Research Note

Navigating Epistemic Disarticulations

Grace A. Musila*

Abstract

This research note reflects on the challenges of conducting research on issues framed by multiple epistemic regimes. Using insights drawn from my work on the 1988 murder of 28-year old British tourist Julie Ann Ward in the Maasai Mara Game Reserve in Kenya, I discuss the problem of opacities created by a combination of uncritical embrace of received knowledge about Africa/ns and cultural illiteracy in competing knowledge systems around which Africa/ns frame their worlds. I also examine rumour as an influential genre of knowledge production, contestation and critique in African societies—what has been termed a form of ‘community intelligence’—that challenges single-lens conceptions of credible knowledge. The research note argues for a more attentive grasp of Africans’ fluid self-conceptions as both ethno-cultural citizens of particular epistemic communities and as citizens of the modern state with its attendant institutions. Serious engagement with Africans’ shifting senses of themselves and the epistemic and ethical protocols they deem themselves subject to, under different circumstances, can have productive implications for our understanding of Africans’ lives, options and choices.

This research note explores the challenges and implications of studying issues framed by multiple epistemic worlds, and the costs of epistemic disarticulation when these multiple knowledge systems are overlooked. Drawing on my work on the 1988 murder of British tourist Julie Ann Ward in the Maasai Mara Game Reserve in Kenya, I reflect on the costs of reading Africa/ns based on received knowledge about the continent, and the place of rumour as an important genre of social truths that enjoy epistemic authority in many African societies. My work on the Ward case suggests that beyond its epistemic injustice, reliance on one-dimensional...
knowledge registers produces blindspots and opacity, resulting in inaccurate conclusions on the choices Africans make and the perspectives they hold.

Briefly, Julie Ann Ward was a 28-year old British tourist and wildlife photographer who travelled from Suffolk to Kenya on a five-month overland group trip, arriving in Nairobi on 27 June 1988. On 2 September, she drove to the Maasai Mara Game Reserve to watch the annual wildebeest migration. She was reported missing on 6 September. At around midday 13 September 1988, a search party led by her father found her jeep stuck in a remote gully in the reserve. A few hours later, Simon ole Makallah, the Chief Game Warden, found her partly burnt remains in another section of the reserve. In the face of competing theories about how she died—with Kenyan police speculating that she was attacked by wild animals and British intelligence covertly trying to convince the family that she was struck by lightning—an inquest was held in Nairobi between 9 August and 27 October 1989. The inquest found that Julie Ward was murdered. Investigations by Kenyan police and the Scotland Yard led to two murder trials of three Maasai Mara game wardens: John Taj EU Magiroi and Peter Metui Kipeen in 1992 and subsequently, Simon ole Makallah in 1999. All three were acquitted, and Julie Ward’s killers are still at large at the time of writing.

Apart from extensive print media coverage, the Ward murder is the subject of three true crime books: her father John Ward’s *The animals are innocent: The search for Julie’s killers*, American journalist Michael Hiltzik’s *A death in Kenya: The murder of Julie Ward* and British journalist Jeremy Gavron’s *Darkness in Eden: The murder of Julie Ward*. In Kenya, the case sparked rumours, speculation and allegations regarding the possible culprits and the reasons behind her murder. This research note draws on my work on Kenyan and British social imaginaries in the Julie Ward murder, to reflect on the blindspots, opacities and deceit that result from a mismatch of assumptions and ideas—what I term epistemic disarticulation—between researchers and the communities they study. I use epistemic disarticulation to emphasise that these disconnects are less about ignorance, and more about inability to acknowledge multiple modes of knowing and their accompanying indices of credibility. In this regard, rumour as a genre scarred by credibility deficits offers an excellent illustration of the costs of epistemic disarticulation and narrow conceptions of what is credible, as I explain below.

