

“New ways of telling”: African Textual Forms and Dissemination in the Age of  
Digital Media

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of  
the requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts

at

Rhodes University

by

Oriole Megan Friedemann

January 2019

Supervisor: Dr Lynda Gichanda Spencer

Co-Supervisor: Prof Dina Ligaga

## Abstract

In the age of digital media, creators are using the versatile nature of information and communication technologies and the ubiquity of the web to publish and distribute texts, circumventing traditional gatekeepers such as publishing institutions. In Africa, where web access and digitisation are relatively new, storytellers are eagerly exploring new mediums and the possibilities that they provide for African narratives and African representation. This thesis looks at the digital platforms of the African Storybook Reader, the FunDza Literacy Project, and Long Story SHORT, as well as Dudu Busani-Dube's novel *Hlomu the Wife*, which first gained popularity on a blog platform. It examines three different web series, *An African City*, *The Foxy Five*, and *Tuko Macho*, as well as a transmedia documentary, *Love Radio*. The texts are grouped into literatures disseminated from digital platforms, localised narratives that explore the urban African woman, and narratives that make use of participatory culture. These are texts that make use of digital tools and platforms to create and disseminate African stories, making diverse and indigenous narratives more easily accessible to both local and global audiences. This thesis argues that digitisation and the global nature of the internet have created opportunities for Africans to become producers and exporters of indigenous information and representation, rather than passive consumers of imported knowledge, or subjects of external characterisation.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the Urban Connections in African Popular Imaginaries project at Rhodes University, which is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

I would also like to thank the following for their support in the completion of this project:

My long-suffering supervisors, Lynda Gichanda Spencer and Dina Ligaga, who have guided and shaped my research.

The Rhodes University Department of Literary Studies in English, which has been the heart of six of the most challenging and exciting years of my life, and which has been open-minded enough to let me study new media in a literature department.

Siphokazi Khanyile, who provided translations for many of the IsiXhosa and IsiZulu phrases that appear in this thesis.

Helen and Katherine James, who offered me a home away from home and made me an honorary member of their family.

My family, Doug, Jenean, Benjamin and Abigail Friedemann, whose personal support has been immeasurable during some very difficult months.

And last, but certainly not least, my fellow members of the Pod Squad – Jordan Stier, Chelsey Wilken, Sarah Yates, Michael Simons, and Ashton Kirsten. I will forever be grateful for the drinks at the Rat, the two-for-one ramen Mondays, and the discussions about everything from world politics to the best way to make an omelette.

# Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION Popular Culture, Digital Culture, and Digital Literature in Africa .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Creating Cultural Texts: Popular Culture, Producers and Audiences .....	4
Democratisation of Narrative as a Possibility of Digital Media Spaces .....	7
<i>The Deepening Divide: Digital Culture in Africa</i> .....	10
Digital Narratives .....	14
Digitisation Paving the Way for Literature Dissemination, Localised Narratives, and Participatory Culture .....	15
Conclusion.....	17
CHAPTER 2 Digital Literary Platforms: Electronic Literature as an Aid to Reading Culture and Text Dissemination in South Africa.....	19
Introduction .....	19
Electronic Literature and the Literary in the Digital Age .....	20
Electronic Literature in Africa .....	22
African Storybook and Childhood Literacy in South Africa .....	24
FunDza and Reading Culture in South Africa .....	29
Long Story SHORT and the Efficacy of Digital Literacy Projects.....	32
<i>Hlomu the Wife</i> and Publishing Online .....	34
Conclusion.....	37
CHAPTER 3 “[R]eclaiming urban spaces for women”: <i>An African City</i> and <i>The Foxy Five</i> as Tales of Black Female Urbanity .....	40
Introduction .....	40
African Women Writing Urbanity .....	42
Sex, Glamour and Urban Womanhood in <i>An African City</i> .....	46
Intersectional Feminism and South African Black Female Identity in <i>The Foxy Five</i> .....	56
Conclusion.....	66
CHAPTER 4 Co-constituting meaning: Participatory Culture in <i>Love Radio</i> and <i>Tuko Macho</i> .....	68
Introduction .....	68
Participatory Culture and the Public Sphere .....	69

Audience Contributions in the Performance of Oral Literature .....	72
Authors and Audiences in the Digital Age .....	75
“The viewer can choose”: Participation, Inclusion, and Curation in <i>Musekeweya</i> and <i>Love Radio</i> .....	79
“You Decide”: <i>Tuko Macho</i> and Implicating an Audience in Issues of Social Justice .....	90
Conclusion.....	95
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION Producers and Exporters of Indigenous Narrative.....	97
Works Cited .....	101

