**How Books Matter: Kwani Trust, Farafina, Cassava Republic Press and the Medium of Print**

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 "Chimurenga: Africa's Answer to *the New Yorker*"), led readers to imagine it was a magazine and so he began receiving submissions (Edjabe "Embracing Opacity"). In July 2002 Edjabe therefore published *Dis-covering Home* as the second issue of *Chimurenga,* a magazine that has 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 "Chimurenga: Africa's Answer to *the New Yorker*"). 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 "Chimurenga: Cape Town Now!: Politics, Music, Culture "). Print as a medium therefore offered *Chimurenga* the greatest potential to reach its intended audience in South Africa and across the continent. However, 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 Africas’ (Edjabe "Chimurenga: Who No Know Go Know"). 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,1 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 "Chimurenga, Felasophy and the Quest for Lightness in the New South Africa"). 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 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).

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 revealing entry point for this article 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 new African literary publishing initiatives established shortly after the turn of the millennium, Chimurenga, Kwani Trust, Kachifo’s Farafina imprint and Cassava Republic Press have shared ideas, writers and texts, 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 "On Chimurenga, Fela and Politics"). 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 "On Chimurenga, Fela and Politics"). Like Edjabe I suggest 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. I use term material through this article to make a particular connection between materiality as relating to physical form, and materiality as relating to cultural value.

**Starting points**

Self-defining as a ‘Kenyan based literary network’, Kwani Trust was founded in 2003, evolving out of an expanding email conversation about why new writers weren’t being published in Kenya. Out of these discussions, which moved to a series of physical conversations in Nairobi, came the idea to set up a new publishing house (Kwani Trust "Our History"). This gained momentum in the immediate aftermath of Binyavanga Wainaina winning the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2002 and early the following year the literary journal *Kwani?* launched online with Wainaina as its first editor. Notably, Wainaina had recently returned to Kenya after spending nearly 10 years studying and working in South Africa, where he had met Edjabe and become, as he describes it, part of ‘a pan-African writing circle of some kind in Cape Town’ that that fostered the ‘interactions’, ‘thinking’ and ‘vibe’ out of which both *Chimurenga* and *Kwani?* emerged (Wainaina). Farafina also 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 the decisive reference points that gave him the impetus to start *Farafina* and the publishing company Kachifo (Bakare). The Lagos-based magazine built a community of writers and readers online, and began to publish the work of Nigerian writers Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta, both of whom were then living in the United States. Adichie and Atta’s debut novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) then became the first titles published in print under the Farafina Books imprint. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf and Jeremy Weate credit Farafina’s launch events for Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* as one of the ‘sparks’ that led them to set up Abuja-based Cassava Republic Press (CRP) in 2006 (Bakare-Yusuf "The Rebirth of Publishing in Nigeria"; Bakare-Yusuf; Weate). Bakare-Yusuf recalls the buzz of recognizing that ‘Nigeria had new talent’, the experience of collaborating with Ebun Feludu and Yemisi Ogbe to bring this novel published in the US to the attention of readers in Nigeria, and the pervasive sense in the audience that this heralded a ‘new cultural moment’ (Bakare-Yusuf "The Rebirth of Publishing in Nigeria"). CRP began with the particular aim of building ‘a new body of African writing that links writers across different times and spaces’, 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* developed out of his successful blog. From the outset then 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.2 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.

**Theorising 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? Traditionally the study of literature has been concerned with the language of literary texts and their content, over the physical form of publication. While, as David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery’s *The Book History Reader* demonstrates (Finkelstein and McCleery), over the last few decades book history has become an increasingly vibrant field of study, the role of print in literary production has continued to be theorised separately to the work of literary studies. To some extent to begin to theorise 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 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 232, 369). More recently N. Katherine Hayles has attempted to build new critical practices that foreground the ‘inscription technologies’ that produce literary texts (Hayles 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 33). However, in focusing her case studies on what she calls ‘technotexts’ (texts that enter into dialogue with their own physicality), and emphasising 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 highlights, 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 2). 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 6, 5) The methodology she proposes emphasises 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 8).

