in English are being made material.

As I have highlighted, as new publishing companies established on the continent since the turn of the millennium, Kwani Trust and Farafina belong to a world of the present which Arjun Appadurai has described as marked by ‘electronic media and mass migration’ as forces that impel ‘the work of the imagination’ (Appadurai 1996, 4). Both have placed a primary emphasis on building communities of writers and readers located in Kenya and Nigeria, reinforcing their agency in publishing from the ‘local’ or ‘national’ while deliberately positioning themselves within a pan-African and ‘world literary space’. They therefore offer particularly rich case studies through which to draw attention to the intersections and disjunctures between scholarly work positioned as contributing to debates about African popular cultures (Newell 2000, Odhiambo 2011, Musila 2014, Nyairo 2007) which has opened up new conceptions for the interactions between ‘local’ and ‘global’ through studies of Africa-based publishers, writers and audiences, and research that foregrounds African literature’s relationship to structures of canonization and circulation in the global North (Huggan 2001, Cooper 2008, Julien 2006, Adesokan 2012, Ojaide 2012). Through this chapter, Casanova’s conception of ‘world literary space’ acts simultaneously as a reference point and a point of departure. It provides a useful reference through which to signal the ways in which Kwani Trust and Farafina self-consciously position themselves in relation to literary institutions in Europe and the US – the Eurocentric model of world literary space governed by the hierarchies Casanova describes. At the same time, I argue that the exchanges revealed by the launch events for Imasuen’s Fine Boys and Owuor’s Dust present a literary space that prompts us to actively reconsider African literature’s position within ‘world literary space’ as Casanova describes it and calls into question the partial histories that frame her conception of the ‘global’ or ‘world’ dynamics through which literature is constructed.

Unsurprisingly, recent studies of the role played by particular publishers or publications in the construction of ‘African literature’ have worked to complicate Casanova’s dynamics of ‘world literary space’ (Davis 2013, Suhr-Sytsma 2013, Helgesson 2015, Bush 2016). Perhaps most powerfully, Ruth Bush’s study of African literary production from Paris between 1945 and 1967 nuances the relationships between centre and periphery that Casanova describes, demonstrating how her idea of ‘Parisianization’ overlooks the ways in which individuals and communities have ‘also challenged and resisted dominant modes of literary evaluation’ and the ways in which writer and publishers simultaneously shape and
are shaped by the effects of the literary field (Bush 2016, 20). What Bush’s work demonstrates is that there is a need for a more dynamic and relational model of world literary space, one that historicizes universality and takes account of the different sites (such as *Présence Africaine*) that gesture to alternative universalisms’ (Bush 2016, 196). Here, I similarly argue that new models are needed for the study of literary production, from Africa and elsewhere, that better allow for the global cultural flows and multiple sites of value that studying Kwani Trust and Farafina make visible.

**Conceptualizing a literary network**

As I set out in my introduction, in response I propose a relational methodology that puts the ‘relations of interdependence’ that Bourdieu’s work brings into view (Bourdieu 1995, 197) in dialogue with Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’ in order to conceptualize the idea of a literary network. In allowing for the ways in which literary texts remain in constant flux, with artists and commentators continually consecrated and re-consecrated through reciprocal flows (Bourdieu 1993, 32, 36), Bourdieu provides a relational methodology that, as a number of recent studies have shown (van der Vlies 2007, Helgesson 2008, 12, Davis 2010, 4, 317, Strauhs 2013, Bush 2016), can be used to complicate centre-periphery models of African cultural production. However, with his own descriptions of the ‘field’ retaining a Eurocentric perspective, it can be difficult to disentangle Bourdieu’s methodologies in order to move beyond the nations, hierarchies and binaries he uses these to describe. Arjun Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’ therefore offers a much needed counterpoint and counterpart, offering a relational model that can be used in dialogue with Bourdieu’s ‘network of relations of exchange’ in order to construct and map a literary network in a way that takes account of global cultural flows. Working across the disjuncture and connections between the five dimensions - *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *techoscapes*, *financescapes* and *ideoscapes* - Appadurai proposes a framework for analyzing global cultural and imaginary that allows for complexity, fragmentation and flows that are multidirectional (Appadurai 1996, 32-33). By bringing together these two approaches, a theory of literary networks emerges that can exploit in productive ways the synergies and tensions engendered between Appadurai’s seemingly non-hierarchical multiple flows and domains of value, and Bourdieu’s concern with hierarchies of value and structures of power. Through this a better understanding of the flows of people, technologies, money, information and ideas that have constructed a new pan-African literary network operating across, outside and between national spaces emerges, and alongside this a redefinition of what world literary space might mean in relation to this.
Launching Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* in Lagos

Farafina’s launch of Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* took place on Saturday 25 August 2012 at 2pm in Quintessence Bookstore in the affluent Ikoyi area of Lagos. This ‘official launch’ event marked the publication of the print edition, Farafina having first published *Fine Boys* as an eBook in September 2011. As the flyer advertising the launch shows (Figure 4.1), this free event was hosted by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and also featured Binyavanga Wainaina, as well as performances from Efe Paul Azino and Honey. What are the exchanges this event makes visible and how might these enable me to map and characterize a literary network? Figure 4.2 begins to represent these exchanges visually and points to the different ‘-scapes’ through which they are inflected. As the diagram shows, it is through individuals that exchanges are made material, although the significance of these exchanges is often forged out of and in turn forges relationships between individuals and institutions.

![Flyer advertising the launch of Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* in Lagos.](image)

Figure 4.1: Flyer advertising the launch of Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* in Lagos.

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20 Which was made available for sale via the now defunct Nigerian digital entertainment store HiBuzz.
Figure 4.2: Exchanges and flows: Launching Eghosa Imasuen's *Fine Boys* in Lagos (Artwork by Wumi Olaosebikan).
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: sharing a publisher

As I have highlighted, Farafina first published Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in 2003 (Adichie 2003), and their publication of her first novel in Nigeria in 2004 not only marked Farafina’s shift from literary magazine publisher to book publisher (Bakare 2014) but the beginning of a publishing relationship that has lasted for over a decade and four books. In hosting the launch of Fine Boys, Adichie therefore not only brought cultural value to the novel by direct association with her own literary prestige, but drew attention to her equivalent author relationship and publishing history with Farafina. In characterizing the dimension of mediascapes, Appadurai is concerned with the ability of information to be produced and disseminated throughout the world through ‘newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios’, and the ‘images of the world’ created through these forms of media (Appadurai 1996, 35). Muhtar Bakare has explained that after the publication of Half of a Yellow Sun (Adichie 2006), Farafina was able to begin ‘managing costs’ by strategically making use of the amount of press coverage Adichie was receiving outside Nigeria. He commented that once the novel had been reviewed in The New York Times or the Guardian, Farafina could take those stories and circulate them—and that through this her writing ‘gets a life of its own’ (Bakare 2014). Interestingly, this intervention of taking international media coverage of Adichie and re-circulating it is something that can be seen happening more broadly in the space of the Nigerian media—not just led by Farafina: news sites are frequently circulating, re-posting or commenting on stories about Adichie from media sources around the world. It is through these multidirectional flows across mediascapes that Adichie’s literary prestige has been built in Nigeria and she is in a position to then consecrate Imasuen’s Fine Boys with cultural value.

However Adichie’s role as host of this event represents more than her conscious involvement in the ‘symbolic production’ (Bourdieu 1993, 37) of the novel. Imasuen has talked about the significance for him of travelling to Lagos in 2005 and buying copies of Farafina’s first two published novels – Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus and Atta’s Everything Good Will Come (Imasuen 2014). He was then already at work on his first novel To St Patrick (Imasu en 2008) and describes how these books showed him that ‘my generation’s story had begun to be told’ and ‘confirmed to me that I had to keep on writing’ (Imasuen 2012). When his own novel was finished he used the contact details he found on the physical editions of these books to get in touch with Farafina and from this unsolicited approach began a conversation with Muhtar Bakare which led to him being offered a contract in 2006 (Imasuen 2014). In 2007 when Adichie launched what has become the annual
Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop, Imasuen was in attendance. In a video that documents the launch of *Fine Boys*, Adichie draws attention to Imasuen being part of this first workshop and comments that they have been friends ever since (Allison 2012). In the same video, Imasuen similarly highlights that he developed a friendship with Adichie around this time, although he foregrounds the link made between them through Farafina: ‘we became close in 2007 after I signed my contract for my first novel’. He then goes on to explain that it was natural to invite Adichie to host the launch of *Fine Boys* because his second novel ‘owes a lot of life’ to her and the support she has given to his writing (Allison 2012). Analyzing Adichie’s role in the launch of *Fine Boys* through the relational models of both Bourdieu and Appadurai allows for a complexity that places the media coverage of Adichie’s literary success outside the country in dialogue with the activities of Farafina and the literary community within Nigeria. Adichie and Imasuen are clearly both conscious of the power dynamics at play in their relationship: that when Adichie hosts his book launch she brings an attention and audience to the novel it wouldn’t otherwise receive. But the relationship between Adichie and Imasuen could also be characterized as interpersonal, creative and material (emphasizing Bourdieu’s distinction between ‘symbolic’ and ‘material’ production (Bourdieu 1993, 321)). Adichie plays a role in inspiring and developing Imasuen’s writing craft, as well as advocating Muhtar Bakare to publish *Fine Boys* at a time when Farafina was struggling financially and publishing very little fiction (Dosekun 2014, Imasuen 2014).

*Binyavanga Wainaina: pan-African connections*

For publishers, agents and critics a particularly effective way of positioning a writer as saleable or important is to make comparisons and herald new voices as the ‘next’ or the ‘natural successor to’. These comparisons are key to the way in which writers acquire cultural value, as well as working to position writers within a particular sub-genre or tradition. Farafina launching *Fine Boys* on a platform shared with not only Adichie but also Binyavanga Wainaina, an author whose first book *One Day I Will Write About This Place* had recently been feted by leading US literary institutions as an Oprah Book Club Choice and one of *The New York Times* ‘100 Most Notable Books of 2011’, had the immediate effect of positioning Imasuen as a writer of a comparable stature (emphasized by the strip of photographs over the centre of the event’s flyer which gives all three writers equal billing). Wainaina as the author of a memoir and whose endorsement is included on the back cover of Imasuen’s novel, brought a particular credibility to *Fine Boys* as a story that draws on the author’s own life. Again the relationship between Wainaina, Imasuen and
Farafina seen through these exchanges represents more than a purely symbolic consecration of cultural value. Wainaina was again in Lagos at the time of the launch of *Fine Boys* in order to teach alongside Adichie at the Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop, a workshop he has taught with her since 2007. Wainaina therefore had an existing relationship with Imasuen that had also been developed through the inaugural edition of the workshop, a relationship that again could be characterized as interpersonal, creative and material that engaged with his writing, and that opened up opportunities for publication. In the launch video Wainaina comments ‘I read this novel in draft, I thought it was extraordinary’ and it was as a result of his interest in the work that an early version of the opening chapter of *Fine Boys* was published in the fiction omnibus *Kwani? 06* in 2010. From this brief snapshot, then, the extent to which Adichie and Wainaina both play a role in Imasuen finding publication on the continent, and through their association with the novel connecting it to wider audiences both in Nigeria and outside, becomes apparent. In part as a result of Adichie's and Wainaina's appearances, the event was hugely popular and their involvement also moved the launch into transnational and global spaces, with photographs appearing on the popular US-based African literature blog Brittle Paper (Morocco-Clarke 2012) and the launch video profiled on South Africa's leading book news source Books LIVE (Luso 2012).

**Instituting flows and exchanges**

Of course, the exchanges and flows evidenced in the launch cannot be characterized only through the participation of Adichie and Wainaina. Also present were several individuals significant to Farafina's institutional history past and future including: compere Tolu Ogunlesi, a now prominent writer and journalist who also participated in Adichie's inaugural writing workshop and whose early work is known for being published by Farafina (Ogunlesi 2007, Ladipo Manyika et al. 2008); A. Igoni Barrett, who not only worked at Farafina, but whose short story collection and novel Farafina would go on to publish (Barrett 2013a, 2015a); performer Efe Paul Azino, who would be a participant in the 2013 Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop and whose debut collection Farafina would publish in 2015 as their first move into poetry publishing (Azino 2015). Notably both this and Barrett’s *Blackass* would be commissioned by Eghosa Imasuen himself, who in 2013 became COO of Kachifo Limited and co-taught the 2013 Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop with Adichie and Wainaina.