## Table of Figures

### CHAPTER 2

Figure 1: The ‘cover’ of Abagane, isiZulu for ‘friends’ .....	27
Figure 2: "My name is Simo" .....	27
Figure 3: "I have four friends" .....	27
Figure 4: The homepage of the FunDza mobisite.....	30
Figure 5: The 'Intro' page for "A New Beginning," showing a summary and publishing information.....	30
Figure 6: Chapter 11 of "A New Beginning".....	30

### CHAPTER 4

Figure 7: The first image or 'cover' of the tap story "Dear Musekeweya". .....	87
Figure 8: Image 36.....	88
Figure 9: Image 37.....	88
Figure 10: Image 39 .....	88
Figure 11: Image 40 .....	88
Figure 12: Image 57, recording the source of the content text.....	88
Figure 13: Once the last image has been tapped, the viewer is invited to share the story via Twitter, Facebook, or email.....	89

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Popular Culture, Digital Culture, and Digital Literature in Africa

[I]n the final reckoning the people who will advance the universal conversation will not be copycats but those able to bring hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling.  
(Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile*)

The new information age and the global connectivity it has brought has forced us to reassess what we thought we knew about Africa, presenting alternative and much more diverse stories and representations of this large and diverse continent. African artists are utilizing this digital space to create, recreate and disseminate new images of Africa in inventive and socio-culturally conscious ways.

(Lizelle Bisschoff, “The Future is Digital: An Introduction to African Digital Arts”)

### Introduction

Since the middle of the twentieth century and the beginning of what the World Economic Forum has called the Third Industrial Revolution, the world has become increasingly digitised. The Third Industrial Revolution, otherwise known as the Digital Revolution,<sup>1</sup> saw the advancement of technology from analogue electronic and mechanical devices to the digital technology that is becoming progressively ubiquitous. This evolution is having a profound effect on the way we access information, communicate, and create. The way that stories are told is no exception. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, both of Harvard’s Berkman Centre for Internet and Society, observe in *Digital Natives* that the “explosion of creativity online has given rise to new forms of expression” (118). One only has to observe a popular platform like YouTube to realise that digital storytelling is a rapidly growing form. Web videos, social media, blogs, and websites geared specifically towards sharing pieces of writing are proliferating. This evolution of narrative is worth examining, for both the implications it holds for literature and the possible consequences for creators and audiences. In Africa, where web access and digitisation are relatively new, creators are eagerly exploring these new mediums and the possibilities that they provide for African narratives and African representation.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Third and Fourth Industrial Revolutions are often confused. The Third Industrial Revolution refers to the emergence of digital systems that have replaced analogue technologies. The Fourth Industrial Revolution builds on the Third, but is characterised by technologies that are blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres. It is marked by breakthroughs in fields such as robotics, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and the interrelated systems and objects that are referred to as the Internet of Things.

New narratives of Africa are imperative given the continent's colonial history. During the colonial era, narratives of Africa and African peoples were often distorted to support a Western worldview. The African decolonial project is to free the continent from the cultural and social effects of colonisation. The difficulties inherent in this process are many, but are perhaps nowhere as evident as in attempts to balance the competing demands of fitting into the modern world and invigorating indigenous traditions, knowledge, and narratives about Africa. In *Home and Exile*, Chinua Achebe elaborates on "the right of a people to take back their own narrative" (44). He recalls his being exposed to Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* which called "into question [his] childhood assumption of the innocence of stories" (33). *Mister Johnson* portrayed Nigeria in a way that Achebe recognised as false, and he came to the realisation that there is such a thing as "absolute power over narrative" and that those who "secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like" (24). Nigeria was being represented inaccurately by the global North, and these representations were being believed because the West had power over narrative. This realisation was the beginning of Achebe's own writing career, and he held onto the expectation that "the innate power" (74) of African stories from Africa would triumph over inaccurate representations of the continent. This belief was validated as the twentieth century witnessed "a significant beginning [...] of the process of 're-storying'" the nations of the developing world which had been silenced by colonialism. Achebe's hope for the twenty-first century was that it would "see the first fruits of the balance of stories among the world's peoples" (79). His conviction, as recorded in the first epigraph to this chapter, is that those storytellers who will "advance the universal conversation" will be those "able to bring hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling" (83). It is these 'new ways of telling' with which this thesis is concerned – new ways which suit a digital, globalised world and at the same time, communicate indigenous narratives.