Navigating discursive baggage

Edward Said’s Orientalism depicts the imperial project as legitimised by an assumed knowledge that inscribed the West as the ‘Seeing Eye.’ Elsewhere, Jean-Paul Sartre remarks that ‘for three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen.’ Although seemingly outdated, this fantasy of a monopoly over the gaze continues to shape contemporary engagements between Europe and the global South in the assumption that the Other is both subject to this gaze and incapable of returning the gaze. As Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us, ‘virtually all branches of European knowledge and science have grown with the confident conviction that the world is knowable only through those categories of knowledge developed in Europe—indeed that the world may exist only in and through those categories of European modernity.’ The challenge for the study of contemporary Africa from any disciplinary perspective then becomes how to navigate this conviction, embedded as it is in the very DNA of academic disciplines. In my work on the Julie Ward case, this monologism played out through the three writers’ reliance on colonial ideas about Kenya and rigid assumptions about law and science as sole determinants of what constituted knowledge and evidence, to the exclusion of local genres of knowing, such as rumours and allegations, which subscribed to different indices of credibility.

Given the persistence of what Will Jackson terms ‘Kenya Colony’s romantic mythology,’ and the continued manufacture of Kenya as ‘a tourist commodity,’ it was inevitable that the brutal murder of a young British tourist in the famous Maasai Mara Game Reserve would excavate and recirculate an old archive of received knowledge about Kenya, the Maasai and the postcolonial African state. Despite coming three decades after the official demise of colonial rule, the three books on the murder understand Julie Ward’s trip as unfolding in the footprints of earlier European visitors to Africa, as seen in their signposting of her journey across Africa with nods to the memory of figures such as Mungo Park, David Livingstone, Henry Stanley, Karen Blixen, and Lord Delamere among others. While I read this retrieval of colonial memories as a summoning of the familiar in making sense of a tragic rupture of accepted common-senses about the British/Kenya relationship, and by extension

the tourist/host relationship, the reliance on these ideas and the outright muting of other archives on Kenya/Africa was counter-productive in understanding the realities of contemporary Kenya.

In their books, Ward, Gavron and Hiltzik excavate the twin tropes of the Maasai as noble savages who had successfully escaped the taint of a failed modernity, and the postcolonial state as a political jungle of corruption and maladministration. In line with colonial discourse’s production of the colonised as what Homi Bhabha terms ‘a fixed reality which is at once an “Other” and yet entirely knowable and visible,’ the Maasai and the Kenyan state institutions are taken to be transparent. Yet the individual players involved in the case, the Maasai, and the state institutions all subscribed to a different set of discursive regimes, some of which were inescrutable to the British. This resulted in an epistemic disarticulation, as the Kenyans were proficient in both local epistemes and British perceptions; while the British were hampered by their illiteracy in and dismissal of local textualities, including rumours and shifting registers of ethno-cultural citizenship or belonging to cultural communities and their attendant protocols, which were illegible to law and science. This disarticulation has less to do with an insider/outsider positioning than with monologic deployment of received knowledge that left little room for other ways of knowing.

The British investigators and the three authors—Ward, Gavron and Hiltzik—approached the Maasai community around the reserve as ‘noble savages’ with a limited grasp of modernity. Where the three men charged for the murder were all Maasai employees in the game reserve, the authors opt to see them as civil servants, and not Maasai civil servants; displacing any suspected misdeeds of individual Maasai on to their other identities as players in a post-colonial state. Alert to this conception of the Maasai as ostensibly outside the dictates—and violences—of modernity, Peter Kipeen reminded the court that it was ‘a great sin for Masai man (sic) to kill a woman.’ Kipeen foregrounded his Maasai ethno-cultural citizenship as a defence in the murder charge, reminding the court to treat him as a Maasai respondent and adherent of the protocols of Maasai cultural citizenship.

Vron Ware writes that the Maasai observed a mafia-like code of silence, obstinately refusing to volunteer any information or to be witnesses in the case. For Ware, part of the problem was that the Maasai live outside of modernity and its rationale-based civilisation. Ware is right about the difficulty of engaging with some Maasai along the dictates of formal legal

