Introduction to the Guest Issue

Shola Adenekan
University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Rhonda Cobham-Sander
Amherst College, USA
Stephanie Bosch Santana
UCLA, USA
Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang
University of Ghana, Ghana

Where does Digital Africa begin—in a story by a Kenyan writer emailed to a South African editor that won a prestigious British award; with the savvy business model of a male Pedi blogger whose online avatar is a naïve Zulu girl; in those emails from deposed African dictators or their bereft widows, pleading for our sympathy and financial resources, which so deftly manipulate literary stereotypes about Africa and Africans?[1] Can we locate a decisive break between digital and analog forms in African literary production, divining its harbingers in Nollywood's technological innovations or in much earlier modes of improvisation (Mbembe)? Or should we be focusing on the alacrity with which African end users repurpose computer algorithms (Ekwealor; Crofts)? How does cyberspace interactivity undermine the distinctions we take for granted between the time of reading and the time of the text's construction? How does the Internet's imagined placelessness disrupt or reify what we canonize as African writing?

African writers have been sharing their work online with audiences on the continent and beyond since the late twentieth century. Nonetheless, when in 2017 Rhonda Cobham-Sander, in collaboration with Shola Adenekan, Stephanie Bosch Santana, and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang convened a group of literary critics and practitioners at Amherst College in Massachusetts, USA, to consider what we had termed Digital Africa, we still thought of our interests as disparate or, at best, eclectic. Dami Ajayi, editor of the Nigerian online journal *Saraba*, Moses Kilolo of Nairobi's *Jalada*, and Bhakti Shringarpure, editor-in-chief of *Warscapes*, were among the symposium's participants, as was Kwame Dawes, who was planning to launch an African digital poetry portal. The conveners also had been in conversation with Ainehi Edoro, the US-based Ghanaian editor of

Brittle Paper, and Alexis Teyie, then a member of the *Enkare* editorial collective in Nairobi, both of whom had hoped to join us. Marisa Parham, director of the Five Colleges Digital humanities program at the time, and now director of the African American Digital Humanities initiative (AADHUM) at the University of Maryland shared her work with the group, as did Akin Adesokan, a founding member of the New Media and Literary Initiatives in Africa (NeMLiA), and Jennifer Bajorek, who extended our conversation to include the visual arts. Ato Quayson and Biodun Jeyifo delivered keynote addresses that connected digital developments to other considerations in the field of African literary studies.

Essays on African online publications, many by contributors to the symposium, had started turning up in scholarly journals (See Adenekan 2014 & 2016; Adenekan and Cousins; Arenberg; Bosch Santana 2016; Jaji; Ligaga 2012 & 2014; Macharia and Mwangi; Mwangi; Nesbitt-Ahmed; Opoku-Agyemang; Yékú 2016 & 2017). Monographs and essay collections by social scientists analyzing the role which new media was playing in African communities were also proliferating (See Ade-Odutola; Mutsvairo; Ndemo and Weiss; Nyabola; Nyairo). Nevertheless, many Africanist literary scholars seemed unaware of the significance of these new networks. It was still possible at the annual African Literature Association conference in June 2017 to take in all three of the sparsely attended panels devoted to African digital literature.[2] Fast forward to 2020, and several academic institutions in Africa, Europe, and North America have established programs, centers and working groups devoted to African digital artistic production.[3] Adenekan's monograph entitled *African Literature in the Digital Age* is forthcoming in March 2021, and will be the first book-length work on digital African literature.

Meanwhile, despite Terry Harpold's 1999 prediction in *Postmodern Culture* that Africa would come to epitomize the heart of digital darkness, African writers and cyber-enthusiasts' entry into the digital age had begun to shift the content and locations of African literature as well as the nature of its audiences. As early as the 1990s, African participants were turning up in internationally hosted online creative writing workshops, and locally initiated listservs or email chains were circulating African fiction and poetry. Some digital pioneers were looking for a space to mark Africa's presence in the digital age; others were trying to elude censorship in their face to face communities (*Gay Nigeria*; *Sext Me Poems and Stories*); for still

others, the Internet offered freedom to engage with Africa on their own terms, unfettered by the marketing trends of the moment (Onwualuo; *Afrofuture(s)*; Chopup.me). Online platforms devoted to African writing included the publications mentioned above as well as *Chimurenga*, *StoryTime*, *Kwani.org*, *African Writing Online*, *African Writer Magazine*, *Bakwa Magazine*, *Àtẹ́lẹwọ́*, *Black Looks*, *Storymoja*, and *Africa in Words* amongst others. African writers also began to feature regularly in major international online publications like *Granta*, *Africa is a Country*, *Maple Tree Literary Supplement*, *Thenewblackmagazine.com*, *The New Yorker*, and *Guernica Magazine*, as well as in the online magazines of many African Newspapers including *Timeslive.co.za*, and *Guardian.ng*.