By examining writers who are visible in the media coverage of the launch, it is also
possible to trace overlaps and connections between the network of writers associated with Farafina and other significant creative and publishing initiatives and institutions coming out of Nigeria. For example, Jude Dibia published his third novel *Blackbird* through the JALAA writers’ collective in 2011, an idea initially sparked by A. Igoli Barrett (Ujubuoñu 2013). Victor Ehikhamenor, whose artwork Barrett references in *Blackass*, was one of the first authors to be launched in 2013 by new Lagos-based publishing company Parrésia, co-founded by former Farafina editor Azafi Omoluabi-Ogosi. And Elnathan John, a participant in the 2011 Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop and whose combative and sexist public response to Adichie referring to him as ‘one of my boys in my workshop’ led to a public falling-out (Edoro 2015), was visible; John’s novel *Born on a Tuesday* is one of the first titles Cassava Republic Press released as they launched into the UK. The literary network contributing directly to the symbolic production of *Fine Boys* is therefore simultaneously, and often in dialogue with Farafina, engaged in the material production of other significant literary institutions formed over the last decade. Notably, suggesting that through this event at an elite bookshop, Farafina were also engaged in brokering a wider audience for the novel, Imasuen arranged for former Nigerian Idol contestant Honey Adum to perform at the event and Nollywood producer Uduak Isong also attended.

**Launching Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust* in Nairobi**

Kwani Trust’s launch of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust* took place on Friday 29 November 2013 at 7.30pm in Marshall’s Warehouse in Nairobi’s CBD, as part of a ‘book party’ to celebrate the institution’s 10th anniversary. While the Farafina’s event launched the only edition of Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* available to date (although it is available globally as an eBook), this event specifically marked the launch of the Kenyan edition of *Dust* (the US edition followed immediately in January 2014 published by Knopf, as well as a UK edition in June 2014 published by Granta). Together these two launch events make powerful case studies for mapping the overlapping literary networks out of which *Fine Boys* and *Dust* were produced, in part because at both events the authors shared a platform with the same two writers. Kwani Trust’s book party launched both *Dust* and a Kenyan edition of Adichie’s *Americanah*, and the two writers appeared together in conversation with Kwani? founding editor Binyavanga Wainaina. Again a diagram (Figure 4.4) can help visualize how the exchanges and flows this event reveals might be used to trace a broader literary network.
At the launch of *Dust*, Wainaina and Adichie play strikingly similar roles, although partially reversed, to those they played in the launch of *Fine Boys*. As host Wainaina brought cultural value to Owuor’s *Dust* through an association with his own literary prestige, but also by drawing attention to a longer history of their relationship with each other through Kwani Trust. Owuor was part of the original conversations from which *Kwani?* emerged; it was then Wainaina who encouraged and pestered her to send her work to the new journal and who as editor published her Caine Prize winning short story in the first edition (Owuor 2015). In the acknowledgements of *Dust*, Wainaina is the first person Owuor mentions after her editors and agents, thanking him for ‘whip-wielding tough love, daring, friendship, relentless faith, and a space-to-breathe residency’ (Owuor 2014a, 367). Again this signals a relationship between the two writers encompassing more than a symbolic production, whose reciprocal flows of cultural value are enabled through interpersonal, creative and material exchanges: from friendship, to critical feedback on an early draft of *Dust* (Owuor 2014b), to practical and financial assistance to enable Owuor’s writing. Just
Figure 4.4: Exchanges and flows: Launching Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s Dust in Nairobi (Artwork by Wumi Olaosebikan).
as the launch of *Fine Boys* emphasized the friendship between Imasuen and Adichie, so the launch of *Dust* was framed through a discourse of familiarity and friendship: Wainaina’s first question refers to knowing Owuor as a first-born child and an awareness of how her family experiences had informed the writing of *Dust*, and he ends the conversation celebrating her and asking for a round of applause with the words, ‘this is our daughter...this is Kenya at 50...this is our sister. Congratulations Yvonne, we love you very very much.’ Owuor responded by hugging him and saying 'I love you too' (Kwani Trust 2013).

*Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: pan-African connections*

The effect of Kwani Trust launching Owuor’s debut novel on the same platform as Adichie – who as I’ve highlighted is perhaps the bestselling and most visible contemporary African writer in the world literary space – again has the immediate effect of positioning these two writers alongside each other, and drawing attention to them both as significant prize-winning female African novelists. This comparison is one that Wainaina builds on in the conversation particularly in relation to their writing preoccupations, drawing a comparison between the intervention of Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* in relation to history and memory in Nigeria, and *Dust* in relation to history and memory in Kenya. In a plenary lecture given at the University of Nairobi as part of Kwani Trust’s 10th anniversary celebrations on the day of the book party, Adichie describes herself as a ‘hopelessly sentimental pan-African’, making a connection between the writers that gathered at Makerere in 1962 and a new generation of writers that Kwani?’symbolizes’ and that she feels she ‘belongs’ to (Adichie 2013). She argues the most significant thing about the African Writers Conference at Makerere was these writers coming together ‘to acknowledge and affirm’ one another (Adichie 2013). The importance to Adichie of this idea of affirmation can be seen throughout the launch of *Dust*, as she continually brings Owuor into the conversation when asked questions about her own work (for example commenting ‘Yvonne’s hair is so cool’ when talking about the role natural hair plays in *Americanah*), and interrupting Wainaina with praise for her novel (for example, ‘can I also just say publicly that I am number 1 in the list of people who love this novel *Dust?’) (Kwani Trust 2013).
Instituting flows and exchanges

Again, by examining writers who are visible as part of this event, it is possible to trace overlaps and connections between the network of writers associated with Kwani Trust and other significant creative and publishing initiatives and institutions coming out of Kenya and Africa. Kwani Trust’s 10th anniversary book party began with a series of readings from Muthoni Garland, Mehul Gohil and Saah Millimono. Muthoni Garland was involved in the beginnings of Kwani Trust and has frequently been published in the *Kwani?* journal between issues 01 to 08. In 2007 with a collective of other writers she formed the more commercially-focused Storymoja, which has published over 100 children’s books, as well as over 20 general fiction and non-fiction titles, and for six years collaborated with the Hay Festival to run the Storymoja Festival. Mehul Gohil’s writing was brought to attention when his first published short story21 won the *Kwani?* ‘The Kenya I Live In’ short story prize in 2010.22 In April 2014 he would be named as one of Africa’s most promising fiction writers from Africa (South of the Sahara) under 40 by Africa39 – a collaboration between the Hay Festival and Nigeria’s Rainbow Book Club. He is also one of the founding members of the pan-African writing collective Jalada, an initiative formed out of a writing workshop hosted by Kwani Trust in 2013. Liberian author Saah Millimono was 1st runner-up in Kwani Trust’s literary prize for unpublished novel manuscripts. As part of Kwani Trust’s 10th anniversary celebrations he was invited to Nairobi to be presented with his award by Kwani? Manuscript Project judge and editor Ellah Wakatama Allfrey. The Zimbabwean-born UK-based editor Allfrey, who as I highlighted in the introduction chaired the launch of Wainaina’s *One Day I Will Write About This Place* in Nairobi, was also in the audience for the launch of *Dust*. Allfrey is former Deputy Editor of Granta and in 2015 was a judge for the Man Booker Prize; she is also Deputy Chair of the Council of the Caine Prize and a patron of the Etisalat Prize for Literature – a new pan-African prize established in 2013. Allfrey’s presence at Kwani Trust’s 10th anniversary also reflects her long-standing exchanges and interactions with Kwani Trust and more broadly as a pivotal figure in the pan-African literary network this thesis seeks to map: Allfrey held ‘manuscript doctor’ sessions as part of 2008 Kwani? Litfest and in 2010 facilitated the first Farafina Trust Editors’ Workshop.

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21 Published alongside Eghosa Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* in *Kwani?* 06.
22 In *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics and Participation*, Doreen Strauhs argues that a ‘core of authors’ frequently appearing in Kwani Trust’s publications compromises the organization’s goal of ‘representing the best writing that Africa has to offer’ (Strauhs 2013, 144-5). In this, Strauhs fails to allow for this focus on a ‘core of authors’ forming a deliberate part of the ways in which Kwani Trust seeks to build a literary network and invest particular writers with cultural value. Mehul Gohil was unknown to Kwani Trust before the ‘The Kenya I Live In’ short story call out, but now regularly features as part of Kwani Trust’s publications and events programme.
Tracing connections

Out of these brief and partial snapshots of the literary prizes and institutions represented by significant figures in the launch of both *Fine Boys* and *Dust*, it is possible to begin characterizing the literary network out of which these novels are produced. They reveal a literary network which is pan-African, yet intimately connected to significant institutions within Kenya and Nigeria, as well as significant institutions in New York and London – capital cities of an Anglophone world literary space; a network that is rooted in the histories of Farafina and Kwani Trust but that out of which, and alongside, new significant literary publishers and initiatives have materialized over the last decade – from JALAA to Jalada, from Storymoja to Parrésia. What the exchanges and flows opened up by these two events show is that they are rooted in a longer history of exchanges and flows. In particular they bring in to view the ways in which both Farafina and Kwani Trust have been built alongside and in dialogue with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Binyavanga Wainaina becoming leading voices in contemporary African literature in the world literary space. And, that it is as a result of a friendship between the two writers that the institutions of Kwani Trust and Farafina have entered into consistent dialogue with each other over time, exchanging writers and texts: from the writing of Imasuen and Barrett appearing in *Kwani? 06* to Kwani Trust’s publication of Kenyan editions of all three of Adichie’s novels, from the special edition of *Farafina* magazine that focused on responses to the post-election violence in Kenya to Farafina’s publication of the Nigerian edition of Wainaina’s memoir *One Day I Will Write About This Place*. The flows across *technoscapes, ethnoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* that enable Adichie and Wainaina to build their relationship, are indicative of the ways in which the institutions of Kwani Trust and Farafina, as well as a broader overlapping and expanding pan-African literary network associated with them, have been created.

Like the institutions of Farafina and Kwani Trust, Adichie and Wainaina’s relationship is formed out of both physical and digital exchanges, and sustained by an interpersonal connection grounded in a passion for the writing process and a shared worldview. In 2001, Adichie and Wainaina met on the Zoetrope website. Through this website Adichie and Wainaina began an intense dialogue about writing and began exchanging emails almost every other day, forming a close friendship (Adichie 2013). In July 2002 the two writers met in person for the first time in the UK, having both been shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing – Wainaina having persuaded Adichie to enter (Adichie 2013). Reflecting in her lecture at the University of Nairobi on the significance of meeting
Wainaina on Zoetrope, Adichie described the importance of connecting with another writer who ‘recognized the eyes with which I looked at the world’ and how Wainaina became ‘the first of my truth tellers, the readers who read what I write and say I like this or I don’t like this, but I know where you are coming from’ (Adichie 2013). From first-hand interview accounts it is striking that what grounds many of Farafina’s most significant publishing relationships, from Imasuen to Barrett to Adichie, is explained through an interpersonal relationship with Muhtar Bakare, based initially on his direct outreach followed by a physical meeting, that confirms a shared passion for literature and a shared worldview (Adichie 2009b, Barrett 2014a, Imasuen 2014, Anya 2014, Verissimo 2015, Dosekun 2014). Adichie and Wainaina’s relationship is enabled by electronic communication and digital publishing, and the opportunities this affords to bring together disparately located individuals and communities – in this case Wainaina in Kenya, having recently returned from South Africa, and Adichie in the US, having left her hometown Nsukka in Nigeria to study there four years earlier. In the same way, electronic communication and digital publishing have been vital to building the writing communities of Kwani Trust and Farafina, bringing together national communities that are both located (for example, through the email exchange out of which Kwani? was formed) and physically distant (for example, through Farafina publishing Adichie and Atta’s writing online or the Nigerian writers listserv Krazitivity), as well as enabling pan-African connections. It is also notable that like Adichie and Wainaina, many of the writers associated with Kwani Trust, including Billy Kahora, Parselelo Kantai and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, have studied at universities outside Kenya. Finally, Adichie’s declared ambivalence about entering the Caine Prize, a prize that Kwani Trust’s institutional history is in some ways linked to, is arguably reflective of different financial structures through which these two institutions have established themselves, Kwani Trust being dependent on donor funding from Europe and the US and Farafina as a commercial organization dependent on the personal investment of Bakare for its capital.

