

**CFP for edited book**  
**African Literary Cities : Hubs, Maps and Urban Literary Ecologies**

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We are pleased to announce this call for papers for the ***African Literary Cities : Hubs, Maps and Urban Literary Ecologies*** edited volume, which aims to address the “absenting” of African literary cities – a complex engagement with urbanity and literariness – in both globally authoritative cultural policy discourses and the emerging scholarly field of Literary Urban Studies.

**Concept Note:**

Does the city, conceived as a literary form that traces modernist and imperialist pathways, deny the possibility of literary cities existing in the global south, and particularly on the African continent? Perusing the list of UNESCO’s creative cities, a glaring absence becomes visible in the creative field of literature through the over-representation of UNESCO Cities of Literature in Europe and North America. The dearth of African ‘Cities of Literature’ in dominant cultural governance discourse belies a vibrant African literary scene that remains invisible when seen through the developmentalist lens criteria of ‘hard literary infrastructures’, (e.g. publishing houses, libraries, bookstores). This traps the African city in a moment of ‘unfinished development’ and does not account for the dynamic and diverse literary and urban encounters that produce the African literary city. Moreover, Sarah Brouillette’s *Underdevelopment and African Literature: Emerging Forms of Reading* (2020) problematises the way in which the knowledge economy of the “cultured city” ties urban planning to literary infrastructures such as writers’ festivals (34-35). Brouillette’s productive mapping of the complex overlaps between dominant “high-literary niche, all aligned roughly with cultivation and sale of paperbound book” and emergent literary forms of literature for “people on the move and looking for relatively short immersive experiences in reading” (49), informs the thinking around the “literary ecologies” and pan-African literary “hubs” that this edited volume seeks to explore.

Urban scholars such as Gautam Bhan et al. (2024) signal the importance of ordinary citizens in ordinary cities imagining the African city, proposing diverse creative forms and expressions as sites for representing the urban everyday as an integral part of a new, emerging urban disposition. Concurrently, the field of Literary Urban Studies casts literary fiction as form of urban materiality and literary narratives as “social investigations” of the material city (Ameel, Finch, Laine and Dennis 2019). Taking cognisance of epistemological interventions on African literary cities by Southern scholars (notably Mbembe, Nuttall & Simone 2008; Quayson 2014), this volume approaches the field of Literary Urban Studies through the optic of Southern urbanism. Our conception of the urban everyday is informed by AbdouMaliq Simone’s articulation of the specificity of the African city not being “told” by stable and ordered urban

space, and rather being “told” by the diverse acts of ordinary people “through flexibly configured landscapes” of the city as a site of both survival and self-actualisation (2004, 409-410). Reading the African city *as* text, Simone provides a productive framework for considering how the imaginary “lend(s) voice to multiple, overlapping languages – of politics, aesthetics, irony, and hope” (2011, 359). The latter is reflected in research such as the African Street Literature project by Ashleigh Harris and Nicklas Hållén (Uppsala University), which focuses on literary forms and infrastructures that emerge from the everyday spaces of city-making in sub-Saharan Africa (*English Studies in Africa*, 61:2). Countering the “absenting” of emergent forms such as zines, flash fiction and street poetry within the developmentalist reading of African literary production, Harris and Hållén underline the “mapped” and “unmapped” elements of urban literary ecologies.

Located at the intersection of Southern urbanism and literary studies, this volume frames the African literary city as spatial narratives that (re) produce themselves in both material and imaginative forms. We therefore invite submissions that allow for productive conversations between the imaginaries (literariness) and material complexity of African cities (urbanity) by scholars, practitioners and literary activists from the continent and its diasporas.

**Chapters may consider, but are not limited to, the following areas:**

- the historical ascendancy and decline of particular literary spaces on the continent
- the literariness that arises out of the crises of the postcolonial city
- literary cities as pan-African hubs in a network of regional and continental collective imaginaries of African urbanity
- popular narrative forms, which emerge from “the episteme of the everyday” (Newell, Okome and Forster, 2014; Musila 2020 ) and the urban networks that these produce (e.g. market literature, flash fiction and literary magazines)
- inherited ideas about African literariness through the histories of canonical African book publishers (Brouillette, 2020)
- the curation and experiences of literary festivals, writers’ circles and poetry groups as sites of “literary encounter”
- literary genres associated with urbanity (e.g. noir or crime fiction)
- street literatures (Harris and Hållén, 2018) such as zines and spoken word
- African languages and the politics of translation in spaces of literary encounter.

**Time frames:**

- Abstracts of 250-300 words, along with a short bio-note of no more than 100 words, to be received by **23<sup>rd</sup> December 2024**
- Notification of Acceptance by **30<sup>th</sup> January 2025**
- Chapters to be received by **30<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

**Abstract submissions to be made to: [polo.moji@uct.ac.za](mailto:polo.moji@uct.ac.za) or [laura.nkula@uct.ac.za](mailto:laura.nkula@uct.ac.za)**