Unsurprisingly then, a new generation of scholars exploring the materiality of print culture in African literature has 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 *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: 'How to Play the Game of Life';* Hofmeyr and Kriel; Barber; Bush; Davis and Johnson; Fraser; Helgesson). This body of scholarship engages with the specific material, social and economic interactions through which the meaning of print as a ‘historical subject’ (Gitelman 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 339-49) in dialogue with print culture’s role in the construction of anti-colonial ideas of nationhood and pan-Africanism (Anderson 25; Newell *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*); tracing the innovative ways in which print has been made to mean in social life through its relationship with orality (Julien *African Novels and the Question of Orality*) and by recrafting reading and writing practices (Newell *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: 'How to Play the Game of Life'* 5; Barber). Significantly for what follows, Stefan Helgesson’s study of southern African literature between 1945 and 1975 compellingly argues for the discourse network that constitutes print, as ‘the historically specific, technological condition of possibility for the type of transnationally distributed discourse we recognize as literature’ (Helgesson 11). Just as Eileen Julien argues for the form of the novel as ‘world historical *in its inception, not in its spread* ’(Julien "The Extroverted African Novel" 675), Helgesson emphasises how literature through its relationship to print is constructed as transnational. He highlights that while what Bourdieu has described as ‘the field’ of cultural production (Bourdieu *The Field of Cultural Production*) concentrates authority, that the discourse network of print ‘distributes it’, and so remains an ‘open technology’ (Helgesson 12, 15). While Helgesson uses literary analysis to explore the ways in which writers invoke and inscribe their own material conditions of possibility, this article 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 "Keynote") 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). 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 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 of bringing ‘the things that are untidy and alive, that are present in society, *into the book’* (Kahora). 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), 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 across Jackie Lebo’s ‘Running’ (Kahora and Wainaina 331, 54). 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). 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).

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 27 December 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 *Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys*). *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. However, as Kahora’s editorial recalls, when violence then broke out these stories and their deadlines had to be revaluated against more urgent concerns (Kahora *Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys* 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* revaluated agenda became about collating ‘the most comprehensive collection of diverse texts and narratives’ (Kahora "Moving Away from the Sound Bites of Big Men") 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.

While *Kwani? 05* has been criticized in personal and even internal conversations for its editorial biases (Kahora *Kwani? 06* 8; Kantai; Maliti), 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 1: ‘Contents’ in Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys**

**Figure 2: First two pages of ‘Benediction in Oyugis’ by David Kaiza (80-1) in Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys**

**Figure 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 4: Extract from ‘Picture and Word’ (74-75) in Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys**

As figure 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 in ‘Revelation and Conversations’ to the poetry of ‘Elegy and Verse’ to the literary prose coming out of the creative non-fiction workshop in ‘Tall Tales and Money Trails’. These headings then took the physical form of labels used across the journal (figure 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 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 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), and the design for *Kwani? 05: Part 2* (Kahora *Kwani? 05 Part 2: Revelation and Conversation*) based on the packaging for Kenyan Simba Mbili curry powder (figure 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).

**Figure 5: Kwani? 05 Part 1: Maps and Journeys (Nairobi: Kwani Trust, 2008)**

**Figure 6: Kwani 05 Part 2: Revelation and Conversation (Nairobi: Kwani Trust, 2008)**

*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) – a travelling exhibition that moved across 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 "Diary 25 - the Obituary of Simiyu Barasa Written by Himself"). The piece then began being widely reposted and commented on before a version appeared in the *New York Times* later in February (Barasa "Kenya’s War of Words"). 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.

Again, Kwani Trust was self-conscious of 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) . 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). 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). 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 established distribution structures outside Kenya) within the transnational structures of value associated with knowledge production and literature. Here Helgesson’s distinction between the literary ‘field’ as concentrating authority and the discourse network as distributing it becomes useful (Helgesson 12-15). 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 *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* 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 what Casanova has called ‘the world literary space’ (Casanova xii). The ‘About Us’ section of Kwani Trust’s 2005 website emphasises their links to some of the ‘world’s most prestigious journals’ including ‘*Paris Review* (New York), *Chimurenga* (Cape Town), *Transition[s]* (Boston) and *Story Quarterly* (Chicago)’ (Kwani Trust "About Us"). 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 be more visible in participating ‘in the marketplace of ideas’ (Bakare), 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). However, 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 ten 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). However, while 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). In a country with an estimated population of 139 million in 2005 (Worldometers.info "Population of Nigeria (2016 and Historical)"), *Farafina* sold fewer than 1000 copies of each edition and several hundred of these were to subscribers abroad (Dosekun). This low circulation is 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 no functioning postal service (Bakare). 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 distribution challenges that led to *Farafina* becoming financially unviable (Bakare).