Intersections and disjunctures

Tanure Ojaide argues that, partly as a result of poor communication networks across the continent, the African literary canon is being defined elsewhere by writers living outside the continent with access to ‘Western publishers’ in part writing with this market in mind, rather than genuinely reflecting the writing being published on the continent (Ojaide 2012, 25). He argues that migration, exile and globalization have given rise to two African literatures: one outside, based in the West and palatable to Westerners, and the other at
home for African consumption (Ojaide 2012, 48). This echoes Eileen Julien’s contention that what we have come to think of as ‘the African novel’ is in fact ‘the extroverted African novel’, characterized by its engagement ‘with hegemonic or global discourses and its appeal across borders’, rather than reflective of the novel forms that are locally produced and most widely read on the continent (Julien 2006, 681). Similarly Akin Adesokun argues that African writing published in the ‘West’ can be characterized in certain ways and (unlike Julien) suggests that, as a result of where they perceive the ‘market’ for their writing to be (as distinct from ‘audience’), writers self-consciously feed into these typologies (Adesokan 2012). He argues that the ‘exoticist allure’ of the marginal in contemporary African literature works in more complex ways than scholars of the postcolonial exotic and postcolonial publishing such as Graham Huggan (Huggan 2001) and Sarah Brouillette (Brouillette 2007) have allowed for, and is underwritten by ‘actually existing global inequalities’ (Adesokan 2012, 3). These interventions highlight important realities. Emma Shercliff, Co-Director of Cassava Republic Press UK, recently observed that intra-Africa distribution channels are so ‘cumbersome’ that in fact opening a UK office will better enable the Abuja-based company to reach markets in East and Southern Africa (Bagnetto 2016). Equally, A. Igoni Barrett has written about how after self-publishing his short story collection and implementing a series of innovative ideas to sell copies in Nigeria, he realized that if he wanted to work as a full-time writer, rather than a part-time publisher and book promoter, that the answer was publication by one of the ‘powerhouses of the West’ (Barrett 2014b). And yet, as Cassava Republic Press’s expansion in the UK and Barrett’s experience of simply using ‘foreign machinery’ to disperse his literary work without compromising his craft or terms of success show (Barrett 2014b), in perpetuating binaries between African literary production ‘on the continent’ and in the ‘West’ these scholars fail to allow for the multidirectional flows and domains of value involved in the creation, production and circulation of African literature.

As the examples of Kwani Trust and Farafina bring into view, writing from Africa that is published by UK and US ‘powerhouses’ is often brought to attention and consecrated with cultural value by structures of literary production based on the continent. Equally writers who achieve critical acclaim internationally are often part of and deeply entrenched within a larger continent-based community of writers. It is only by allowing for this that scholarship can begin to understand the complex dynamics of production of African literature in English in the world literary space: a space in which writers such as Adichie

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23 In both cases their critique is made more interesting by these scholars having been published by Farafina. Farafina published Ojaide’s novel The Activist in 2006 and Adesokan edited both Farafina 12 and Farafina’s Weaverbird Collection of new Nigerian fiction in 2008 (Ojaide 2006, Ladipo Manyika et al. 2008).
and Wainaina have been able to establish a high profile as public intellectuals in part as a
result of their Western-facing interventions challenging the ways in which Africa is
represented outside the continent (Wainaina 2005, Adichie 2009a)\(^{24}\); a space in which
Adichie and Wainaina (as the launch events for *Fine Boys* and *Dust* show) have both placed
a particular emphasis on being part of and nurturing a network of African writers, with
Adichie commenting that she set up the Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop
because ‘we shouldn’t walk the paths we walk alone’ (Adichie 2013) and Wainaina more
explicitly articulating in an interview that his politics and idea of himself as a writer is
informed by a sense of duty and belonging to an ‘African network of writers’ (Wainaina
2011); a space in which the economics of the market and the economics of the writer are
not one and the same thing – where, as the acknowledgements of *Dust* show, residencies
and grants that ‘buy’ individuals time to write may be funded by European or US
institutions but brokered through a literary network based on the continent; a space
where, as Bourdieu’s *field of forces* helps foreground (Bourdieu 1993) and as The Wylie
Agency’s representation of Adichie, Wainaina, Owuor and Barrett illustrates, even
exchanges rooted in friendship, shared commitment to the creative process, and a
philanthropic desire to enable the production of new writing are simultaneously
exchanges of power. Founded by Andrew ‘the jackal’ Wylie, known for being one of the
most powerful and ruthless literary agents in the Anglophone publishing industry with
authors including Martin Amis, Philip Roth and Salman Rushdie, through The Wylie
Agency Adichie and Wainaina have built their cultural value simultaneously in New York,
London, Lagos and Nairobi by acting as hubs or brokers that connect these literary
spaces.\(^{25}\)

The Warwick Research Collective have criticized Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters*
for not giving sufficient attention to the relationship between the world literary space and
the world of politics; for these scholars world-literature is defined by its mediation of the
capitalist world system (WReC 2015, 7). In drawing attention to the diverse, uneven but
interconnected conditions through which literature is produced, the Warwick Research
Collective productively open up a definition of world literary space or world literature

\(^{24}\) Wainaina’s ‘How to Write About Africa’ published in *Granta Magazine* and Adichie’s TED Talk ‘The Danger of
a Single Story’ (watched online over seven million times) both challenge stereotypes and the idea of a single
narrative about Africa, and have become seminal reference points in conversations across the international
media, politics and academia about the ways in which the continent is represented.

\(^{25}\) While concerned primarily with the political implications of networks as a medium of contemporary power,
Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Hacker have challenged the idea of network structures as liberating or
egalitarian, showing instead how they exercise new forms of control and create the conditions for a new kind
of sovereignty (Galloway and Hacker 2007, 5-20).
which is not dependent on texts that, as Damrosch’s widely cited definition of world literature calls for (Damrosch 2003), travel to the ‘centre’ or gain from translation. Despite the launch event for Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* attracting attention in South Africa and the US through Books LIVE and Brittle Paper, and the novel being named as one of Adichie’s ‘Books of 2012’ in the UK *Guardian* (The Guardian 2012), the print edition is only available through Farafina in Nigeria. Similarly, despite the interactions I’ve highlighted between Kwani Trust and literary institutions in Europe and the US, the *Kwani?* journal is only widely available in Kenya and has no established distribution structures elsewhere. The theory of literary networks that this thesis advocates for, in drawing attention to the role played by trans-continental connections and local publishers in the global movement and circulation of African literature, a role often not visible in current scholarship, offers a methodology that can also bring a more genuinely ‘worldly’ approach to world literature or accounts of a world literary space. Framing this through Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’ allows me to take account of the pervasive structure of ‘the modern capitalist world-system’ and the ways in which this underlies the production of African literature, without what African literature means and how it enters the world becoming solely defined by this – as it is for the Warwick Research Collective. Instead, in an environment where not just in Africa but elsewhere the majority of writers published by the global Anglophone publishing industry aren’t able to support themselves through book sales (Flood 2015), the examples of Kwani Trust and Farafina productively open up questions of what ‘value’ might mean in relation to literature and show the ways in which ‘networks of relations of exchange’ exercise more than symbolic power. In this instance, physical exchanges in African cities, interpersonal relationships and digital technology have all been vital to the construction of a literary network with the power not only to consecrate with cultural value, but to enable the development and publication of writers and texts.

**Conclusion**

While the literary network associated with Farafina has been built through their publishing, Kwani Trust as an institution was formed out of a pre-existing literary network created through a series of digital and physical exchanges. As a result, from the outset Kwani Trust have self-identified as a ‘Kenyan based literary network’. The description of activities outlined in the current ‘About Us’ section of their website suggests that for Kwani Trust, relationships built through publications, workshops and events (which predominantly take place or circulate in Nairobi) form the foundations of a literary network, which also has mobility (they are Kenyan-based not Kenya-based) and
connections in a world literary space. Bruno Latour has argued for an approach to tracing social connections or networks in which 'the inquirer is always one reflexive loop behind those they study' (Latour 2005, 32). In this thesis the idea of a literary network becomes self-reflexive: in many ways Wainaina and Kwani Trust's explicit positioning of themselves as part of a literary network has prompted me to develop a methodology through which this can be conceptualized and characterized.

While this methodology emerges out of and responds to the particular context of publishing post-millennial African literature in English, it is a methodology with the potential to be used more widely to reveal alternative geographies. Focusing in on a particular literary event offers the opportunity to provide a meaningful snapshot of some of the messy, complex and temporary 'exchanges' and flows across 'scapes' through which literature is produced and received and to follow these relational processes in multiple directions – so further work could be done to explore the connections this chapter makes visible from the perspective of new literary institutions based in Africa from Jalada to Parrésia, or equally from the perspective of UK or US-based literary magazines or agents from Granta to The Wylie Agency. By focusing on literary networks, I foreground an approach that allows for the ways in which literary spaces constantly overlap and shift, providing a way to make sense of these shifts while allowing for relationships with literary pasts and futures, and a range of different geographies.

The exchanges and flows out of which writers and texts are formed are always multiple and often contested. Still, conversations that continue to place ‘global’ and ‘local’ as terms and locations in opposition with each other risk neglecting the complexity of interactions within, across and beyond the continent involved in the production of African literature in English. Strikingly, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani writing in the New York Times on 'African Books for Western Eyes' (Nwaubani 2014) seemingly erases the role Cassava Republic Press played in recognizing the potential of and developing her novel before she was offered a contract by a publisher in the 'West' (Bakare-Yusuf 2014). And likewise, A. Igoni Barrett writing in direct response to this piece, and convincingly arguing that his decision to publish with one of the 'powerhouses of the West' does not mean African writers are powerless to control the narrative of their own creations (Barrett 2014b), at no point mentions Binyavanga Wainaina’s role in facilitating his publication opportunities in the UK and US.

By putting the ‘relations of interdependence’ that Bourdieu’s work brings into view in
dialogue with Appadurai's idea of 'scapes', and examining the exchanges and flows revealed by the launch events for Imasuen’s *Fine Boys* and Owuor’s *Dust*, I map an overlapping literary network that is firmly located within communities of writers based on the continent while being pan-African and in dialogue with elsewhere. Studying literature through the frame of literary networks forms both my methodology and argument here. Through the process of conceptualizing and characterizing the literary network associated with Kwani Trust and Farafina, I show these publishing companies forming the foundations of an overlapping pan-African literary network with the power not only to nurture and bring literary value to individual writers, but to inspire and validate new literary institutions. While this literary network is constructed in response to and in dialogue with the power dynamics of a Eurocentric world literary space as described by Casanova, I argue it has created a shift in the dynamics of how and where African writing in English is *material*. By using the word material, I signal both the processes through which writing is created and published, and the processes through which writing is validated and consecrated with literary value; it is by keeping both these processes in view that this study proposes a methodology that can, alongside and in dialogue with the work of Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press, redefine ideas of world literary space.
The Cape Town-based publisher Chimurenga began life in April 2002 as a single print book. However, editor Ntone Edjabe’s concern for *Music as a Weapon* to not only have the ‘seriousness of a book’ - something readers would feel ‘has enough value for them to keep’ - but the appearance of something friendlier that ‘you want to hold and touch and look at’ (Edjabe 2012a), led readers to imagine it was a magazine and so he began receiving submissions (Edjabe 2011). In July 2002 Edjabe therefore published *Dis-covering Home* as the second issue of *Chimurenga*, a magazine that to date has published sixteen issues in print. From these beginnings Chimurenga has demonstrated a self-consciousness and mutability in relation to its medium and form. Edjabe's concern to create a publication that invited the reader in through its tactile quality was motivated by the idea that through this they might be ‘engaging with knowledge in a different way’ (Edjabe 2012a). In a 2002 interview he highlighted that while the average black middle class family in South Africa might own two cars and have the ability to ‘spread gossip between cities, villages and townships’, they do not own a computer (Edjabe 2002b). Print as a medium therefore offered *Chimurenga* the greatest potential to reach its intended audience in South Africa and across the continent. Nevertheless, Edjabe was also conscious of print’s relationship to ideas of value and knowledge production, commenting in a later interview that ‘more than the tactile element, it was important for us to exist in print, in order to make the intervention we needed to make in the body of written material on and/or from Africa’s’ (Edjabe 2004). From 2003 Chimurenga also had a very active presence online at [www.chimurenga.co.za](http://www.chimurenga.co.za) - referred to in early editions of the magazine as ‘the sibling’. With access to the internet in South Africa (and worldwide) rising over the first decade of the 21st century, by 2009 Edjabe was characterizing the magazine as manifesting in ‘three different forms’: print (published 3 times a year), the website (updated monthly) and the Chimurenga Sessions (performances and conversations to accompany the launch of each edition) (Edjabe 2009). After publishing sixteen issues of the print magazine, in 2011 *Chimurenga* evolved again, this time into the form of a newspaper: the last edition of *Chimurenga* magazine - *The Chimurenga Chronicle* - became the first edition of a now

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26 The ITU (the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies) estimate that the percentage of the population in South Africa with access to the internet was 6.7% in 2002 and by 2012 this had risen to 41% (compared to 1.1% to 32.2% in Kenya and 0.33% to 32.9% Nigeria) (International Telecommunications Union 2012).
quarterly *gazette The Chronic* available both in print and a cheaper digital edition. This mutability in relation to medium or form has become an important part of the way Chimurenga self-identifies, today describing itself as a ‘project-based mutable object, a print magazine, a workspace, and platform for editorial and curatorial activities’ (Chimurenga 2016).