processes. However, using anthropological common-sense about Maasai tribal bonds and unfamiliarity with modern law to understand the Mara community’s reticence, obscures a more complicated logic. The Maasai employees and villagers understood their allegiance to lie not with the British tourist’s family, whatever their sympathy with the family’s loss, nor with the Kenyan police, a metonym for a state that has historically presided over Maasai marginalisation in post-independent Kenya and the tourism industry, but rather with their kinsmen. Bearing in mind the second-hand clothes seller who told John Ward about rumours of a high profile politician’s involvement in the murder circulating in the Mara villages, Ware’s mafia-like code of silence would seem to have been a result of an astute assessment of the potential injustice of the situation. They recognised that Makallah, Kipeen, and Magiroi, if at all involved in the murder or disposal of the body, were certainly the small fish, who could easily become the sacrificial lambs, while the person who ordered the murder went scot-free, protected by the shroud of impunity that attaches to proximity to power in Kenya. The Maasai and Kenyans at large would be familiar with an older history of political and politicised murders in Kenyan history, which was unacknowledged and seemingly unknown to the three writers. They would recall Nahashon Isaac Njenga’s fate in the Tom Mboya murder, where the ‘Big Man’ allegedly behind the murder remained free, while Njenga was found guilty and sentenced to hang. Two decades later, Supt. Muchiri, the first Kenyan detective to investigate the murder immediately after the remains were found, would confess to Ward that he was ordered by his superiors to lie about his findings, and that Makallah was not the murderer: ‘it wasn’t him. He was told to get rid of the body, but he didn’t kill her. I think it was Mr B’s bodyguards.’

This disarticulation of understandings and priorities between the British and the Maasai is hardly specific to the Ward murder or even Kenya. Rather, it illustrates the importance of vigilance when researching issues laden with the discursive debris of received knowledge and its seeming authority to render local realities transparent. In the next section, I turn to rumours and allegations as an example of alternative knowledge genres which intersected with science and law remarkably in the Ward case. Rumours are an example of bodies of knowledge that stage a provocative critique of this single-lens reliance on the authority of conventional modes of knowing.

10. John Ward, ‘Mr B killed Julie,’ Nairobi Law Monthly, March 2012, p. 34. While Ward provides the full name of this person in the magazine, I opt to anonymize him for legal reasons.
Rumours and their regimes of truths

Anjan Ghosh defines rumour as ‘anonymously authored speech which conveys the collective will of a section of the people, contrary to the dominant discourse’. Ghosh identifies three core elements of rumour: it is marked by a paucity of conventionally verifiable evidence; it distils a group’s perspectives on issues lacking adequate information; and it is culturally coded to a given group’s core concerns and anxieties. These features locate rumour squarely in the realm of James Scott’s hidden transcripts.

According to Scott, domination experienced systematically over a period of time by a group of people results in hidden transcripts which bear the marks of collective scripting, in so far as they express shared sentiments, and as such become collective cultural repositories of shared social truths. The rumours regarding Julie Ward’s murder gesture towards issues that preoccupied Kenyans at the time of the murder: that she stumbled upon a drug ring, a poaching ring or a private militia training in the Mara; that the murder started out as a rape by a prominent political figure; and that she was a spy who had sensitive information acquired through a close relationship with a politician. The murder is read as the elimination of a woman who—either knowingly or inadvertently—knew too much. The veracity of these rumours aside, what is remarkable is their resonances with issues Kenyans were grappling with in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Despite being genres with major credibility deficits, rumours and allegations are worth taking seriously because their very prevalence spells concerns about mainstream institutions and processes of information production, while providing a reliable window into the textures of a given society’s concerns and anxieties. Stephen Ellis emphasises the role of rumour in shaping popular consciousness through crystallisation and repeated circulation of the most credible strands over time. In the Ward case, the one consistent strand over the years has been the involvement of a prominent political figure in the murder and subsequent cover-up. Where her family and British media for decades believed the cover-up was to protect the tourism industry, few Kenyans if any, believed this. In effect, rumour mediates a powerful contestation of truth claims associated with state institutions. It gains its legitimacy from precisely the suspect nature of officially produced truths, especially in cases where these

institutions and their processes are open to manipulation or, and herein lies the irony, lack credibility. In Kenya, as in many postcolonial contexts, the entrenchment of impunity and deployment of state institutions in the service of injustice has rendered suspect the truths of these institutions. This is hardly unique to the postcolony; in fact it is a perfection of colonial legacies of state injustice, as the work of Frantz Fanon on colonial Algeria, Jacob Dlamini on apartheid South Africa and Mahmood Mamdani on the colonial state in Uganda and South Africa illustrates.\(^\text{15}\) Equally, as I discuss in my book, British state institutions would seem to have been part of the cover-up in the Ward case, seemingly out of anxiety to protect strategic British interests in Kenya.\(^\text{16}\) With such compromised state credibility, rumour becomes a mode of knowing that enjoys greater credibility than formal institutions. For historian Atieno Odhiambo, rumour-mongering is one of the informal oppositional institutions in Kenya, which grant ordinary citizens a democratic space to express forms of socio-political consciousness with some degree of impunity.\(^\text{17}\) It therefore operates on a different index of credibility, which places greater store on truths perceived to be credible to the group in question, as Luise White’s work shows.\(^\text{18}\)