The advent of smartphones in 2007 eased consumers' reliance on Internet cafes to circulate and read locally produced work online, radically changing the composition, size and power of the African reading public. Africa today has more mobile phone users than Europe or America (Mara Phone Blog) and many of them read full-length print and digital-born literary texts on their phones that otherwise would be impossible for them to access (Wainaina 2011). This has led to a second wave of African literary production on social media platforms. From Nollywood videos and live poetry sessions now posted on YouTube, to serialized Facebook fictions with rigorous daily posting schedules, and apps designed specifically for African language fiction, the forms of digital African literatures have evolved so rapidly that studies charting their progress are nearly always out of date by the time they appear. As we enter the third decade of the current millennium, digital technologies permeate most aspects of everyday life on the continent; from Kenyan market women carrying out transactions on their mobile phones with the electronic currency MPesa, to Mosa and Siya documenting quotidian queer life in South Africa on YouTube, to coding communes in Lagos, Nigeria. The reach of digital everydayness also has facilitated new artistic endeavours in film, comedy and the visual arts. One of the most innovative of these has been the ways in which artists working in theater and with the moving image have begun to incorporate text-based strategies into their online work, blurring the line between literature and the visual and performing arts. Jim Chuchu's work and that of Kenya's Nest Egg Collective are prime examples of these trends as well as the panoply of artists from across the continent brought together in the volume documenting the *African*

Futures interdisciplinary festivals held in Johannesburg, Lagos, Nairobi, and Berlin in 2015 (Heidenreich-Seleme and O'Toole).

Digital space also acts as a lens through which African writers and their publics can reflect upon their understanding of African history, and articulate large and small political agendas. The past two decades have seen a boom in online-based communities, websites, blogs and social media pages tailored to Africans at home and overseas, as politicians in almost every country on the continent have gotten into the business of targeting online readers as potential voters on such platforms as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. In response, African writers and readers have turned to online literary platforms to negotiate political developments, as well as to address larger issues of history and current affairs. Following the political upheaval and botched international tribunal to investigate the violence surrounding Kenya's 2007 general elections, for example, Kenyan writers created a Tumblr blog, called the *ICC Witness project*, which aimed "to give voice to some of the missing witnesses for the ICC trial." In October 2020, *Brittle Paper* published a special issue in which Nigerian poets came together online to memorialize the anti-police brutality campaigns that started on Twitter as #EndSARS, before that same brutality ended the movement on Nigerian city streets. #EndSARS also highlighted Digital Africa's potential to connect the voices of ordinary Africans to others in the African Diaspora, in this context, to the US Black Lives Matter Movement. As celebrities of African descent such as Lewis Hamilton, Beyoncé, Rihanna and Gabrielle Union, responded to #EndSARS, they amplified the support which the protests garnered across digital communities on the continent. These monumental paradigm shifts signpost for us the potential as well as the risks which the digital space offers to African consumers and producers of online content related to social activism, creativity, and self-expression. As scholars, we would be remiss to ignore their significance for the study of African literature.

So, how do we as literary critics begin to engage with Digital Africa? Of the many conversations at the 2017 Amherst conference, some of the most important ones dealt with Digital Africa as a term. Kwame Dawes challenged us to articulate what we meant by it, noting that the term needed to retain its breadth in order to account for the vast array of digital work being produced and theorized. Keguro Macharia warned that we must be wary of reproducing exclusionary and extractive practices endemic in scholarly work on Africa. Instead,

Macharia advocated for locating queer Africa at the heart of Digital Africa, pointing to what the field could learn from digital queer practioners: "Africa's digital queers are not waiting to be theorized," he emphasized. "We have generated archives and theorized our work." Macharia's remarks have since been incorporated into the text of his important new monograph *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora*. Both Macharia and Wambui Mwangi, who presented a paper on *The ICC Witness Project* blog and the "compelled" as well as "chosen anonymity" of its producers, reminded us that the risks which African online literary and cultural producers take, in the face of state media censorship, as well as the threats of violence and imprisonment that sometimes greet their digital activism, are on the rise.

Despite these challenges, African digital communities continue to explore new forms of self-articulation online, and the impact of their interventions often has felt liberatory. The essays in this volume seek to make these myriad complexities visible, without dismissing the aspirations, language and terms of engagement of African literary digital producers, publics, and platforms. For the purposes of facilitating conversation at the symposium and in this special issue, our definition of African digital literature thus embraces the digital as subject, technique, and mode of production. It includes not only digital-born works, but also print works that thematize the digital or make use of new stylistic conventions and ways of constructing literary subjectivity that writing online has brought to the fore. In using the term to encompass both works that circulate on digital platforms and printed works that thematize digital media or repurpose online forms, we hope to signal Digital Africa's capaciousness as well as its utility, while remaining alive to the dangers of its institutionalization, against which Macharia in his comments warned.