This brief publishing history brings into view the ways in which, in a digital age, decisions about medium are critical to how texts are read, circulated and given meaning. It provides a starting point for this chapter which argues for the significance of the physical form in which texts have been published, and in particular the medium of print, for the literary production of three contemporary and connected publishing companies based on the African continent – Kwani Trust, Kachifo and Cassava Republic Press. In reflecting an explicit self-consciousness and mutability in relation to form, Chimurenga draws attention to questions and connections that are vital but perhaps play out less explicitly in the publishing histories that follow: What are the relationships between print and knowledge production, digital and literature, medium and audience, aesthetics and value? How do these relationships intersect and shift over time? As I’ve shown over this study, Chimurenga, Kwani Trust, Kachifo’s Farafina imprint and Cassava Republic Press have developed in dialogue with each other, sharing ideas, writers and texts and collaborating with each other on events as well as on producing and distributing publications. According to Edjabe these exchanges have enabled the institutions to ‘mainstream our own aesthetics and reduce our dependency on the global publishing system’ (Edjabe 2012b). For Edjabe this mainstreaming is concerned both with the ways in which books physically travel - ensuring a Nigerian writer doesn’t need to be published in London or New York to be read in Kenya – and the way in which knowledge is produced and valued on the continent – ‘regaining the capacity to imagine and shape our own futures’ (Edjabe 2012b). Like Edjabe I argue that these publishing companies represent new pan-African literary networks through which the texts of 21st century African literature in English are being made material – using the term material through this thesis to make a particular connection between materiality as relating to physical form, and materiality as relating to cultural value. From the outset the output of all three of these publishing companies had a relationship with the digital space, just as they had overlapping relationships with each other enabled both by physical exchanges and electronic communication. However, in each case their focus became print publications whose aesthetics and distribution structures were aimed at a specifically national market, even though the structures through which their publishing programme was created and consecrated with cultural
value remained pan-African and transnational.

Theorizing print as a medium

The recent histories of these three publishers provoke a key question: what does it mean to think of print as a medium? While, as David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery’s The Book History Reader demonstrates (Finkelstein and McCleery 2006), over the last few decades book history has become an increasingly vibrant field of study, the role of print in literary production is very often theorized separately to the work of literary studies. To some extent to begin to theorize the medium in which literature is produced is to acknowledge the printed book as a relatively recent form of media technology, emerging out of manuscript traditions and now standing alongside the Internet or radio. Friedrich Kittler’s work has been significant in highlighting literature’s technological underpinnings, and the failure of literary studies to consider the ways in which the book ‘processes, stores and transmits data’ (Kittler 1990, 370). Through a comparative study of discourse networks between 1800 and 1900, Kittler explores how a network of technologies and institutions determines what can become literature (Kittler 1990, 232, 369). As I’ve highlighted, more recently N. Katherine Hayles has developed new critical models that foreground the ‘inscription technologies’ that produce literary texts (Hayles 2002, 26). Hayles argues that the development of digital media make visible the ways in which the methodologies of literary studies have been ‘imbued with assumptions specific to print’ (Hayles 2002, 33). Yet, in focusing her case studies on what she calls ‘tecnnotexts’ (texts that enter into dialogue with their own physicality), and emphasizing the need to bring the specificities of print into view through comparative work that puts print in dialogue with electronic literature, Hayles misses the opportunity to also show the usefulness of her approach to literary studies more broadly.

The medium of print, and its relationship to literary form and content, demands attention from literary scholars in part because it is not static. As Adrian John’s history of print culture powerfully observes, what are often considered to be ‘essential elements’ of print have been constructed over time ‘by virtue of hard work, exercised over generations and across nations’ (Johns 1998, 2). As I noted in the introduction to this study, the work of media historian Lisa Gitelman offers a particularly valuable reference point for reading the medium of print not as having its own inherent qualities, but as a historical subject formed by social interactions and open to change over time. She highlights that even when media technologies and protocols have the appearance of invisibility they are responsible for
structuring what 'data of culture' can be saved (Gitelman 2006, 6, 5) The methodology she proposes emphasizes specificity, writing not about ‘the telephone’ but ‘the telephone in 1890 in the rural United States’ in order to better acknowledge that the context of telephoning determines what people say and how they say it, that this is ‘expressive of social, economic and material relationships’ and that these relationships in turn build and shift what the telephone is made to mean (Gitelman 2006, 8).

Unsurprisingly then, scholars exploring the materiality of print culture in African literature have begun to challenge both implicitly and explicitly narratives and theoretical framings of the 'medium', 'print' or the 'book' being offered in the field of book history (Newell 2002, Hofmeyr and Kriel 2006, Barber 2006a, Fraser 2008, Helgesson 2008, Davis and Johnson 2015, Bush 2016). This body of scholarship engages with the specific material, social and economic interactions through which the meaning of print as a 'historical subject' (Gitelman 2006, 5) has evolved in Africa. It provides a frame through which a longer history of print publication on the continent comes into view and the print medium is shown to be forged through multiple exchanges and interactions: putting the significance of Christian mission groups installing printing presses, as well as the establishment of colonial systems of education and government (Chakava 2001, 339-349) in dialogue with print culture’s role in the construction of anti-colonial ideas of nationhood and pan-Africanism (Anderson 1983, 25, Newell 2006); tracing the innovative ways in which print has been made to mean in social life through its relationship with orality (Julien 1992) and by recrafting reading and writing practices (Newell 2002, 5, Barber 2006a). Significantly for what follows, Stefan Helgesson’s study of southern African literature between 1945 and 1975 demonstrates the role of print in enabling literary cultures associated with the journals Itinerario and Drum to become significant beyond national boundaries (Helgesson 2008, 7). Building on and nuancing Kittler, he compellingly argues for the discourse network that constitutes print, including within this institutions from schools to newspapers to the postal service, as ‘the historically specific, technological condition of possibility for the type of transnationally distributed discourse we recognize as literature’ (Helgesson 2008, 11). Just as Eileen Julien argues for the form of the novel as ‘world historical in its inception, not in its spread’ (Julien 2006, 675), Helgesson emphasizes how literature through its relationship to print is constructed as transnational. He notes that what Bourdieu has described as ‘the field of cultural production’ (Bourdieu 1993) determines ideas of literary value and ‘concentrates authority’, while the discourse network of print ‘distributes’ this authority, and as such remains an ‘open technology’ (Helgesson 2008, 12, 15). While Helgesson uses literary
analysis to explore the ways in which writers invoke and inscribe their own material conditions of possibility, this chapter instead examines how these same dynamics play out in relation to the text as a material object.

**Kwani Trust and Kwani? 05**

While *Kwani?* launched online in 2003, at the time it felt too difficult to imagine ‘what online fiction would want to be like’ (Wainaina 2015) and so later that year *Kwani? 01* was published in print with funding from the US-based Ford Foundation. As Dina Ligaga has argued, early editions of *Kwani?* were distinctive in drawing on and representing forms from Kenyan popular culture (from email to sheng to matatu slogans) not previously represented in and as *literature* (Ligaga 2005). Doreen Strauhs has suggested that in explicitly incorporating the forms of email, SMS and blogs, *Kwani?* worked towards ‘disintegrating the borders between online and offline communication’ (Strauhs 2013, 126). I want to suggest instead that *Kwani?* was concerned not to disintegrate, but in fact to draw attention to these borders, and that the journal has been self-conscious of its own role in formalizing or validating diverse forms of Kenyan creativity by making them available in print. Kwani Trust’s current Managing Editor, Billy Kahora, has highlighted Kwani Trust’s deliberate intention to bring ‘the things that are untidy and alive, that are present in society, into the book’ (Kahora 2015a). Alongside this informing the content of the journal, it has informed its physical form. From the outset, partly inspired by the combination of art and text in *Chimurenga* (Kiome 2016), artwork was commissioned to accompany each piece of non-fiction, fiction or poetry included in the journal. By *Kwani? 04* these visuals not only framed the stories but started to be integrated through them, from the ‘Made in China’ label that appears seven pages into Billy Kahora’s story ‘Selling World Power’ to the running man who moves through Jackie Lebo’s ‘Running’ (Kahora and Wainaina 2007, 331, 354). As Kahora explained in interview, these decisions about presentation and aesthetics can be characterized as part of a deliberate attempt to ‘increase the three dimensionality of the look of the book’ (Kahora 2015a). Conscious that in sub-Saharan Africa the form of the book and its ‘false formality’ had tended to keep the reader or raia (citizen) ‘at arms length’, Kwani Trust wanted to tear down those structures and through the journal’s physical form make literature ‘more of a living and breathing thing’ (Kahora 2015a).

Over time Kwani Trust’s cover and text designs became increasingly sophisticated, culminating in *Kwani? 05* where the journal’s layout starts to code and provide additional
tools to process different kinds of content. This twin edition responded to the violence that followed Kenya’s December 27 2007 election, with the journal’s inside cover declaring its intention to ‘provide a collective narrative on what we were before, and what we became, during the epochal first 100 days of 2008’ (Kahora 2008a). Kwani? 05 began life as an intense 3-day workshop in early December 2007, bringing together journalists and writers to explore ‘the techniques of creative non-fiction’ for an issue that intended to explore new ways to talk about the electoral process. Sessions covered theoretical questions from ‘how to tell the Kenyan story?’ to ‘how do you make your election story durable?’, as well as focusing on practical elements and skills from character and writing everyday detail to editing and blogging (Kwani Trust 2007). However, as Kahora’s editorial recalls, when violence then broke out these stories and their deadlines had to be re-evaluated against more urgent concerns (Kahora 2008a, 11). Kwani Trust’s literary community responded by forming Concerned Kenyan Writers (CKW), a coalition initiated by Wainaina that aimed to document and react to the events taking place ‘using our writing skills to help save Kenya in this polarized time’. To facilitate this, a Google group called ‘Kenyan writers’ was set up. Kwani? 05’s re-evaluated agenda became about collating ‘the most comprehensive collection of diverse texts and narratives’ (Kahora 2012b) coming out of this moment, working with writers they’d already commissioned, drawing on the Concerned Kenyan Writers Google group, bringing together cartoons and photographs not published by the mainstream media, and sending more writers out across Kenya to conduct interviews.

Kwani? 05 has been criticized in personal and even internal conversations for ‘shying away from politics’ (Kantai 2011, Maliti 2015) and for having ‘failed to capture the voice of a particular generation’ (Kahora 2010, 8), nevertheless it succeeded in bringing together over 800 pages of texts and images engaging with Kenya in the context of the violence from a variety of different geographical and narrative perspectives. The journal’s text and cover design became critical to presenting these perspectives in a material form that was meaningful in terms of memory-making and to constructing a multivocal collective narrative.
Figure 5.1: ‘Contents’ in Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys.

Figure 5.2: First two pages of ‘Benediction in Oyugis’ by David Kaiza (80-1) in Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys.
Figure 5.3: Last two pages of ‘The Obituary of Simiyu Barasa, Written by Himself’ by Simiyu Barasa (204-5) in Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys.

Figure 5.4: Extract from ‘Picture and Word’ (74-75) in Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys.
As figure 5.1 shows, creative headings were used to bring coherence to the content’s structure and group together different kinds of texts: from the interview material documented in ‘Revelation and Conversations’ to the poetry of ‘Elegy and Verse’, or the literary prose divided between ‘Map and Journey’, ‘Tall Tales and Money Trails’ (pieces coming directly out of the creative non-fiction workshop) and ‘Spectacle and Invention’. These headings then took the physical form of labels used across the journal (figure 5.2), working both to bring a consistency of presentation and to provide readers with visual clues that could inform their reading. The text design pushed further towards an idea of three-dimensionality, with powerful words and phrases picked out in a larger font to draw the reader’s attention (figure 5.3). Strikingly, photos from Kenya Burning, an exhibition launched at Nairobi’s GoDown Arts Centre in April 2008, are presented alongside extracts from literary texts published elsewhere in Kwani? 05 and moving responses to the exhibition taken from GoDown’s visitor book (figure 5.4). In presenting these texts in ways that engage readers from multiple directions, Kwani Trust’s agenda echoes Edjabe’s with Chimurenga: to enable readers, particularly in Kenya, to engage with knowledge in a different way. The cover artwork is similarly addressed primarily to readers in Kenya with the design for Kwani? 05: Part 1 based on the packaging for the washing powder brand Omo, launched in Kenya in 1950s (figure 5.5), and the design for Kwani? 05: Part 2 (Kahora 2008b) based on the packaging for Kenyan Simba Mbili curry powder (figure 5.6). By referencing these brands, Kwani Trust make a subtle connection between the form of the journal and the forms the violence had taken – pointing to ideas of ethnic cleansing and the burning of property. However, as Kahora observed, these images are also intended to create a sense of nostalgia through visual recognition of these as aspirational consumer brands associated with the past and the everyday Kenyan experience (Kahora 2011a).