Perhaps what stands out in the Ward case is the manner in which an oft-neglected and largely discredited medium was able to offer a powerful critique of modern institutions that ordinarily enjoy great legitimacy. The rumours and allegations reconfigured conventional regimes of truth and evidence privileged by modern state institutions, by drawing on the dictates of science and law to formulate their truths, while simultaneously rejecting the two disciplines’ hegemonic status. These rumours worked through critical engagement with fragments of local histories and power dynamics, in total disregard of notions of truth as exclusively based on legally admissible evidence. Kenyans closely followed the developments in the courtrooms with ample suspicion, then reassembled fragments of information drawn from court proceedings and media reports, and circulated these in the rumour mills with their own parallel analyses and

---


16. The patterns of responses and actions by the British High Commission in Kenya, British Intelligence and Scotland Yard point towards complicity in the cover up, perhaps most palpably in British Intelligence’s attempt to convince the family that Julie Ward had been struck by lightning and the family should cremate the remains and accept that there was no foul play, just days after the recovery of the remains. See Musila, *A death retold*, pp. 167–192.


verdicts. They looked on in bafflement at John Ward’s faith in each new politician’s promises to get to the bottom of the murder. Each of these promises amounted to nought, in part because as Kenyans knew only too well, the incestuous nature of Kenyan politics meant regime changes were at best nominal.

For years after his daughter’s death, Ward received anonymous accusations, rumours, allegations concerning the involvement of a prominent political figure in his daughter’s death. While conceding that the involvement of such a figure would explain the trouble and expense to which Kenyan authorities went in orchestrating the cover-up, Ward stuck to his resolve to ‘dismiss such accusations until provided with some proof’. 19 It would be another twenty years before Ward publicly acknowledged these rumours and allegations and took them seriously in a 2012 publication. 20

Owing to his conviction about the power of law and science, and a mistaken belief that British institutions were on his side in the pursuit of truth and justice, Ward overlooked a large body of Kenyan public memory archived in both print media and rumour networks. This public memory would have revealed to him the tell-tale similarities between this death and previous high profile deaths in Kenya. Convinced by these parallels with previous and subsequent suspicious deaths and similar attempts by the state to cover up the truth, Kenyans cast Julie Ward as a political threat to criminal elements in the state. But because they relied on a different archive, most notably perceptions of black peril rape, Ward and Gavron considered the game rangers to be the prime suspects, who, in Ward’s speculation, ‘had lost their thin veneer of civilisation’ under the influence of alcohol, and proceeded to rape and kill his daughter. 21

Working with rumour as a research source demands tapping into different epistemic archives, developing an eye for the different nodes of connectivity, and setting these in conversation with one another. It also calls for an openness to, and active embrace of, porous disciplinary boundaries, because rumours are by nature marked by indiscipline and excess; they spill over rigid boundaries and reject fixity.

This disciplinary porosity of rumour and allegations was illustrated by the ruptures between official truths and rumours and allegations regarding the fate of Julie Ward’s decapitated head. Ward reports a chilling encounter at his hotel room, at the Nairobi Serena Hotel, about a month after his daughter’s burnt remains were found. One evening, there is a knock on his hotel door, which he opens, to find two policemen:

19. Ward, The animals are innocent, p. 386.
20. Ward, ‘Mr B killed Julie.’
21. Ward, The animals are innocent, p. 381.
‘Good evening, sir. I have been instructed to bring you this’

He held out an envelope. Opening it, I saw it was the death certificate I had requested from the Kenyan Police Commissioner.

‘This is for you, too,’ he continued, handing me a plastic shopping bag.

‘What’s in there?’ I asked, taking the bag from him.

‘It’s your daughter’s skull,’ he replied without expression.

