

**Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry**  
**Special Issue: Genre in Africa**  
**Guest Edited by Tsitsi Jaji and Lily Saint**

This special issue considers genre from the perspective of the history of African cultural production. African postcolonialities present uniquely generative lenses through which to examine a pressing question in contemporary literary studies: what is genre good for today?

While African literary studies continues to be invested in category of “world literature,” popular literature and film increasingly embrace science fiction, romance, detective fiction, horror and Westerns, highlighting the appeal and contradictions of genre on the continent. Is genre a cousin of form or mode? A marketing category? The remainder of period formations like romanticism, modernism and the like? A classification device to safeguard purity? Or are contemporary genres rather the equivalent of mix-tapes or mashups—the hybrid form par excellence?

These questions are, of course, not new. Twentieth century literary studies in Britain and France in particular, gained authority through the formulation and policing of genre boundaries in works by F.R. Leavis, William Empson, Gérard Genette and others. Later, Jacques Derrida’s “Law of Genre” made a case for how genre evokes the instability of its dependence on “rules” for writing, destabilizing, by extension, the very idea of law. Peter Hitchcock picks up on Derrida’s elaboration of genre as gender, generation, and biological classification. Translating Derrida’s claims to a postcolonial context, Hitchcock proposes that literary criticism, not just literary works, can be thought of as genres. His critique begins with the premise that *all* classificatory gestures fall within a broader taxonomy of power regimes, in which colonization is a privileged case. Hitchcock’s proposal that *postcolonialism* itself is a genre seems newly provocative in light of renewed student activism regarding curricula and the waning of the postcolonial as an institutional and hiring category. Is the decolonial discourse of the #RhodesMustFall movement, for example, more productive than postcolonialism, and what of less explicitly political formations such as Afropolitanism and diaspora? We are interested in the relevance of such organizational schema to genre formation on the continent.

Many contemporary African writers are working *around* rather than *against* genre’s constraints, and in fact such approaches are not without precedent. For example, South African writer, Mothobi Mutloatse identified genre’s radical energies under apartheid, urging African writers to “pee, spit and shit on literary convention” (5). Furthermore, recent scholarship shows that far from contradictory, genre, politics and play not only coexist but are co-constitutive. As Caroline Levine articulates, “Forms will often fail to impose their order when they run up against other forms that disrupt their logic and frustrate their organizing ends, producing aleatory and sometimes contradictory effects” (7). And, as Leela Gandhi shows, post-colonial queer theory also disrupts categories of biological filiation: the “self-confirming orderliness of imperial habitation” is unmasked by those who seek a “world without taxonomy...” (7). While we emphasize the historical,

material, and affective specificity of postcolonial experience over genre categories anchored in the Western canon, this special issue invites engagement with a full range of genre theories, both established and emergent.

This special issue on Genres in Africa invites essays that explore how Africa's own histories generated affective experiences that manifested themselves in, and in response to, generic forms. Are there genres of protest, *ressentiment*, ridicule and misrule, for instance, particular to the continent and its aesthetic traditions? Or might such responses come buried below the surface of generic convention, erupting like unpredictable landmines? We welcome essays that also attend to how the circulation of international cultural forms might flatten out the specificities of local African experiences. Since the publishing industry increasingly concentrates its purchasing power on works that perform "worldliness," the relationships between global capitalism, literary production and audiences beg attention. Where does African writing fit within the economy of "world literature" and how do pedagogic practices reproduce or problematize the market's effects?

Indeed, local forms and genres often limn both popular and elitist spheres, escaping generic and world market demands. Are there new African genres that have important local purchase? And how does technological and digital invention contribute to generic intermediality and creativity? On the one hand genres are often reshaped in Africa to fit local needs, metastasizing to generate new, relevant cultural epistemes. But one might also ask whether Africa is where genres go to die—is it the graveyard for generic belatedness?

Possible topics may include:

- New African genres and/or the genre of postcoloniality
- The circulation of genres
- Genre and affect studies
- The status of the popular in contemporary or historical instances
- Biological genre categories in eco-criticism and/or anthropology
- Temporality, belatedness, and genre (e.g. Afro-futurism)
- The sociology of genre; material culture; book culture
- Postcolonial and African queer theories of genre and reception
- Pedagogy, the academy and the reproduction of African genres
- Capital and the birth, reproduction, and circulation of genres
- Technology and genre

Please submit essays at the [Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry website](#) to reach us by Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.