Kwani? 05’s engagement with memory-making brings an additional significance to the journal’s material form that moves beyond aesthetics. Several of the images and texts included in Kwani? 05 were immediate and direct responses to the violence, and therefore circulated and discussed more widely in digital and physical spaces before publication in the journal, rather than as a result of this. Boniface Mwangi’s photography was not only part of Kenya Burning but also formed part of Picha Mtaani (Picha Mtaani 2016) – a travelling exhibition that moved around the country and was seen by thousands of Kenyans. Similarly, ‘The Obituary of Simiyu Barasa, Written by Himself’ was not only shared on the CKW Google group on 28 January 2008, but the following day was posted by CKW member Ory Okolloh on her popular blog Kenya Pundit (Barasa 2008a). The piece
then began being widely reposted and commented on before a version appeared in the *New York Times* later in February (Barasa 2008b). Kwani Trust's role as a publisher in relation to *Kwani? 05* can therefore be seen as concerned with presentation and documentation, finding a form to collect and validate in order that over time these texts might impact on a collective sense of the past.

![Figure 5.5: Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys](Nairobi: Kwani Trust, 2008).

![Figure 5.6: Kwani 05 Part 2: Revelation and Conversation](Nairobi: Kwani Trust, 2008).

Again, Kwani Trust was self-conscious about print playing a role in this process. Kahora highlighted that it was widely known that violence had also followed the 1992 and 1997 elections but that this hadn’t been properly recorded, apart from as ‘secret histories’ and ‘oral texts that are hard to locate’ (Kahora 2011a). It therefore felt particularly important in relation to the 2007 election for Kwani Trust to ‘put something down that can be looked at after a while. It might not say everything, we just need to actually record this in a book’ (Kahora 2011a). As I’ve demonstrated via Kittler and Gitelman, the printed book is not in itself inherently enduring, but gains the perception of being enduring through a transnational network of bodies and institutions that have invested in it as a medium through which certain kinds of data are coded as meaningful, and through which knowledge is produced. Kahora even noted as part of the same conversation that some of the books he remembers seeing in Kenya in the 1980s are no longer available (Kahora 2011a). Kwani Trust’s identification and activities as a literary network therefore become particularly significant, as a deliberate push towards establishing their print publications (which have no formal infrastructure for distribution outside of Kenya) within the transnational structures of value associated with knowledge production and literature.
Here Helgesson’s distinction between the ‘field’ and ‘network’ as analytical categories becomes useful. Helgesson positions the literary ‘field’ as concentrating authority and constituted through ‘individuals who write, interact, and are judged according to their positions and dispositions’ (Helgesson 2008, 12). In contrast the discourse network of print ‘lies beyond the purview of the individual writer or reader’ and is ‘produced by impersonal technological, linguistic, and economic factors’, as such rather than ‘concentrating’ authority it distributes it (Helgesson 2008, 12). So while print might be an open technology with its meanings established through histories and usage, literature, as Bourdieu highlights, is formed out of the complex ‘network of relations of exchange’ that produces cultural value (Bourdieu 1995, 230). Established with Chimurenga as a point of inspiration and in the immediate aftermath of Wainaina winning the UK-based Caine Prize, Kwani Trust differentiated itself from other contemporary Nairobi-based publishers through its explicit push for Kenyan writers and publications to be consecrated with cultural value through exchanges and institutions beyond national borders – both on the continent and in ‘world literary space’ according to Casanova’s Eurocentric conception (Casanova 2004, xii). Notably then, not only was *Kwani? 05* featured on the programme for Nairobi’s Storymoja Hay Festival alongside Hanif Kureishi and Vikram Seth, and Durban’s Time of the Writer alongside Marlene van Niekerk and Mia Couto, short stories published in both editions went on to be shortlisted for the Caine Prize in 2014 (Billy Kahora’s ‘The Gorilla’s Apprentice’) and form part of a short story collection which won the 2009 Guardian First Book Award (Petina Gappah’s ‘The Elegy for Easterly’).

**Farafina and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus***

Motivated by a sense that Africans needed to be more visible in participating ‘in the marketplace of ideas’ (Bakare 2014), Muhtar Bakare made a deliberate decision to begin publishing *Farafina* online. His vision for the magazine was pan-African in conception: he wanted *Farafina* to be a ‘mobile magazine’ and to reach ‘young aspirational intelligent Africans wherever they are in the world’ (Bakare 2014). While *Farafina* intended to make an intervention in the production of knowledge from and about Africa, in contrast to *Kwani?*, its editorial emphasis was on doing so through content rather than through physical form. Publishing six issues a year (rather than Kwani Trust’s one), *Farafina’s* content - which in early online issues ranged across the headings ‘People’, ‘Places’, ‘Ideas’, ‘Fiction’, ‘Music and ‘Visual’ – was conceived of as more immediate, commenting on contemporary issues or reporting on cultural events, and having more in common with commercial magazines found on the newsstand. After publishing eleven issues online,
*Farafina* launched in print in October 2005 and ran for sixteen issues. For Bakare it was important that the magazine, whether online or in print, used African designers and that its visual identity reflected the energy of its vision and content (Bakare 2014). However, even though the print edition moved through different layouts and sizes, finding a form from ‘The Woman Issue’ (April 2007) onwards that was increasingly consistent and stylish, it remained a functional rather than aesthetic material object. Strikingly, Bakare ultimately blames the decision to move to print for the magazine’s closure in 2009 and suggests that if *Farafina* had stayed online it would most likely still exist today (Bakare 2014). In a country with an estimated population of 139 million in 2005 (Worldometers.info 2016b), *Farafina* sold fewer than 1000 copies of each edition and several hundred of these were to subscribers abroad (Dosekun 2014). This low circulation in part reflected the content and design of the magazine not being sufficiently appealing to distributors and retailers of commercial magazines, with later issues of *Farafina* deliberately introducing more images in an attempt to broaden its appeal in this market (Omoluabi-Ogosi 2015). However, it is also reflective of the lack of an effective centralized publishing distribution network in Nigeria through which Farafina could make the magazine available and receive payment. Instead Bakare faced what he described as ‘mission impossible’– having to individually navigate the risks and costs of poor transport links, no established commercial infrastructure and an ineffectual postal service (Bakare 2014). Reflecting that he took the decision to shift the medium of publication on the advice of ‘people I thought knew better than me’, it was the printing costs combined with these sales and distribution challenges that led to *Farafina* becoming financially unviable (Bakare 2014).

For Kachifo’s Farafina Books imprint – launched earlier than *Farafina* magazine in print and developed directly through a network of writers built by *Farafina* magazine online – the aesthetic and medium of print publication has been crucial. As I’ve drawn attention to, following the successful reading tour Farafina organized to promote and celebrate Adichie as a contributor to the magazine, Farafina Books began with the launch of *Purple Hibiscus*. Since 2004 Kachifo has released editions of all of Adichie’s books and Farafina has established a reputation for publishing works by African authors originally – and increasingly simultaneously – published by UK or US-based publishers. Concerned primarily with creating editions in print that are specifically designed for the Nigerian market, Farafina have foregrounded the role of paratexts (Genette 1997, 1, 408) and aesthetics in order to respond to local structures that impact book sales and distribution.
Farafina have commissioned their own cover designs for Adichie’s books, including *Purple Hibiscus*. As Graham Huggan has observed, African writers published in the UK or the US often have to contend with a form of exoticism in how their works are packaged and marketed (Huggan 2001). Operating with the strapline ‘Telling Our Own Stories’, for Farafina the process of creating new cover artwork was an opportunity to collaborate closely with authors and ensure that, by being published from an African editorial perspective, these books were now produced on their own terms (Bakare 2014). In the case of *Purple Hibiscus* (figure 5.7), Adichie suggested to Farafina that they use an image by the Nigerian artist and writer Victor Ehikhamenor (Ehikhamenor 2014b). Bakare reached out to Ehikhamenor, who was based in Maryland in the US at the time. Ehikhamenor then organized a photo shoot with a young girl of a comparable age to the book’s protagonist, aiming to portray her as a ‘vulnerable yet strong character’, and sent a selection of images to Farafina (Ehikhamenor 2016). By commissioning Ehikhamenor, Farafina invested in their edition of *Purple Hibiscus* as an object with aesthetic value, while ‘mainstreaming’ (Edjabe 2012b) or shifting the reference points for ‘aesthetics’ away from the global North. With recent solo exhibitions at the Bloom Gallery and Terra Kulture in Lagos and at the Gallery of African Art in London, as well as a collaboration with fashion designer Ituen Basi, over the last decade Ehikhamenor’s profile as an artist has continued to rise alongside Adichie’s as a writer. In 2014, Farafina commissioned Ehikhamenor to create original cover artwork for Adichie’s latest novel *Americanah* (figure 5.8) and this edition has become a collector’s item as a work of art by Ehikhamenor as well as a novel by Adichie (Ehikhamenor 2016).

![Figure 5.7: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*. Lagos: Farafina, 2004.](image1)

![Figure 5.8: New cover for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (Lagos: Farafina, 2013) designed by Victor Ehikhamenor and issued in 2014.](image2)

![Figure 5.9: Revised cover for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (Lagos: Farafina, 2004) issued after the book was selected for the WAEC syllabus in 2010.](image3)
Beyond aesthetics, the cover design of *Purple Hibiscus* reflects the ways in which Farafina has made the novel physically available to readers in Nigeria who wouldn't have had access to it otherwise. While the image and layout for the cover have remained the same, new print runs have altered straplines, added labels and even shifted colours. The current edition (figure 5.9) includes at the top corners the labels ‘Now on the WAEC syllabus’ and ‘Fight Piracy: Buy the ORIGINAL’. When Farafina launched their edition of *Purple Hibiscus* it was priced at 800 Naira (£3), whereas literary fiction titles selling in Nigeria through UK publishers tended to be priced closer to 2500 Naira (£10) (Dosekun 2014). In 2010 *Purple Hibiscus* was selected as a set text by the West African Examination Council (WAEC), making it required reading for the final exams of many senior school students. So that more schools and individuals could afford their edition, Farafina brought the price down to 400 Naira (£1.50). One of the biggest challenges facing book publishers in Nigeria is piracy, with estimates suggesting that ‘illegal sales account for 75% of the book market’ (International Publishers Association 2014). Lowering the price also ensured that their edition would be more comparably priced with an increasing number of pirate versions, and Farafina also used the novel’s physical form to discourage inadvertent purchases of pirate editions and make customers aware of value of their edition as the ‘original’. In addition to the ‘Fight Piracy’ label on the cover, for Adichie’s subsequent books Farafina have published two editions – a higher priced first print run targeted at the elite, followed by a more affordable smaller format edition with a new text design and cover which can reach a wider audience and better combat the pirate market (Bakare 2014, Imasuen 2016). The problem of book piracy in Nigeria is perpetuated, as Emma Shercliff has observed, not only by ‘the lack of investment by the government to pursue copyright infringement’ but also by the ‘difficulties with the distribution of books’ (Shercliff 2015, 55). As a result of these challenges Farafina Books also remains commercially unviable and Bakare has had to find other ways for Kachifo to generate revenue – from creating a successful new social studies school textbook to the Prestige Books imprint which offers clients a pay-to-publish service (Bakare 2014). However, by publishing literary fiction by Nigerian and African writers in a physical form designed specifically to reach readers in Nigeria, Farafina Books has worked to highlight the cultural (if not commercial) value of these texts as ‘original’ material objects worth investing in and protecting from pirates. This not only revalorizes the work of publishing itself, but by ensuring fewer copies are sold illegally, a greater proportion of the revenue generated from book sales in Nigeria becomes reinvested in Farafina’s larger goal of building a sustainable literary publishing industry.
**Cassava Republic Press and Teju Cole's Every Day is for the Thief**

Like Farafina Books, Cassava Republic Press began with the intention of publishing Nigerian print editions of African novels and short story collections originally published and edited by UK or US-based publishers. Reflecting the importance of the book as a *material* or sensory object in relation to this, Cassava Republic Press's Publishing Director Bibi Bakare-Yusuf observed that a Nigerian or African author can have celebrity status in the UK or US, but when their book is not available on the continent 'nobody *smells* them back home...people don’t know you...you don’t mean anything to them' (Bakare-Yusuf 2014). Conscious of the transnational structures of print and literary value, Bakare-Yusuf wanted Cassava Republic Press to be a pan-African organization (Bakare-Yusuf 2014), observing in interview 'although we’re based in Nigeria, our remit is the African world' (Bakare-Yusuf 2016). Reflecting this, in 2008 Cassava Republic Press launched Ugandan writer Doreen Baingana’s short story collection *Tropical Fish* in Nigeria (figure 5.10). The title story had been shortlisted for the Caine Prize in 2005, and the collection had won the Associated Writing Programme’s award for short fiction before being published in US by University of Massachusetts Press and winning the Commonwealth Writers first book award in 2006. By publishing their edition, Cassava Republic Press succeeded in developing a profile for Baingana as a writer who is now widely studied on university courses and independently invited to literary events in Nigeria.