And I hadn’t even had time to take a deep breath.22

Subsequently, an alleged eye-witness and renegade of a secret militia, Valentine Uhuru Kodipo, described the horrific murder to a local newspaper, and an encounter with the decapitated head. Kodipo claims that after torturing her and whipping her, in the belief that she was a spy with sensitive information about the group in the Mara, Julie Ward was struck with a ‘Maasai Club’ that bore a heavy nut bolt at its tip:

The man in charge told another man—a much feared political murderer—to end it. This man went to a vehicle and pulled back the front seat. Behind it was a carved Masai wooden club—with the wheel nut of a tractor on the top. He took it and hit her once on the back of the neck at the base of the skull. She fell down immediately and her body twitched for some minutes before she was quiet.23

For John Ward, Kodipo’s claims seemed to be legitimized by medical science, as UK-based pathologists confirmed that Kodipo’s description of how his daughter’s body twitched before she died was medically accurate. Prof Gresham further described the head as showing ‘the classical signs of decapitation’.24 This description represents one of the disconcerting moments in the case, when modern science—here represented by pathology—comes face to face with the dictates of ethno-culture. Kodipo claims the killers decided to butcher Julie Ward’s body into small pieces and set it alight, but the politician further ordered them to decapitate her:

The president’s close confidant picked up the severed head by the ear and ordered me to drive behind him to Makari [outpost in the Maasai Mara Reserve]. It was only about one kilometre, but it took us almost an hour because he was walking slowly with the head dangling by his side, dripping blood, while my car headlights lit up the road for them…. He did not want to drive because he did not want blood in the vehicle, and also it is a Kalenjin ritual to walk with the head of your victim.25

If we read Kodipo’s allegations purely for their legal legibility as witness accounts, we are likely to come away frustrated by the bizarre transparency of this description of the turn of events. However, a second reading,

22. Ward, *The animals are innocent*, p. 176.
24. Ward, *The animals are innocent*, p.50
which both accepts and interrogates this seeming transparency reveals a different set of possible insights into not only Kodipo’s allegations, whatever the facts, but broadly into the multiple epistemic terrains that seemed at play in the case.

The two policemen’s casual delivery of the decapitated head to the grieving father’s hotel room would be considered an unusual, even abominable, treatment of the dead in many Kenyan cultural protocols. To understand these policemen and the politician’s walk in the reserve, we need to linger on the seeming transparency of these narratives, and pay attention to the opacities behind them. One possible reading is that the policemen at that moment understood themselves as civil servants, and not citizens of their ethno-cultural worlds, with the attendant sanctions for flouting protocols of decent treatment of the dead. Similarly, Kodipo’s descriptions of the cultural protocols that govern murder, presumably drawn from an older ethno-cultural military code governing sanctioned military action, alert us to another shift in cultural citizenship. The idea of torturing, murdering and mutilating a woman assumed to be a threat to modern political power, driving around a game reserve in a Mercedes Benz, then proceeding to observe ethno-cultural military protocol, presents a perplexing mosaic of moral referents that signal active belonging to multiple, seemingly entangled ‘epistemo-moral’ worlds that were criss-crossed with little contradiction. This mosaic is further mirrored in the afore-mentioned ‘Maasai Club’ with a tractor’s wheel-nut, which similarly blends together various cultural and technological tropes: Maasai-ness as an identity laden with ethno-cultural baggage in tourist Kenya; the wheel-nut of a tractor as associated with modern, mechanised, farming; and private militias training in the Mara. Kodipo’s claims underscore both the fluid activation of different moral epistemes and shifting conceptions of cultural citizenship.

Mahmood Mamdani and Peter Ekeh’s work offers productive ways of understanding the Maasai, the policemen, and the politician. Mamdani writes that the colonial state exercised two forms of power:

urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. [But] between the rights-bearing colons and the subject peasantry was a third group: urban-based natives, mainly middle-and-working class persons, who were exempt from the lash of customary law but not from modern, racially discriminatory civil legislation. Neither subject to custom nor exalted as rights-bearing citizens, they languished in a juridical limbo. 26

On his part, Ekeh suggests that there are two public realms in Africa, with distinct moral relations to the private realm: ‘the public realm in

which primordial ties and sentiments influence and determine an individual’s public behavior [and] and the public realm which is historically associated with the colonial administration’. Consequently, citizenship takes different shapes in these two publics: the civic public is understood in terms of material gains accruing from it, with little moral compulsion to invest in it; ‘duties… are de-emphasised while rights are squeezed out of the civic public with the amorality of an artful dodger’. But in the primordial public sphere, duties are seen as ‘moral obligations to benefit and sustain the primordial public’, while the benefits are largely intangible, often taking the shape of stability and security in the face of the ‘psychic turbulence’ that marks double-belonging in the two public spheres.