In addition to considering the literary scope of Digital Africa, the conference participants also reflected on its locations. Where is Digital Africa? Do we situate it primarily on the African continent or also in the Diaspora? Or is it part of a global cyberspace, in which geographic distinctions have only diminished significance? It is perhaps no surprise that many of the essays in this volume focus on literary production by writers from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Namibia and South Africa—countries that have seen a digital literary and cultural boom, as well as explosive growth in Internet usage (Clement). But countries with less extensive Internet penetration, like Malawi, Tanzania, and

Cameroon, also have developed dense online networks for the circulation of regionally produced literary content. If we consider such connectivity a good indicator of digital literary production, we must also look to other, more nuanced ways in which material and virtual networks intersect. Though the earliest work on online literature frequently celebrated its placelessness, many of the essays in this special issue foreground the complex relationship between material and virtual geographies. The seeming ease with which digital platforms close physical distances in terms of access and distribution is still stymied by other virtual barriers, such as phone providers' different payment systems as well as language preferences amongst readers (Diegner, this volume). Several of the online literary ventures discussed here—including Flash Fiction Ghana, Namibian Facebook serials, Tanzanian app fiction, and Kenyan literary podcasts—engage local and national readerships that align with their own real world locations.

Another question that relates to location is the production site for the virtual platforms so essential to digital literatures. From Facebook to Whatsapp and SoundCloud, the platforms which African writers use often are designed, produced, and monetized in and by the West. James Yékú made this crucial point in the paper he presented at the Digital Africa symposium, and he has elaborated on it in recent work (2020). In order for a true digital literary and cultural revolution to take place, Yékú argued, the platforms that enable and sustain African digital production must also be African-made, and he has pushed for start-up initiatives that would teach more African digital literary producers how to code.

Finally, we must also recognize how much of the scholarship on Digital Africa is itself located in the global North, including the majority of the contributors to this volume. Important continent-based scholarship has developed inside and outside of the academy—in South Africa through WISER's multi-university Program in African Digital Humanities, in Kenya at Maseno University, as well as at the University of Ghana, where our co-editor Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang is based. The Centre for Digital Humanities, at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, prides itself on being "the first full-fledged, stand-alone Digital Humanities Centre in Africa" (Ope-Davies) and the online Network for Digital Humanities in Africa, formed in 2019, connects scholars working on digital projects from across the continent and the globe. Many critical debates on African literary production

have also taken place on blogs and listservs originating on the continent, important examples of which include *Pa Ikhide*, *James Murua Literary*, *kwaChirere, Black Looks, Gukira*, *USA-Africa Dialogue, Krazitivity*, and *Ederi*. Nevertheless, scholars and public intellectuals operating beyond the global North or outside of academic institutions still face additional hurdles when they join transnational conversations around African literary production in the digital age. This was literally the case both in the logistical difficulties which Wambui Mwangi and Keguro Macharia had to surmount to participate in the symposium via Skype and in the political hurdles around obtaining a US visa that prevented Mwangi from attending in person. The impetus for publishing our special issue with *Postcolonial Text* came in large part from Mwangi's insistence that we choose a platform whose open-access policy would allow readers to download the essays without navigating the paywalls that so often exclude continent-based academics and public intellectuals.

The essays gathered here extend the discussions begun in 2017 at the "Digital Africa" symposium, delineating by their incorporation under a single sign the existence of a field whose parameters, though indistinct, are palpable at every turn. Several build on earlier scholarship by two of the volume's co-editors, Shola Adenekan and Stephanie Bosch Santana, who have written extensively on the digital literary scene in Nigeria and Southern Africa respectively. The first four essays stake their claims about the field, less in terms of the media platforms on which particular works have been published and more as a way of reimagining critical approaches to African literature in the digital age. Through close readings of print novels, as well as archival research mapping the changing fortunes of single-authored literary blogs and online flash fiction platforms, they offer fresh perspectives on how we evaluate such staples of literary criticism as plot, character development, allusion, authorial intention, and form. The next three essays turn their attention to the relationship between authors, publics, and modes of production. They follow the development of Facebook fiction in Namibia, the "App-Propriation" of Tanzanian popular novels, and the complicated negotiations around traditional forms and innovative platforms that have shaped the resurgence of interest in Swahili poetry as it has moved online. The final three essays explore the unique practices which African writers bring to digital spaces; from self-affirmation and self-presentation by sexually confident African women; to emerging literary networks that are generating new publics;

to digital poetics capable of disrupting colonial narratives. Taken together, the essays demonstrate that Digital Africa, far from being an abstraction, engages robustly with imagined African communities, on the continent and beyond. As African writers in the digital age push the boundaries of what their works can say about gender, sexuality and nation, they also must contend with a digitally sophisticated public, which still demands that artists and influencers act simultaneously as role models, entertainers, and idea innovators. These expectations exert pressures on digital content producers similar to those African writers already must negotiate in the analog public sphere. We are far away, here from any notion of a digital utopia.

