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978-1-108-71378-8 — Underdevelopment and African Literature  
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# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Publishing and Book Culture

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## UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

*Emerging Forms of Reading*

Sarah Brouillette

*Carleton University*

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## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108713788](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108713788)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108624947

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First published 2020

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-108-71378-8 Paperback

ISSN 2514-8524 (online)

ISSN 2514-8516 (print)

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# Underdevelopment and African Literature

## Emerging Forms of Reading

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DOI: 10.1017/9781108624947

First published online: December 2020

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**ABSTRACT:** People looking for work in cities are immersed in English as the lingua franca of the mobile phone and the urban hustle – more effective instigations to reading than decades of work by traditional publishers and development agencies. The legal publishing industry campaigns to convince people to scorn pirates and plagiarists as a criminal underclass, and to instead purchase copyrighted, barcoded works that have the look of legitimacy about them. They work with development industry officials to “foster literacy” – meaning to grow the legal book trade as a contributor to national economic health, and police what and how the newly literate read. But harried cash-strapped audiences will read what and how they can, often outside of formal economies, and are increasingly turning to mobile phone platforms that sell texts at a fraction of the price of legally printed books.

**KEYWORDS:** African literatures, publishing studies, cultural sociology, cultural studies, literary studies

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ISBNs: 9781108713788 (PB), 9781108624947 (OC)

ISSNs: 2514-8524 (online), 2514-8516 (print)

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