While Ekeh and Mamdani locate this psychic turbulence and juridical indeterminacy within the nascent postcolonial middleclass, the Maasai community’s complicated positioning between a negligent Kenyan state and the British stakeholders suggests a similar disinvestment in the civic public and prioritisation of justice for their kin, in the face of a state with a history of sacrificing or scapegoating foot soldiers. Equally, they help us understand the shifting moral protocols the policemen and the politician understood themselves to be subject to, in their respective handling of Ward’s remains. These ideas were largely illegible to British stakeholders in the case, owing to their single-lens approach.

Conclusion

Where Ellis, White and Odhiambo’s work emphasises the oral nature of rumour, communication technologies have changed the pace and scope of circulation of rumour, as Michelle Osborn’s work on how rumours circulated via SMS messages in Kibera in 2008 shaped and escalated the unfolding political crisis shows. For Dina Ligaga, internet technologies have destabilised mainstream media infrastructure, facilitating the free expression of ideas previously haunted by censorship. In addition to greater reach, scope and power, the digital turn in African public engagement widens the scope of application of insights from rumour as a mode of knowing. Oh and colleagues’ work on rumour mongering on social networking platforms during social crisis approaches rumour as forms of ‘collective intelligence and information processing to make sense of, cope with, and

29. Ibid, p. 106.
adapt to situational and informational uncertainties under crises’, but also as a cautionary note on crisis communication for states, firms and emergency response teams. Similarly, Ambreena Manji emphasises the centrality of rumour in land law research in Kenya, where they form ‘an unstable, porous archive [of] subaltern narratives’ that supplement official reports on land grabbing.

The challenge with working with rumours is that owing to the academy’s embeddedness in particular epistemic logics, rumour poses difficulties for researchers invested in monologic conceptions of truth, evidence and data. They appear too accessible, too transparent, to be generative. Yet, ironically, this transparency, I want to suggest, is also opaque and pithy, and it is our inattentiveness to this transparent opacity that undermines our grasp of rumour’s possibilities as insightful archives. Owing to their seeming transparency and inevitable, often self-undermining contradictions, rumours make particular demands of the researcher: they position one as a curator, putting together different patches of information, narratives, ideas, while accepting that the final quilt would remain incomplete, uncertain and open to future patches and the new patterns they would form. In practice, this curating demands questioning modes of translation invested in rendering knowledge legible in the researchers’ own epistemic registers. If, as my discussion illustrates, epistemic disarticulation is produced by single-lens indices of credibility, then merely translating ideas to lend them legibility in the researcher’s registers of knowledge hardly improves the quality and credibility of insights drawn. Rolando Vazquez describes such translation as framed by disdain and recognition, ‘eras[ing] all that does not fit into the proper place of the already established epistemic territory’.

Far from deepening our understanding, Vazquez writes, such translation merely co-opts the target worldviews into the hegemonic parameters of legibility of a given epistemic territory, while disavowing all that lies beyond its horizon of intelligibility. The modes of knowing discussed here call for redrawing the registers of analysis to take these genres and their knowledge seriously on their own terms.

Scholarly debates emphasise the epistemic injustice of one-dimensional gazes, but little attention has been paid to the cost of this fantasy of a monopoly of the gaze. The Ward case reveals costly blindspots and opportunities for subversion produced by single-lens knowledge registers. Although scholars of Africa might arguably be more alert to the discursive

baggage that haunts the issues they study, many academic disciplines are nonetheless firmly embedded in rigid conceptions of what constitutes knowledge, evidence, data, and legitimate modes of knowing. These conceptions largely serve the disciplines well, but they fall short when it comes to developing analytic registers that can productively tease out the truths and insights contained in genres haunted by deficits of normative credibility and legitimacy. Put differently, genres marked by uncertainty, incompleteness and even inaccuracy are generative in the study of African politics and society, if engaged in ways that take their incompleteness as neither a deficit nor symptomatic of the ostensible failures of modernity in Africa, but as worthy of attention in and of themselves. Whatever their seeming deficits, such genres occupy an authoritative place in Africans’ lives as credible intelligence that lends Africans a conceptual handle on their lives and times.