Not all the scholars who attended the Amherst symposium contributed to this volume and not all the contributors to this volume attended that meeting. Through these interventions we have sought to expand and consolidate the networks of scholars and artists whose work connects African writers invested in specific digital practices and genres as well regional and international communities. This issue should therefore be read alongside other recent special issues such as "African Street Literature" (2018) in *English Studies in Africa*, which considers a host of digital forms, and "Space, Time and Culture on African/Diaspora Websites" (2020) in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies,* as well as new monographs, including Bhakti Shringarpure's *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital* (2019) and Dina Ligaga's *Women, Visibility and Morality in Kenyan popular media* (2020). We can imagine a companion issue that takes up where this one leaves off, creating more spaces for conversations with the editors circulating digital artifacts like those Krishnan and Wallis discuss in their essay in this volume, and exploring in greater depth the queering aesthetics to which Macharia's comments and recent book enjoin us to attend. There is also still important work to do, connecting creative expression in the digital age to cultural forms that predate print. Even as digital-born artifacts continue to loosen their moorings from print, integrating visual and sonic effects that destabilize the primacy of the written word, a new wave of African print novels is also making its mark. For the authors of these works, the interface between digital and analog worlds is no longer a novelty. They move across technological frontiers with practiced ease, reconfiguring all the worlds they inhabit.

In the African digital space, highbrow and lowbrow literary artifacts and allusions often rub up against each other with occasionally disconcerting intimacy. That frottage is one consequence

of the Internet's seemingly infinite reach, as it gives each end user the opportunity to indulge their curatorial idiosyncrasies. In **"Open City Open Text: Teju Cole and the Limits of Epistemology,"** Rhonda Cobham-Sander argues that Cole's novel harnesses these idiosyncrasies by inviting readers to approach the printed page with their Internet browsers open. Enlisting the conventions of hypertext, Cole pivots seamlessly between references to high culture artifacts and popular genres, as he maps the breaks and continuities between times and places as remote from each other as pre-colonial Manhattan and a Yoruba burial ceremony. Cobham-Sander's close readings reveal how Cole represents these infinitely ramifying networks of meaning through intricately fabricated but tightly controlled layers of allusion that draw the entire world wide web into the novel's signifying framework. His web of allusions ultimately entraps the reader, forcing us to occupy the same unreliable relationship to truth and fact as Cole's compromised narrator. Cobham-Sander's readings challenge us to reassess our critical approaches to intertextuality in response to the new forms of hypertextuality which the Internet facilitates.

For writers operating fully within the digital realm, as Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang argues in "***Flash Fiction Ghana*, African Digital Literature, and Imagining Domestic Relationships,"** the text's porosity in relation to its online intertexts poses a different kind of challenge. The three microstories he considers, all authored by Ghanaian men, traverse familiar domestic terrain: one plot connects a dying woman, her lecherous husband and their illiterate, sexually vulnerable housegirl; another celebrates the restorative powers of pastorally rendered village life; while the third follows a botched attempt at communication between a father and his delinquent son that ends in melodramatic violence. Such Nollywood staples facilitate flash fiction's compression, because their formulaic conventions allow online writers to reduce setting and plot to a few swift strokes. But the writers also rely on readerly augmentation to add multivalency and texture to their microstories. In contrast to Cobham-Sander's reading of Teju Cole's novel, Opoku-Agyemang observes that flash fiction writers exert little control over the sometimes contradictory, often retrograde, perspectives which online commentators attach to their stories in real time. Flash fiction's brevity locates it at the opposite end of the digital spectrum from the endlessly unfurling Facebook novels described in Martha Ndakalako-Bannikov's essay on Namibian Digital Literature in this volume. Like them, however, as Opoku-Agyemang

demonstrates, its stories work allochronically, blurring the time of the story and the time of its reading as these are shaped and reshaped by readers' online interventions.

Whereas time subtends the argument in Opoku-Agyemang's essay, Bhakti Shringarpure's **"Digital Forms, Migrant Forms: Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*"** uses space as its organizing principle – digital space, national space, and the constantly mutating spaces of migration. Borrowing the term "migrant forms," from Stephanie Bosch Santana to describe how these "new literary geographies" are, in fact, "structured by, feature, and textualize [the] processes of continuous migration" (2014, 168), Shingarpure analyzes how print novels by two commercially successful transnational writers utilize thematic and structural innovations as well as new modes of production, to which digital technologies give them access. She argues that the novels only reveal their full complexity when read in relation to "the vast array of digital and migrant forms and the exciting hybridity and textual innovation" to which social media has given writers and their readers access. In locating the hallmarks of African digital literary production in form rather than modes of delivery Shringarpure's essay calls into question the adequacy of traditional approaches to literary exegesis when evaluating codex works that also partake of the formal innovations which digital media enable.