However, 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. Initially Bakare had no intention of moving into book publishing. However, after organizing a reading tour for Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (published by Algonquin in the US and Harper Collins in the UK) to promote and celebrate her as a contributor to the magazine, it became apparent that traditional publishers (primarily focused on the education market) were unwilling to take a risk on publishing an edition of the book for the Nigerian market and Bakare started to think this was something Farafina could do (Bakare). 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 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). 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). In the case of *Purple Hibiscus* (figure 7), Adichie suggested to Farafina that they use an image by the Nigerian artist and writer Victor Ehikhamenor (Ehikhamenor "Meet Nigeria's King of Book Covers"). Bakare reached out to Ehikhamenor, who 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). By commissioning Ehikamenor, Farafina invested in their edition of *Purple Hibiscus* as an object with aesthetic value, while ‘mainstreaming’ (Edjabe "On Chimurenga, Fela and Politics") or shifting the reference points for ‘aesthetics’ away from the global North. With recent solo exhibitions in Lagos and London, over the last decade Ehikamenor’s profile as an artist has risen alongside Adichie’s as a writer. In 2014, Farafina commissioned Ehikhamenor to create original cover artwork for Adichie’s latest novel *Americanah* (figure 8) and this has become a collector’s item as a work of art by Ehikamenor as well as a novel by Adichie (Ehikhamenor).

**Figure 7: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*. Lagos: Farafina, 2004.**

**Figure 8: New cover for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (Lagos: Farafina, 2013) designed by Victor Ehikamenor and issued in 2014.**

**Figure 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.**

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 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). 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). 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; Imasuen). The problem of book piracy in Nigeria is perpetuated, as Emma Shercliff has highlighted, 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 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). 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 revalorises 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, CRP 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, CRP’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). Conscious of the transnational structures of print and literary value, Bakare-Yusuf wanted CRP to ‘be a pan-African organization’ and in 2008 launched Ugandan writer Doreen Baingana’s short story collection *Tropical Fish* in Nigeria (figure 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. However, by publishing their edition, CRP 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.

CRP 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 11) of texts in a way that can enable new African writing talent to reach new Nigerian readers. Bakare-Yusuf explained that CRP, 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). In a short film included on the ‘About Us’ section on their website, Bakare-Yusuf comments that CRP give particular attention to their covers ‘because when you create an object of beauty, people will gravitate towards beauty’ (Hoff). Interestingly, Victor Ehikhamenor also created the cover artwork for one of CRP’s first titles (figure 11) – Helon Habila’s *Measuring Time* (2007).

CRP employ two dedicated sales representatives (Bakare-Yusuf), 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. CRP 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 (Kofo). As a result, supermarkets and institutions of higher education have become more reliable sources of revenue. CRP 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 (Kofo). This offers not only a more reliable method of payment but enables the students to buy the books at a more affordable price.

**Figure 10: Doreen Baingana. Tropical Fish: Tales from Entebbe. Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2008.**

**Figure 11: Helon Habila. Measuring Time. Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2008.**

**Figure 12: Teju Cole. Every Day is for The Thief. Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2007.**

CRP’s publication of Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* (figure 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 CRP, started blogging at Naijablog and through this met Teju Cole (Weate). 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). 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). 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 CRP (Bakare-Yusuf; Weate). 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; Cole). 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. By commissioning endorsements from Diana Evans, Helon Habila and Chris Abani, CRP 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.

However, 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). 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*). 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 "Small Fates"), came from the same impulse as the original blog posts, ‘making something alive in the moment’ (Cole). 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; Lewis-Kraus), with one reviewer commenting that the ‘American edition retains the piecemeal lightness of the original experiment’ (Lytal). 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). In a very tangible way then CRP’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 article provides an insight into the ways in which African literature in English has been made material by a new inter-connected 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 CRP 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’s3 and an estimated 4000 bookshops compared to Kenya’s 1500 (African Publishers Network), Nigeria represents a larger potential market for books sales; this perhaps explains the greater emphasis of Farafina and CRP 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 CRP 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 CRP 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 "Keynote"). 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). In contrast, Kwani Trust, Farafina and CRP (who in 2016 expanded their international distribution by launching in the UK) 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 and that, as Edjabe notes, reduce their ‘dependency on the global publishing system’. Significantly then, new publishing initiatives have already begun to develop directly out of these literary networks – from Lagos-based publishing company Paressia 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.

**NOTES**

1. 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).
2. Particularly significant to the connections forged between Kwani Trust and Farafina was Wainaina having met Adichie online in 2001 through the Zoetrope website (Adichie).
3. Kenya’s population was estimated at 35 million in 2005 (Worldometers.info *Population of Kenya (2016 and Historical)*)

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