Cassava Republic Press have perhaps been even more conscious than Farafina of their role in mediating what Andrew van der Vlies has called the ‘material manifestations’ (van der Vlies 2007, 11) of texts in a way that can enable new African writing talent to reach new Nigerian readers. Bakare-Yusuf explained that Cassava Republic Press, as one of the very few publishing companies in Africa that isn’t dependent on the educational market or external funding, ‘are forced to think very carefully about covers and titles’ in order to reach a broad enough audience base to be self-sustaining (Bakare-Yusuf 2014). In a short film included on the ‘About Us’ section on their website, Bakare-Yusuf comments that Cassava Republic Press give particular attention to their covers 'because when you create an object of beauty, people will gravitate towards beauty' (Hoff 2013). Interestingly, Victor Ehikhamenor also created the cover artwork for one of Cassava Republic Press’s first titles (figure 5.11) – Helon Habila’s *Measuring Time* (2007). Like Adichie, Habila was involved in encouraging his publisher to use Ehikhamenor’s work, and not only now has a version of the painting used for the cover design of *Measuring Time* on his wall at home.
but he makes a point of carrying the Nigerian editions of his novels around the world to read from because of their value to him as aesthetic objects (Habila 2015).

Cassava Republic Press employ two dedicated sales representatives (Bakare-Yusuf 2014), run a small bookshop out of the Arts and Crafts Village in Abuja and have also built the cultural and commercial value of their publications through a responsiveness to the structures of business and tertiary education in Nigeria. Cassava Republic Press found it harder than they expected to get bookshops to pay for their books, and have had to risk losing stock in order to make their books visible to potential customers (Okunola 2013). As a result, supermarkets and institutions of higher education have become more reliable sources of revenue, and Cassava Republic Press have also tried to think creatively about spaces that might broaden the audiences for their books, selling them through cafes and hairdressers (Okunola 2013, Bakare-Yusuf 2016). Cassava Republic Press have not only invested in visiting university lecturers across Nigeria to make them aware of their publications and share sample copies, they have also developed a system of employing student representatives to sell copies directly to other students when a book is adopted for a particular course (Okunola 2013). This offers not only a more reliable method of payment but enables the students to buy the books at a more affordable price.

Figure 5.10: Doreen Baingana. *Tropical Fish: Tales from Entebbe*. Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2008.


Figure 5.12: Teju Cole. *Every Day is for The Thief*. Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2007.
Cassava Republic Press’s publication of Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* (figure 5.12), like *Kwani? 05*, brings into clearer view the complex and shifting relationships between value, audience and the medium in which literature or knowledge is produced. In 2004 Jeremy Weate, co-founder of Cassava Republic Press, started blogging at Naijablog and through this met Teju Cole (Weate 2016). They began exchanging emails and discussing ways of writing, and at the end of 2005 when Cole visited Nigeria, where he had grown up, from the US, where he had been living for 13 years, he travelled to Abuja to meet Weate in person (Weate 2016). On his return to the US Cole began a 30-day experimental fiction project on his own blog Modal Minority, each day sharing a post coming out of his experiences during the trip (Cole 2014). This piece of serial fiction generated a following and, impressed by the beauty with which Cole wrote about these small slices of Nigeria, Weate and Bakare-Yusuf suggested to Cole he turn it into a book for Cassava Republic Press (Bakare-Yusuf 2014, Weate 2016). As with *Kwani? 05*, this text having an existence and circulation in the digital space ahead of its publication in the medium of print raises questions about the publisher’s role in relation to material form. Cole worked on edits in dialogue with Weate in order for what was once presented as a series of blog posts to be presented as a novel (Weate 2016, Cole 2014). Cole took down the blog posts immediately after the 30-day project ended, and so a print edition also had the function of documenting this writing in a form that was more enduring. Cole originally wanted to call his novel *The Return*, but Bakare-Yusuf felt strongly they needed a title with a stronger resonance that would ‘sing’ to the Nigerian environment – and in response Cole proposed translating a Yoruba proverb (Bakare-Yusuf 2014). By commissioning endorsements from Chris Abani, Diana Evans, Helon Habila and Molara Wood, Cassava Republic Press used transnational connections to build the novel’s cultural value as well as to validate their own broader project of bringing high quality Nigerian writing from authors based outside Nigeria, including Cole, to Nigerian readers.

The form of *Every Day is for the Thief* retained and has even utilized traces of the text’s original medium of publication. Photographs are interspersed through the book ‘because that’s what you do with a blog post—you put up pictures’ (Cole 2014). When seven years later *Every Day is for the Thief* was published in the US as a novella rather than a novel, Cole was quoted in interview saying the novel as a form was overrated and that ‘the writers I find most interesting find ways to escape it’ (The New York Times 2014). By this time Cole had gained critical acclaim in both the US and the UK, following the launch of *Open City* (2011) and for using the medium of Twitter to create snapshots of Nigerian life through his ‘small fates’ project. Cole’s writing had adopted a mutability in relation to form
that was both practical – *Open City* was more likely to attract attention from critics and prizes if marketed as a debut novel – but also resonated with his creative practice. For Cole, ‘small fates’, which developed out of research for a new non-fiction narrative of Lagos (Cole 2011), came from the same impulse as the original blog posts, ‘making something alive in the moment’ (Cole 2014). Unsurprisingly then, several reviewers of *Every Day is for the Thief* in the UK and US approached the book by exploring its relationship to form and the lines it blurs between the novel and a collection of fiction, or fiction and memoir (Wolitzer 2014, Lewis-Kraus 2014), with one reviewer commenting that the ‘American edition retains the piecemeal lightness of the original experiment’ (Lytal 2014). Cole has highlighted that for him *Every Day is for the Thief* and *Open City* are texts that are written out of the same moment, and that he began *Open City* in November 2006 as a form of procrastination from working on the edits ‘for the book version’ of the original blog (Cole 2014). In a very tangible way then Cassava Republic Press’s intervention and investment in Cole turning the blog into a printed book provided a platform for his subsequent writing career. Launching ‘small fates’ on Twitter concurrently with *Open City*’s publication in the US, the exchanges that then validated this novel as literature in Casanova’s ‘world literary space’ were able to also validate ‘small fates’ as literature in the digital space.

**Conclusion**

Focusing on the decisions that these three publishers have made about medium or material form, and the relationship these decisions have to the circulation of texts, this chapter provides an insight into the ways in which African literature in English has been made material by a new interconnected generation of publishers based on the continent. For Kwani Trust, as a result of a self-consciousness about the role of print in relation to knowledge production, the medium begins to shape creative processes, just as in turn their creative processes shape the medium of print, with the form of each edition of *Kwani?* dictated by its content and published as an individually designed and increasingly three-dimensional book. For Farafina and Cassava Republic Press the print medium offers a form through which contemporary African literature can be claimed, invested with cultural value on its own terms and brought to new audiences in Nigeria. In different ways these publishing companies utilize print’s inherently transnational structures and relationship to knowledge production and literature. With a population four times larger
than Kenya’s and an estimated 4000 bookshops compared to Kenya’s 1500 (African Publishers Network 2000). Nigeria represents a larger potential market for books sales; this perhaps explains the greater emphasis of Farafina and Cassava Republic Press on building a commercially sustainable literary publishing industry in the national space. In contrast, donor-funded Kwani Trust’s concern with the material book is in part born out of frustration with the partial histories and literature being made material in the national space.

I have also been concerned to explore the role Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have played in drawing attention to and shifting the boundaries of literature’s relationship to its medium. Relationships between print and digital in literary production are still in the process of evolving and establishing themselves, and so the self-reflective practice of a publishing company like Chimurenga perhaps offers more valuable critical insight than contemporary scholarship for making sense of these structures of value in the context of African literary production. Chimurenga’s publishing history shows that while in 2002 print offered the most effective medium through which to reach audiences and intervene in the creation of knowledge from and about Africa, over time the materiality established through print shifted to other media. Reflecting this, in late 2014 Cassava Republic Press launched a new romance imprint in eBook format and in his keynote at the 2015 ALA conference Wainaina made the case that increasingly ‘every existing platform itself will take on literary element...that literary element may or may not be traded for money, but it will certainly be traded for cultural legitimacy’ with digital platforms now offering the potential of reaching more readers in Africa than print (Wainaina 2015). Helgesson suggests that for most of the mid-twentieth century southern African writers he studies, there is a tension between ‘the lateral mobility of print’ and the hierarchies of ‘world literature’ (Helgesson 2008). In contrast, Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press show the transnational structures of the medium of print being used to build new literary networks and forms of materiality invested with value on their own terms. As my conclusion explores in more detail, new publishing initiatives have already begun to develop directly out of these literary networks – from Lagos-based publishing company Parrésia co-founded by former Farafina editor Azafi Omoluabi-Ogosi to the pan-African writing collective Jalada formed out of a writing workshop hosted by Kwani Trust – that are producing new African literary fiction both in print and online.

27 Kenya’s population was estimated at 35 million in 2005 (Worldometers.info 2016a)
In 2006, the year Farafina published *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie launched www.halfofayellowsun.com (Figure 6.1). This website, created by US-based etherweave, was not associated with a particular publisher but positioned as Adichie’s own website,\(^{28}\) and included contact details, publication dates and links to purchase editions of the novel releasing that year in the UK, US and Nigeria. Alongside an author biography, synopsis of the novel, extracts from reviews and links to author interviews, the website included a section entitled ‘Tell Your Biafra Story’. Visitors to the website were asked ‘Do you have a personal story about Biafra? Please share it with us’ and given the opportunity to post a response of 2000 characters, as well as to ‘Scroll down to read the stories of others’ (www.halfofayellowsun.com). Each submission to the website was required to give a name, email address and country and it is therefore possible to see that the 221\(^{29}\) posts made over the next five years came from 28 different countries across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, South America and North America. While this reflects the book’s reach and availability to a broad geographical spread of readers, in most cases there are only one or two posts from each individual country. As might be expected, over 75% of the posts came from the three locations where *Half of a Yellow Sun* was first published – the UK, US and Nigeria, with the largest number of posts coming from Nigeria (36%), closely followed by the UK (32%) and just 12% of posts from the US. The website was not promoted by the author in interviews or referenced in any print edition of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Those posting on www.halfofayellowsun.com were therefore motivated to actively seek out further information about the novel online. Given this and that the website invites the sharing of a personal story about Nigeria’s history, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of those posting on the website are either based in Nigeria, or make clear from their posts that they are Nigerians in the diaspora (over 25%) or have a personal connection to Nigeria (15%).

Having analyzed each of the posts on www.halfofayellowsun.com, coding each entry using the qualitative research tool HyperRESEARCH, I am able to share some broader

\(^{28}\) Each page included the copyright line @ 2006 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the ‘Contacts’ section appeared to invite readers to email the author directly at chimamanda@halfofayellowsun.com

\(^{29}\) This analysis draws on 221 posts on the website made between September 2006 and May 2011 (8 of which were duplicates). In 2013, when Adichie published her third novel *Americanah*, http://www.halfofayellowsun.com was deleted and the page redirected to http://www.chimamanda.com.
observations about what motivated these responses and how they might be characterized in relation to the novel and to Adichie as the novel’s author. 40% of the posts responded directly to the invitation to ‘Tell Your Biafra Story’ and shared either a personal or a family memory; an additional 10% of posts shared their own creative writing about the Nigerian civil war; 25% of posts used the forum as an opening for comment about questions of division and unity within Nigeria and the contemporary political situation. Although the invitation to ‘Tell Your Biafra Story’ makes no direct reference to Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, 75% of posts did make reference to the book or the author providing a fascinating sample of reader responses to the novel. Over 25% of posts were addressed directly to the author and many of these tried to start a further conversation.

![Home page of www.halfofayellowsun.com](http://www.halfofayellowsun.com/)

Figure 6.1 Home page of www.halfofayellowsun.com

Nearly half of the posts that share a family memory of the Nigerian civil war made reference to these stories being ‘told’ or ‘passed down’, making visible the archive of memory about the conflict that exists within the space of the family. In addition, the stories shared often respond directly to Adichie’s own emphasis on her family connection to the war in the novel’s framing and in interview, with comments such as, ‘I am about the same age as you and grew up listening to my parents’ tales about Biafra’ (23 Jul 2007, UK, Nigerian) and ‘just like you, my parents told me lots of stories of the horrible things that happened’ (23 Apr 2007, UK, Nigerian). The posts also revealed Adichie’s foregrounding of
the material and day-to-day realities of war in *Half of a Yellow Sun* - from Olanna, Odenigbo and Ugwu fleeing Nsukka (179), to Baby's hair falling out as a result of malnutrition, (409), to Olanna unable to walk and experiencing 'dark swoops' (156) - enabling connections and parallels to be drawn between the events of the novel and shared lived experience and trauma.