For Kristen Stern, who chronicles the fate of selected literary websites in "**Digital Obsolescence? Abandoned blogs in the francophone African literary field"** not even the direction of movement between digital and analog forms can be taken for granted. As platforms like Twitter and Instagram compete for relevance in cyberspace with even more transient applications, the expansive single-author literary blogs popular with African writers in the early decades of the digital age seem destined for obscurity. Observing the alacrity with which such established Francophone writers as Alain Mabanckou and Léonora Miano have abandoned their blogs, and the extent to which others, like Bessora, have reoriented theirs to showcase forthcoming print publications, Stern speculates about the long-term viability of online literary forums that do not retain a connection to print. The future of many digital platforms may depend on whether they can monetize their content or serve as strategic incubators for work by authors for whom book publishing remains the ultimate goal.The fate of abandoned blogs also raises urgent questions about

how archival research will fare when the online platforms that initially facilitated the creative processes of a new generation of African writers cease to exist.

Following Stern's analysis of how Francophone writers have used digital platforms to position themselves relative to the literary field in French, Martha Ndakalako-Bannikov's essay **"Authors, Readers, and the Virtualscapes of Namibian Digital Literature: 'The Dream of a Kwanyama Girl' and other Facebook Serial Fictions"** explores Namibian Facebook fiction in relation to the category of the global Anglophone. "What does it mean," Ndakalako-Bannikov asks, "that Facebook has become a repository of digital, accessible, inexpensive 'books' for Namibia's reading public" as well as for a broader audience of global readers, many of whom are reading in English? Examining serials like the anonymously-authored "Dream of a Kwanyama Girl," Ndakalako-Bannikov demonstrates how Facebook stories like this one straddle English and African languages, print and digital publishing, as well as traditional and collaborative models of authorship. Like Opoku-Agyemang, Ndakalako-Bannikov explores the complex relationship between online writers and readers. While reader engagement in the form of comments is essential for the continued circulation and growth of the serial's Facebook page, instances of unsolicited readerly interventions—from unwanted "fanfiction" to plagiarism—expose the precarity of authorship in the digital environment. For these reasons, in addition to the problem of monetizing digital publications, Namibian Facebook serial writers have turned to other digital venues like Whatsapp that offer them greater control over their published work. And, much like the writers Stern and Diegner discuss, they, too, aspire to publish in print. Despite these challenges, Facebook serial fictions remain powerful tools of social critique, in this case, of stereotypical representations of young women and gender-based inequality and violence.

What Lutz Diegner's essay **"Uwaridi kwani? (Why 'Uwaridi'?): Digital Literary Networks and the App-Propriation of Swahili Popular Novels"** identifies as the "app-ization" of popular Swahili literature by the Tanzanian writers' collective UWARIDI grew out of frustrations similar to those encountered by the Namibian Facebook writers that Ndakalako-Bannikov discusses. Diegner follows the migration of Swahili popular novel publishing across media over the past several decades, from print self-publishing and distribution via "briefcase" to Facebook pages and smartphone apps. The *Uwaridi* app

allows readers to sample novels that they can then download to their devices or buy in print at the collective's brick and mortar bookshop. Despite its success, Diegner notes that the app perpetuates the gender biases of the male-dominated print publishing world. It also throws into relief the intractable difficulties of cross-border literary exchange, as evidenced by Kenyan readers' slow uptake of hard copy versions of the stories they follow on apps. Furthermore, the very ease of online access may be leading to a decline in communal reading cultures and fragmentation of the public sphere, since, unlike shared print newspapers, reading apps privileges individualized middle-class reading practices.

Meg Arenberg's essay **"Swahili Poetry's Digital Geographies: WhatsApp and the Forming of Cultural Space,"** embeds itself in the linguistic and poetic practices of the KiSwahili mobile messaging group "Majagina wa Ushairi," or "Poetry's Heroes." Through nuanced readings of the group's rigid rules for membership (all eighteen of which are posted each time a new member is added to the WhatsApp group), as well as the poems composed to welcome them "home," Arenberg analyzes how these digital forms construct online social and cultural space. The boundaries thus constructed, she argues, reanimate classic dialogic poetry forms popular along the Swahili coast, while simultaneously opening them up to encompass broader forms and geographies, from the mainland to the globe. WhatsApp, though text-based, also becomes a jukwanni, or stage for poetic performance. Arenberg's close readings demonstrate how "it is perhaps precisely within the apparently deterritorialized terrain of the digital that the spatiality of social relations, indeed the construction of space itself, is the most transparently visible."

Susanna Sacks' **"Digital Voices: Negotiating Global Forces and Local Identity in Performance Poetry from Cape Town"** brings us back full circle to formal issues similar to those raised in earlier essays by Cobham-Sander and Shringarpure, as it explores how social media platforms have enhanced the reach of African poetry, changing the ways practitioners approach their craft. If, as Adam Schwartzman (1999) argued, South African poems have always been objects of art constituted by "intricate social interactions" (3), the digital context allows us to focus more clearly on the many ways in which poems are the product of the poet's environment as well as the poet's lived experience. Sacks reads the YouTube videos of Antjie Krog and Pieter Odendaal's "Rondeau in Four Parts," as well as Lwanda Sindaphi's

"Apartheid Rags," to provide insights into how the license which poetry enjoys on the page or in performance becomes even more powerful in the digital space, where a plethora of voices can speak and be heard. For Sacks, literary aesthetics in the age of the Internet must take into account the multimedia formats that deliver written texts to our screens. So, when she points out that "YouTube deepens the relationship between bodily and metaphoric voices by joining the reverberations of the physical voice with the participatory demands of social media platforms," she invites us to consider how social media platforms augment poetry's possibilities. By animating body and voice beyond the limits of the page, the online performances challenge the enduring legacies of colonial narratives, allowing digital audiences to participate in the project of decolonizing South Africa's offline and online spaces.

In **"Podcasting as Activism and/or Entrepreneurship: Cooperative Networks, Publics and African Literary Production,"** Madhu Krishnan and Kate Wallis focus our attention on how literary practices and intellectual labour are organised not only around the individual author but also around networks of writers, publishers, marketers and reading publics. Starting with the proliferating multimedia publications associated with the South African literary network *Chimurenga* then focusing on the networks around two more recently established podcasts, the Nairobi-based 2 Girls & a Pod (2015) and Cameroonian BakwaCast (2018), their essay charts forms of connectivity between print and new media, politics and art. Such networks challenge assumptions about the opposition between activism and entrepreneurship. African cultural producers in the digital age, they argue, operate beyond purely aesthetic considerations, "self-consciously intervening in structures of power in relation to the literary space" (9) as they turn to literature, essays and podcasts to engage monumental and quotidian political developments. Their interactions across online platforms and physical venues speak to the multifaceted nature of literary networks in the digital age.

As with Dina Ligaga's essay, **"Beyond Shame Culture? Kenyan Women's Self-representation Practices Online"** however, we are a long way here from merely utopian claims for digital literature as a democratizing, solidarity building exercise. Ligaga offers readers a window into how patriarchy affects African women's experience of cyberspace despite claims about the freedom for self-expression the online space is supposed to offer. She concedes that the Internet may

have given the African female body more visibility than ever before, but points out that this body must now contend with new forms of surveillance. Focusing on the real-life vicissitudes of three high-profile Kenyan media celebrities, Vera Sidika, Huddah Monroe and Esther Akoth (Akothee), her essay foregrounds the discourses of body politics, class consciousness, and modes of self-presentation, which both subvert and aid patriarchal heteronormative agendas that seek to shame and violate the bodies of sexually confident women. In curating their images online in intentional opposition to prevalent social norms, these self-proclaimed divas resist being read through the lens of shame culture. Like the subversive digital theorizing of Queer African space and the reclaiming of invisibility and voicelessness as guerilla tactics in digital performances, their controversial self-representation performs "difficulty," as defiance.

We define literary epochs retrospectively. One day we wake up to the realization that this tightly knit group of friends, those widely dispersed artists who barely know each other, that solitary hermit, who never goes to conferences or readings, are using similar tools, responding in myriad ways to the same material conditions, and working with literary forms that diverge widely yet seem still to share a family resemblance. And the closer we look, the more apparent it becomes that the new literary artifacts may be related to texts we thought we already knew; that they are changing retroactively the criteria we apply in making critical pronouncements; revealing continuities that extend, in the case of African literary production, back beyond the advent of print and forward to verbal and visual hybrids we never accurately predict until their presence seems inevitable. We offer these essays to mark that moment of recognition and to foster sustained critical engagement with a new and vibrant field.