In interview, Adichie repeatedly emphasizes that she wanted *Half of a Yellow Sun* to start 'a conversation about our history' (Haq 23 October 2006) and to 'get us to examine our history and ask questions' (Wood July 2007). It is noticeable that over 10% of the posts on the website did pose questions, from 'What then is the point of war? How do we quickly profile a person as an enemy to be killed just because of his race? How can we be more respective of and sensitive to our differences, when from such differences we can profit?' (20 Sep 2007, Nigeria) and 'We don’t know our history, we don’t know ourselves. How can you reinvent or improve something that you have no idea about?' (27 July 2007, UK, Nigerian). Nigerian readers also shared proverbs and sayings such as ‘A man without a history is nothing more than a sheep lost in the woods at night’ (7 Jun 2007, Nigeria) and ‘A word for the wise, those that ignore the lessons/mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them’ (24 Feb 2009, Canada, Nigerian). The range of creative writing shared on the website included poetry and autobiography, as well as links to blogs and details of writing projects: 'My nightmares of the civil war have filled up 480 foolscap pages and I have abandoned the volume somewhere in Lagos since January 1, 1999' (24 Nov 2006, Nigeria) or 'My story is more than 2000 character[s] which is allowed here so it is not possible for me to tell the whole story here though it comes in form of poems, songs and story line all joined together to express my grief' (29 July 2010, Nigeria).

**Cultural value and popular memory**

This brief overview of posts shared on [www.halfofayellowsun.com](http://www.halfofayellowsun.com) provides a useful frame to begin drawing together several of the key ideas and questions raised by this study. As I showed at the outset of this thesis, the reading tour for *Purple Hibiscus* was able to galvanize a community of writers that in different ways felt connected to Farafina - even while not being direct producers or consumers of the publisher's literary production. In this example, I show how, through the book's website, *Half of a Yellow Sun* opened up spaces for literary and knowledge production in Nigeria that extended still further beyond the literary networks directly curated by or associated with Farafina.
James Young in *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* highlights the 'interactive, dialogical quality of every memorial space', enlarging the 'life and texture of...memorials' to include the 'times and places in which they were conceived', 'their literal construction' and the 'ever-evolving lives in the minds of their communities' (Young 1993, xii, 14). While Young's work focuses on Holocaust memorials, he intends his approach 'to serve also as a broad critique of the memorialization process at large' (Young 1993, xiii).

As the close readings of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 make evident, through this study I have been concerned with texts that make a deliberate intervention in memory-making. What Young's work productively brings into view is that the exchanges and flows through which I show these texts being made material in Chapters 4 and 5 – the literary networks out of which texts are consecrated with cultural value and the publishing histories out of which they are physically produced and circulate – are also directly engaged in the 'interactive, dialogical' work of memory-making. The conversations that go into creating texts and the conversations that take place as a result of their publication, conversations entangled within the processes of literary production, play a significant role in the way in which these texts are able to intervene in the creation of cultural or popular memory. The invitation to 'Tell Your Biafra Story' rather than 'Tell Your Nigerian Civil War Story' on www.halfofayellowsun.com is likely to have influenced not only who was drawn to post on the website but also the nature of the stories shared. Even so, this limited sample of responses to Half of a Yellow Sun show the novel and this website, in dialogue with Adichie's rising celebrity status in Nigeria and the international media, offering a reference point for framing and constructing a personal engagement with the events of the Nigeria-Biafra war and a platform for sharing a range of different creative and narrative responses.

Andrew Hoskins has explored the way in which digital media and technologies contribute to a new kind of memory-making he calls 'digital network memory' (Hoskins 2009, 92). Digital network memory is memory mediated through the ‘connectivities of digital technologies and media’ and that is both forged through and constitutes digital social networks (Hoskins 2009, 92). Hoskins draws attention to the different ways in which these media and technologies shape ‘the nature, function and potential of the “archive”’ (93) – enabling both a ‘massively increased availability of all-things-past’ (95) alongside a series of different processes through which this data is then made present, obsolete or erased. Strikingly, in describing digital network memory as a kind of 'living archival memory' (Hoskins 2009, 92), Hoskins foregrounds many of the same tensions as Grace Musila in her conception of ‘archives of the present’ (Musila 2014, 247). Unsurprisingly
then Hoskins shows how digital media and technologies problematize both Jan Assmann’s distinction between communicative and cultural memory (Assmann 1995) and Aleida Assmann’s distinction between canon and archive (Assmann 2010a), with the heightened connectivity of the present resulting in memory becoming ‘characterized by its mediated or mediatized emergence through a range of everyday digital media’ (Hoskins 2009, 94).

In Chapter 2, by putting Assmann’s concepts of communicative and cultural memory in dialogue with Karin Barber’s definitions of popular arts, I argued for Kwani Trust’s role as a cultural broker across a continuum of communicative-cultural memory working in the space of popular memory. I want to suggest that this conception of popular memory becomes equally productive for bringing into view the complex and co-constitutive role of digital media and memory-making highlighted by Hoskins, and the ways in which the Internet similarly embeds memory in networks that blur not only public and private, but the ‘totalizing and the contextual, the permanent and the ephemeral, the archive and the narrative’ (Hoskins 2009, 93). Through this I read www.halfofayellowsun.com as facilitating popular memory, enabling the public sharing of personal expression, alongside the development of a community of writers and readers around Adichie’s novel that becomes both part of everyday digital media and the way in which the novel mediates and intervenes in the creation of cultural memory. Significantly, after six years this website was taken down and is no longer available to interact with – although it remains available as a static archive via www.waybackmachine.org.

Another example of popular memory being forged through and constituting digital networks, while being entangled within the processes of literary production, is the Concerned Kenyan Writers Google Group. This study has shown the multiple ways in which electronic communication has enabled exchanges out of which the overlapping pan-African literary networks associated with Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have been constructed. Online discussion groups have played a role in this, perhaps most notably many of the writers published by Farafina and Cassava Republic Press were part of the Yahoo Group Krazitivity set up in 2001 by Sola Ososinan with the strapline ‘Writers and Artists of Nigerian Descent Dialoguing Across Borders’. As I’ve highlighted, the Concerned Kenyan Writers (CKW) Google Group was set up as a direct response to the violence that followed Kenya’s 2007 election. Binyavanga Wainaina initiated the Google Group following a physical meeting on January 2 2008 to discuss the role writers could play as the country descended into political instability and violence. Initially reaching out to fifteen writers including Muthoni Garland, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor and Andia Kisia, all of whom had been published in the Kwani?journal and many involved in the initial
conversations from which Kwani Trust emerged, Wainaina explained that the Google Group offered a space to share writing ‘from the heart’ that is ‘strong on character and place’ about the events taking place in Kenya and to build networks through which this could be circulated ‘so we can start to influence the world to see this place through our eyes’ and ‘start to make other Kenyans see into the hearts of other Kenyans’ (Wainaina, 6 Jan 2008, 18.15). In the two months following the contested election, before a power-sharing agreement between Kibaki and Odinga was reached at the end of February 2008, 52 members joined the CKW Google Group, contributing 845 posts and 35 writers shared over 90 pieces of writing.

Figure 6.2 Discussions on the CKW Google Group in early January 2008

The Google Group became a space engaged in the ‘interactive, dialogical’ (Young 1993, xii) work of constructing popular memory. For example, when Stephen Derwent Partington shared ‘Praise Poem’ (later published in Kwani? 05 Part 1) on January 31 2008, he commented that he wrote it as a direct response to earlier discussion within the Google Group about local heroes ‘not being adequately celebrated’ (Partington, 31 Jan 2008, 6.23am). Several people, including writers Muthoni Garland, Binyavanga Wainaina and Tony Mochama, responded with praise for the poem, describing it as ‘moving, beautiful’ or simply ‘brilliant’ or ‘great’ (Mochama, 2 February, 11.12am, Wainaina 3 February, 10.10am). Muthoni Garland also shared her own story of local heroism in response (Garland, 31 Jan 2008, 11pm). In addition five people posted in response asking for permission to share the poem with different media outlets or civil society organizations. Filmmaker Judy Kibinge asked if she could look for funding to make the poem into a poster
for distribution as a ‘peace declaration’ (Kibinge, 31 Jan 2008, 22.09). Zimbabwean writer Petina Gappah described being so moved by the poem that she read it over the phone to her friend the Nigerian writer and critic Molara Wood, and explains that Wood would now like permission to publish the piece on her widely-read blog Wordsbody.\(^{30}\) (Gappah, 1 Feb 2008, 00.49).

However, this level of response to and interaction with a piece of writing posted on the Google Group is worthy of comment because it was unusual. In contrast, the majority of the pieces posted elicited no direct response. Arguably then the primary significance of the CKW Google Group in relation to literary responses to the post-election violence is not in the conversations about writing it enabled, but the way it provided a platform for daily interactions and the forming of a group identity out of which a body of writing could be built, collated, stored and circulated. Hoskins’s conception of digital network memory offers a useful reference point here as it allows for the impact on memory of a continual shaping or display of biographical information through the immediacy of platforms such as Facebook, alongside the variety of archiving practices these platforms enable such as the tagging of images, while also asking how the prospects of ‘disconnection and deletion’ might ultimately afford the material objects of cultural memory a greater significance (Hoskins 2009, 103). Through my research I have been concerned to explore the ways in which exchanges and interactions online enable, intersect or reinforce interactions in print or in physical spaces. So, even though the Google Group had over 50 members during January and February of 2008, 70% of posts came from the same ten writers who were all in different ways already associated with Kwani Trust. The group simultaneously interacted in physical spaces, with Kwani Trust sponsoring a trip to Eldoret open to members of CKW who wanted to respond to the situation there, and physical meetings held regularly at Storymoja’s offices. Seven of the 90 pieces of writing shared on the Google Group were later published in Kwani?05 (Kahora 2008a, b).

**Relational literary networks**

In his research into a new generation of Kenyan and Nigerian writers forming communities and publishing on the Internet, Shola Adenekan argues for ‘cyberspace’ as opening up opportunities for freedom of expression in relation to class and sexual politics. Seen through this lens, Adenekan argues that, for some of the emerging voices of African

\(^{30}\) Molara Wood guest edited the eighth print edition of *Farafina* (January 2007) and her collection of short stories *Indigo* was published by Parrésia in 2013. Partington’s ‘Praise Poem’ was published on Wordsbody on February 1 2008 (Derwent Partington 2008).
literature, print and the book have come to symbolize a ‘restrictive’ space (Adenekan 2012, 11). Adenekan’s work provides a fascinating insight into interactions between writers and readers across different platforms and the immediate responses to poetry and fiction that publishing on the Internet and discussion groups make possible. In his study he emphasizes the ways in which the digital space enables conversation and community between writers and readers ‘that may have been impossible in the book age’ (Adenekan 2012, 17). And yet the nature of the interactions he describes, and in particular a blurring of boundaries between writers and readers, have striking parallels in Stephanie Newell’s work on West African reading cultures. Newell shows a practice and culture of reading in West Africa that is fundamentally discursive and made up of ‘“reading publics” whose sense of the text is simultaneously personal and social’ (Newell 2002, 6). She demonstrates the multiple ways in which for West African readers from the 1880s onwards, the ‘activity of reading is linked with noise, argument, public debate and the “ethical agency” of the reader’ (Newell 2002, 5) and a ‘simple dichotomy separating literary production from the reception of texts’ is resisted (Newell 2000, 4). So, the conversations between Nigerian writers and readers that Adenekan makes visible, as well as the popular memory facilitated by www.halfofayellowsun.com, need to be read not only in relation to emergent digital media and technologies but also in relation to a longer history of reading culture in West Africa.

In Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana, Newell describes the influence of ‘paracolonial’ literary networks that stretched along the west coast of Africa, established through African-owned newspapers and alongside British colonialism and pre-colonial exchanges of trade and culture (Newell 2002, 3, 30, 213). In what ways then do digital media and technology both build on and alter the reading practices that Newell’s work brings into view? And equally what parallels, interconnections and differences might there be between the transnational literary networks described by Newell and the pan-African literary networks that have formed the focus of this study? Pan-African exchanges, and networks emerging from these, have been crucial to African literary and intellectual production over the 20th century (Benson 1986, Newell 2002, Prais 2008, Currey 2008, Helgesson 2008, Bush 2016, Suhr-Sytsma 2013). How different are the overlapping transnational and pan-African dynamics through which Es’kia Mphahlele went from an editor of South Africa’s Drum magazine in the late 1950s and having his novel published by Faber in the UK in 1959, to moving between Paris, Ibadan and Nairobi where he was involved in founding Nigeria’s Mbari’s Club, their ‘sister’ the Chemchemi Centre in Kenya and securing the funds from the Congress for Cultural Freedom for the Makerere African
writers conference in 1962 (Mphahlele 1995, Currey 2008)? What might characterize the 21st century literary networks this study examines as ‘new’ beyond the ways in which they make use of digital media and technology?