Notes

1. Kenya's Binyavanga Wainaina won the 2002 Caine Prize for "Discovering Home" after he emailed the manuscript to the editor Andrew Unsworth at the *South Africa Times,* who agreed to run it in time for it to "count" as a published work for submission to the contest (Wainaina, 2012: 174, 183). For the story behind how Mike Maphoto's serialized blog *Diary of a Zulu Girl* (2013) became a viral sensation in South Africa, see Stephanie Bosch Santana (2018). Internet scams

originating in Nigeria account for a mere 6% of such scams worldwide, and only a small fraction of those that reference Nigeria actually originate there. Nevertheless, the explicit ways in which their representations of Nigerians feed off of common literary stereotypes about naive and/or corrupt Africans make them an important point of reference for literary scholars. See James Yékú (2020) for a discussion of this connection.

2. The three sessions devoted to digital literary production among the 165 panels and round tables at the 2017 ALA convention, were "Literary Performance in Cyberspace," chaired by Susanna Sacks, "Blogging African Arts and Literature," chaired by Aaron Bady and "Social Media and Literary Discourse," chaired by Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang.

3. Current US-based initiatives devoted wholly or in part to African Digital literature include the Global Poetics Project at Cornell University, the Kansas University African Studies Center, directed by James Yékú, and New Media and Literary Initiatives in Africa (NeMLiA) at the University of Indiana.

Works Cited

Adenekan, Shola. "Transnationalism and the Agenda of African Literature in a Digital Age." *Matatu: Journal for African Culture & Society*, edited by Ogaga Okuyade, vol. 45, no. 1, 2014, pp. 133-151.

—. "New Voices in the Age of New Media: Class Consciousness and Politics in 21st Century Nigerian and Kenyan Poetry," *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 11, no. 1, March 2016, https://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/1856/1934.

—. "Gay African, Middle-Class and Fabulous: Writing Queerness in New Writing from Nigeria and South Africa." *African Literature Today,* edited by John Hawley, vol. 36, 2018, pp. 67-81.

—. *African Literature in the Digital Age: Class and Sexual Politics in New Writing from Nigeria and Kenya*. James Currey, 2021.

Adenekan, Shola and Helen Cousins. "Class Online: Representations of African Middle-Class Identity." *Postcolonial Text,* vol. 9, no. 3, December 2014. https://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/1779/1738.

Ade-Odutola, Kole. *Diaspora and Imagined Nationality: USA-Africa Dialogue and Cyberframing Nigerian Nationhood*. Carolina Academic Press, 2011.

African Street Literature. Special Issue of *English Studies in Africa*, edited by Ashleigh Harris and Nicklas Hållén, vol. 61, no. 2, 2018.

Afrofuture(s). *Jalada*, vol. 2, 2015, https://jaladaafrica.org/2015/01/14/jalada-02-afrofutures/.

Arenberg, Meg. "The Digital Ukumbi: New Terrains in Swahili Identity and Poetic Dialogue." *PMLA*, vol. 131, no. 5, October 2016, pp. 1344-1360.

Bajorek, Jenifer. *Unfixed: Photography and Decolonial Imagination in West Africa*. Duke UP, 2020.

Black Looks. "Black Looks - Including an African LGBTIQ+ Archive." *Black Looks*, Blacklooks.org.

Bosch Santana, Stephanie. "Review Essay: New Pan-Africanisms Online." *Wasafiri*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2016, pp. 82-86.

—. "From Nation to Network: Blog and Facebook Fiction from Southern Africa." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 49, no. 1, Spring 2018, pp. 187-208.

—. "The Story Club: African Literary Networks Offline," *Routledge Handbook of African Literature*, edited by Moradewun Adejunmobi and Carli Coetzee, Routledge, 2019, pp. 385-398.

Centre for Digital Humanities. "Welcome to CEDHUL," *University of Lagos's Centre for Digital Humanities*, cedhul.com.ng.

Chirere, Memory. *kwaChirere*. http://memorychirere.blogspot.com.

Clement, J. "Africa: Number of Internet Users in Selected Countries 2019." *Statista*, 2 Sept. 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/505883/number-of-internet-users-in-african-countries/.

Crofts, Yelizaveta. "Lagos is Taking Software by Storm: Waking Up to Nigeria." *Medium.com*. 12 June 2018, https://medium.com/@talent.io/lagos-is-taking-software-by-storm-waking-up-to-nigeria-1871aecc343c.

Ederi Listserv. Ederi@yahoogroups.com

Ekwealor, Victor. "11 Ways to Learn Programming in Nigeria, and Everything You Need to Know About Them." *Techpoint Africa*, Techpoint.Africa, 9 Mar. 2017, https://techpoint.africa/2017/03/09/learn-programming-nigeria/.

Heidenreich-Seleme, Lien and Sean O'Toole, eds. *African Future*s. Kerber Verlag, 2017.

"The ICC Witness Project." ICC Witness Project, https://iccwitnesses.tumblr.com. *Gay Nigeria*. *Transition*, no. 114, 2014.

Ikheloa, Ikhide R., *Pa Ikhide*. https://xokigbo.com.