This thesis puts Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’ in dialogue with Bourdieu’s ‘network of relations of exchange’ in order to develop a model for conceptualizing literary networks that allows for multiple forms and sites of value. The relational nature of this model opens up possibilities for it being used to trace intersections between literary networks. For example, a significant literary network in Nigeria is the Association of Nigerian Authors which self-identifies as ‘the worldwide literary organization committed to the promotion of Nigerian and African literature’ and was formed in 1981 out of a conference at the University of Nsukka attended by Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o (Association of Nigerian Authors 2015). While emphasizing its transnational origins and reach, it is in the national space that ANA intersects with the literary networks associated with Farafina and Cassava Republic Press: with Lola Shoneyin’s The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives (2010) and Toni Kan’s Nights of the Creaking Bed (2008) both winning the ANA/NDDC Ken Saro Wiwa Prize for Prose and co-founder of Parrésia Publishers Richard Ali having served as ANA’s publicity secretary for the north of Nigeria since 2011 (Parrésia 2015). Future research arising from this study will use the models developed here to map the literary networks associated with Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press in relation to and alongside other literary networks that have been active in Kenya and Nigeria both previously and concurrently, giving particular attention to the ways in which literary networks shape aesthetics. What might be the connections and disjunctures between the national, transnational and pan-African exchanges and flows out of which these literary networks produce texts? In particular, Simon Gikandi has observed that literary production in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s emerged out of a ‘continuous conversation’ between newspapers, universities and publishers (Gikandi 2014). Using reviews in national newspapers rather than located literary events as ‘multilayered expressive fragment(s)’ (Quayson 2014, 21) out of which to conceptualize and map a literary network, I intend to explore the nature of the interpersonal, creative and material exchanges out of which these texts were produced, alongside the shifting role of initiatives such as the Chemichemi Centre, the media and the university in Kenya’s literary production and the factors that enabled the vibrancy and dialogue associated with this particular period.

Equally there is considerable scope for future research to put the models developed by
scholars to map and characterize earlier pan-African literary networks in dialogue with this study. For example Jinny Prais, while rejecting the conception of network in favour of West African public sphere, offers a fascinating insight into the complex exchanges through which western-educated Africans in the 1920s and 1930s convened communities of readers and writers in London, Accra and beyond (Prais 2008, 14). What parallels are there between the transnational dynamics Prais describes and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf’s founding of Cassava Republic Press in Abuja after undertaking secondary and university education in the UK? Equally, Kwani? 07 explicitly draws attention to the fact that ‘roughly one-third of the writers who contributed to the first issues [of Kwani?] had spent time abroad, mostly as students’ (Kahora 2012a, 14). How might this issue of the journal, exploring the ways in which the Kwani? aesthetic is informed by the experience of diaspora and positioning this within a longer history of exchanges and movement between Kenya and elsewhere, be read in relation to a longer history of educational experiences in the diaspora shaping African literary production?

**Brokering materiality**

My concern in this thesis has been to show how by tracing pan-African literary networks through the publishing histories of Kwani Trust, Farafina Books and Cassava Republic Press, a bridge can be created between the study of African popular cultures and African literature in the world literary space or as world literature. I argue what makes these literary networks distinctive is the particular way in which they broker different forms of materiality. Kwani Trust, Farafina Books and Cassava Republic Press have all produced texts which facilitate popular memory, and in different ways draw attention to the structures through which knowledge and literature are produced, making visible a shifting continuum between everyday experience and the canonization of cultural memory. As Chapter 5 examines, despite the importance of the Internet in enabling exchanges through which this network and particular publications have been created, print remains a critical part of how these publications have found form, audiences and cultural value as literature. As N. Katherine Hayles observes, rather than operating separately from print, digital media enable us to ‘see print with new eyes’ (Hayles 2002, 33). My research deliberately foregrounds not only the ways in which the print medium constructs texts but print’s relationship to shifting and interconnected forms of materiality. A striking example of this is Jalada who, with their roots in a Kwani Trust workshop, identify as a ‘pan-African writing collective’ (Jalada 2016). Since January 2014, Jalada have published five writing anthologies online and writers associated with the collective have gained international
recognition in various forms - from six members appearing on a list of the 39 most promising fiction writers from Africa under 40 put together by Hay Festival and Nigeria’s Rainbow Book Club (Hay Festival 2016) and Okwiri Oduor winning the 2014 Caine Prize. However, Jalada is now in conversation with Kwani Trust about the possibilities of working together to publish a ‘best of’ Jalada anthology in print.

Pascale Casanova uses the term ‘broker’ to refer to the ‘cosmopolitan figures of the world of letters’ who are responsible for ‘exporting’ across territories and often across languages ‘texts whose literary value they determine by virtue of this very activity’ (Casanova 2004, 21). The study has shown how the writers Binyavanga Wainaina and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, with critical acclaim and established profiles as public intellectuals in the global North, have been central to the literary networks and creative output of Kwani Trust and Farafina. While Chapter 4 highlights the critical role that Adichie and Wainaina have played in brokering the publication of African writers in London or New York, alongside this I draw attention to a much wider range of interpersonal, creative and material exchanges out of which the ‘literary value’ of texts published by Kwani Trust, Farafina Book and Cassava Republic Press has been formed. Casanova makes the astute observation that these brokers increase their own literary wealth in what she defines as the ‘world literary space’ by ‘adding the value of newly recognized works to the existing stock of capital held by those who recognize it’; nevertheless, she argues for these brokers as committed to a ‘pure, dehistoricized, denationalized, and depoliticized conception of literature’ and ‘convinced of the universality of the aesthetic categories in terms of which they evaluate individual works’ (Casanova 2004, 23). As both my close readings of texts and publishing histories show, the literary production of these three publishing companies specifically draws attention to other forms of materiality and structures of value beyond the histories, geographies and ‘universal’ aesthetic categories’ that according to Casanova’s Eurocentric conception govern ‘world literary space’.

Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press draw on the cultural value built by Adichie, Wainaina and other writers in the global North in order to, for example, obtain donor funding or corporate sponsorship to run writing workshops in Lagos or Mombasa, or secure adoptions of literary texts by university lecturers in Nigeria. However, by building on Appadurai’s concept of ‘-scapes’, I emphasize these publishing companies as cultural brokers facing in multiple directions – across the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ spaces of culture in Kenya and Nigeria, as well as outwards to the African continent and the ‘world literary space’, and across print and digital media. This study documents the exchanges
through which in dialogue with each other, Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic Press have been able to, as Ntome Edjabe observes, ‘mainstream our own aesthetics and reduce our dependency on the global publishing system’ (Edjabe 2012b). The pan-African literary networks that have developed as a result of this continue to inform both the aesthetics and the structures of value of contemporary literary production on the continent. For example, one of the sparks for The Chronic’s 2015 new cartographies issue was Parselelo Kantai’s review of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s Dust published in The East African (Kantai 2013, Kwani Trust 2015). Similarly, in 2015, Nigerian online magazine Saraba announced the ‘Saraba Manuscript Project’, a new literary prize echoing the 2012 Kwani? Manuscript Project in its framing and judged by Farafina’s COO Eghosa Imasuen, Parrésia’s Managing Editor Azafi Omoluabi-Ogosi and 2012 winner of the Caine Prize Rotimi Babatunde.

The exchanges through which cultural value and literary networks are constructed are constantly shifting, and this thesis can only document a particular snapshot in the history of these three publishing companies. While part of Kwani Trust’s editorial agenda for the next issue of the journal is to explore and document ‘competing geographies and histories of the former Coast Province’ (Kwani Trust 2016b), which again speaks to a particular preoccupation with historiography, interviews with a younger generation of writers associated with Kwani Trust reflect quite different preoccupations and conceptions of the organization (Gachagua 2015, Gohil 2015). Equally, the move by Farafina, Cassava Republic Press and Parrésia into publishing genre fiction, with Bakare-Yusuf’s explicit feminist agenda and desire to ‘puncture’ a ‘limited and limiting way of viewing African literature’ (Bakare-Yusuf 2015), represents a new phase in the work of these publishing companies as cultural brokers. However, the critical models that this thesis develops by studying the literary production of Kwani Trust, Farafina and Cassava Republic have an ongoing relevance and resonance.

Franco Moretti argued that in order to move beyond a small canon of texts being read in the US academy towards a discipline of literary studies that more genuinely reflects the study of ‘world literature’, a move was needed away from close reading to distant reading (Moretti 2000). The idea of ‘world literature’ has been repeatedly criticized and contested by scholars as ‘bound to the inevitabilities of commodification’ (Hitchcock 2010, 5) or endorsing ‘cultural equivalence’ and part of an ‘entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world’s cultural resources’ (Apter 2012, 178). However, Moretti’s observation that ‘world literature is not an object’ but a ‘problem that asks for a
new critical method’ resonates with the findings of this study (Moretti 2000, 55). In order to draw attention to the role played by trans-continental and local publishers in the global movement and circulation of African literature, a role that is not always visible in current scholarship, this thesis has had to develop new critical methods.

Recent scholarly work has begun to show that world literature does offer a frame for bringing analytical perspectives to African literature that allow for close reading and move beyond the ‘metropole-colony optic of postcolonialism’ (Helgesson 2014, 488). Peter Hitchcock, in conceptualizing ‘the long space’, argues that world literature can be read as ‘the scene of struggle among different modalities’ not just of genres ‘but of different forms of time/space’ (Hitchcock 2010, 35). While Stefan Helgesson problematizes Casanova’s conception of a ‘single literary world, dominated by a Greenwich meridian’ by showing how literature evolves as it circulates and moves across languages and multiple literary networks (Helgesson 2014, 496). This study adds to this body of work, and proposes the idea of materiality, read through both literary form and literary networks, as a productive frame that can bring a more genuinely ‘worldly’ lens to the idea of a world literary space and world literature. A frame that allows for Kinsi Abdulleh and Binyavanga Wainaina meeting in 2009 at an event in Berlin to trace the life and work of Nurrudin Farah, and Wainaina giving Abdulleh the push she needed to set up SCARF magazine saying: ‘you want a voice, and you want a voice to be reckoned with – who is going to do it if you don’t do it?’ (Abdulleh 2015). SCARF is a London-based cross-cultural and cross-arts magazine launched in 2010 by Numbi - an arts organization that ‘draws from the experience of Somali communities around the world’ (Numbi 2016). A frame that allows for the role of the Ake Arts & Book Festival, set up by Cassava Republic Press author Lola Shoneyin, in building audiences for and conversations between African writers on the continent. A festival that has its roots both in the arts event Infusion that Shoneyin ran in Abuja (Shoneyin 2013), alongside her experience of having The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives (London: Serpent’s Tail) published in the UK, the novel being longlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction and her subsequent appearances at a range of European book festivals: ‘I asked myself, why am I talking to all these people [abroad] when the people I really want to be talking to are my people’ (Ogunlesi 2015). A frame that allows for Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, winner of the Kwani? Manuscript Project in 2013, having moved to the UK from Uganda in 2001 to study an MA in creative writing at Manchester Metropolitan University followed by a PhD in creative writing at Lancaster University. While Makumbi had not been able to find publication in the UK, Kwani Trust launching her novel in East Africa at an event in collaboration with Writivism and FEMRITE led to
Makumbi being embraced by a network of Ugandan writers that, before the publication of *Kintu*, she was not physically or digitally connected to; epitomizing this at the launch event Chair of FEMRITE, Glaydah Namukasa, declared to Makumbi ‘FEMRITE congratulates you - your win is our win as all the Ugandan writers, your win is our win as Ugandans and as Uganda’ (Kwani Trust 2014b). *Kintu* will be published in the US in 2017 by Transit Books.

In conclusion, materiality is a frame that allows for the role of both the physical form taken by texts, and the transnational exchanges through which they are produced, in creating the multiple sites and modes of cultural value reflected through these examples and across this study. It allows for African literature’s relationship to colonial history but also for the multiplicity of other histories and interactions that have and continue to shape literary production on the continent. As such it is a model that could be applied to a range of texts and geographies. Perhaps most significantly, like the literary texts this study focuses on, the idea of materiality brings into view the ways in which the literary canon and knowledge production have been constructed in relation to a Eurocentric version of ‘world literary space’, and opens up conceptions of literature and history that move beyond this.
## Appendices

### Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author / Editor</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Binyavanga Wainaina (editor)</td>
<td><em>Kwani? 01</em></td>
<td>Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Binyavanga Wainaina &amp; Ebba Kalondo (editors)</td>
<td><em>Kwani? 02</em></td>
<td>Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Billy Kahora &amp; Binyavanga Wainaina (editors)</td>
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### Appendix 2

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31 This list includes fiction, literary non-fiction and poetry titles only. It does not include other non-fiction titles published by Farafina such as Ayonna Aguele-Trimnell’s Celebrated: Women in Development or Chude Jideonwo’s Are We the Turning Point Generation, Farafina Edutational or Farafina’s books for children (Farafina Tuuti).
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\(^{32}\) Released as an eBook in 2011 and in print in 2012.
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This list does not include titles published under the Ankara Press imprint.
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<td>H. J. Golakai Abubakar Adam Ibrahim Sarah Ladipo Manyika</td>
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<sup>34</sup> UK edition only. Published in Nigeria by Parrésia Publishers.
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