Jaji, Tsitsi. "Can You Hear Africa Roar? StoryTime and the Digital Publishing Innovations of Ivor Hartmann and Emmanuel Sigauke." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 122-139.

Kilolo, Moses. "Jalada Africa: Translating the Continent." *English Pen*, June 9, 2016.

Krazitivity. krazitivity@yahoogroups.com.

Ligaga, Dina. "'Virtual Expressions': Alternative Online Spaces and the Staging of Kenyan Popular Cultures." *Measuring Time: Karin Barber and the Study of Everyday Africa*. Special issue of *Research in African Literatures*, edited by Onookome Okome and Stephanie Newell, vol. 43, no. 4, Winter 2012, pp. 1-16.

—. "Mapping emerging constructions of good time girls in Kenyan popular media." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2014, pp. 249-261.

—. *Women, Visibility and Morality in Kenyan Popular Media*. African Humanities Program, 2020.

Macharia, Keguro. *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora*. New York UP, 2019.

—. *Gukira*. https://gukira.wordpress.com/.

Macharia, Keguro and Wambui Mwangi. "Koroga: Another African Story." *Anglistica*, vol. 15, no.1, 2011, pp.1-17.

Mara Phone Blog. "Potential of Smartphone Users in Africa Mystery Revealed." *Mara Phones*, Maraphones.com, 6 August 2019. https://maraphones.com/blog/potential-of-smartphone-users-in-africa-mystery-revealed/.

Mbembe, Achille in conversation with Bregtje van der Haak. "How I See It: The Internet is Afropolitan." *Chimurenga Chronic*, March 2015, pp. 2-3.

Murua, James. *James Murua Literary*. https://www.jamesmurua.com.

Mutsvairo, Bruce, ed. *Digital Activism in the Social Media Era: Critical Reflections on Emerging Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Mwangi, Evan. "Queer Agency in Kenya's Digital Media." *African Studies Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, September 2014, pp. 93-113.

Ndemo, Bitange and Tim Weiss, eds. *Digital Kenya*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Nesbitt-Ahmed, Zahrah. "Reclaiming African Literature in the Digital Age: An Exploration of Online Literary Platforms." *Critical African Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2017, pp. 377-390.

Nyabola, Najala, *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Politics in Kenya.* Zed Books, 2018.

Nyairo, Joyce, *Kenya@50: Trends, Identities and The Politics of Belonging*. Contact Zones NRB Books, Goethe Institut-Kenya, 2012.

Onwualu, Chinelo, "The Unbearable Solitude of Being an African Fan Girl." Omenana.com, 30 Nov. 2014. https://omenana.com/2014/11/30/the-unbearable-solitude-of-being-an-african-fan-girl/.

Ope-Davies, Tunde, "Welcome to CEDHUL." Center For Digital Humanities, University of Lagos, 2020, https://www.cedhul.com.ng.

Opoku-Agyemang, Kwabena. "Lost/Gained in Translation: Oware 3D Ananse: The Origin and Questions of Hegemony." *Gaming Culture Hegemony*, special issue of *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, edited by Siddharta Chakraborti *et al*., vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 155-168.

—. "Looking Back While Moving Forward: The Case of Concrete Poetry and Sankofa." *Hyperrihz: New Media Cultures*, Spring 2017. http://hyperrhiz.io/hyperrhiz16/essays/7-opoku-agyemang-sankofa-ghana.html.

Sext Me Poems and Stories. *Jalada*, vol. 1, 2014. https://jaladaafrica.org/2014/06/10/sext-me-poems-and-stories/.

Shringarpure, Bhakti, *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital*. Routledge, 2019.

Space, Time and Culture on African/Diaspora Websites. Special issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, edited by Inge Brinkman and Daniela Merolla, vol. 31, no. 1, 2020.

USA-Africa Dialogue. usaafricadialogue@googlegroups.com.

Wainaina, Binyavanga in conversation with Rob Spillman. *BOMB Magazine*, 1 Jul. 2011, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/binyavanga-wainaina/.

—. *One Day I Will Write about this Place.* Greywolf, 2012.

Willems, Wendy and Winston Mano, eds. *Everyday Media Culture in Africa: Audiences and Users*. Routledge, 2017.

Yékú, James, "'Akpos *don* come again': Nigerian Cyberpop Hero as Trickster." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2016, pp. 245-261.

—. "Thighs Fell Apart: Online Fan Fiction, and African Writing in a Digital Age." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2017, pp. 261-275.

—."Anti-Afropolitan ethics and the performative politics of online scambaiting." *Social Dynamics*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2020, pp. 240–258.

—. "Deference to Paper: Textuality, Materiality, and Literary Digital Humanities in Africa." *Digital Studies/ Le champs numérique*, 2020, pp. 1-27 DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/dscn.357