New forms of expression have always been important. TS Eliot proclaims in his essay on Elizabethan translations of Seneca that "few things that can happen to a nation are more important than the invention of a new form of verse" (101). Jacob Bronowski, in a defence of science, argues that "few things that can happen to the world are more important than the invention of a new form of prose" (49). The new forms of digital expression that Africans are using to communicate their reality are important because online platforms are global platforms. African storytellers are creating narratives that convey lived realities, and these narratives are reaching an audience that might otherwise have a limited story of Africa. In the second epigraph of this chapter, Lizelle Bisschoff argues that the global connectivity of the

internet age has forced a reassessment of what is ‘known’ about Africa. African artists are using digital spaces “to create, recreate and disseminate new images of Africa in inventive and socio-culturally conscious ways,” presenting diverse representations of a diverse continent (261).

In this thesis, I look at various digital and online texts. The text-disseminating platforms of African Storybook, the FunDza mobisite, and Long Story SHORT are examined for their role in enabling access to literature, while the online dissemination of Dudu Busani-Dube’s *Hlomu the Wife* is provided as evidence for a South African reading culture. Nicole Amarteifio’s *An African City* and Jabu Nadia Newman’s *The Foxy Five* are localised narratives, their wide distribution made possible by the low publishing barriers of online mediums. They are considered for the ways in which their narratives claim urban spaces for black African women and their forms assert rights to a global audience. Anoeke Steketee and Eefje Blankevoort’s transmedia documentary *Love Radio*, and The Nest Collective’s web series *Tuko Macho* are analysed for the ways in which they include their respective audiences in building narrative, making use of the participatory culture of the web. These texts communicate and address African concerns using new forms. They employ digital tools and platforms to create and disseminate African stories, making them more easily accessible to both local and global audiences.

It is necessary here to briefly define the terms I will be using in this thesis. A ‘web series’ is a sequence of short, scripted and episodic videos released on the internet. ‘Transmedia’ is a term which refers to the various platforms across which a multimedia narrative is told, and can include (but is not limited to) web videos, social media posts, photography, and audio. By ‘digital media’ or ‘new media’ I refer to media that are created and viewed on digital devices, and distributed by means of the internet. Finally, I refer to “texts’ in the Bakhtinian sense – “as any coherent complex of signs” (“The Problem of the Text” 103). Any intentional configuration of words, images, and sounds is denoted a ‘text’, and thus I use the word as a general term that covers literature, film, and audio material.

In order to appreciate the particular position of digital storytelling as popular art in Africa, it is necessary to review the theory behind popular culture and digital culture, and to evaluate how these are particular to the continent. This introductory chapter will look at some of the theory of cultural studies, popular culture in Africa, the implications of cultural theories for the participatory nature of the internet, the internet as a democratic space, the digital divide so relevant on the African continent, and finally, will discuss the digital text as a type of literature.



## Creating Cultural Texts: Popular Culture, Producers and Audiences

Culture in the 1900s was thought of, in British writer Matthew Arnold's words, as "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Higgins 6). This perspective exemplifies a justification for what has been called 'high culture,' and is contrasted with popular forms of art and literature, which are sometimes termed 'low culture.' Raymond Williams, a critical influence of the formation of cultural studies, actively worked to undermine the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture. By placing emphasis on the power of the individual to influence social processes, Williams denied Arnold's argument that culture is the property of the educated minority and out of the reach of what Arnold called "the raw and uncultivated masses" (76). He argued that culture is the meanings generated by ordinary people, the lived experiences of its participants, and the texts and practices that people engage in. Williams radically changed the practice of textual analysis by historicizing it and including non-literary forms of cultural expression such as television, film, and media. Current studies of popular culture owe much to this redefinition of 'important' cultural texts.

The territory of popular culture is complex, and its terminology is much debated. Chris Barker states that popular culture "is constituted through the production of popular meaning located at the moment of consumption" (55) and Stuart Hall argues that it is a space of consent and resistance in the struggle over cultural meanings, a space where cultural hegemony is fixed or contested. Henry Jenkins defines it as "cultural materials that have been appropriated and integrated into the everyday lives of their consumers" (*Convergence Culture* 291). Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome assert that popular culture in Africa is generally agreed to be "locally produced urban materials and discourses," but that this does not preclude "so-called elite production" and "the local consumption of 'global' art forms and commodities" (18). Popular culture has many definitions, but what they all have in common "is the idea of *popularis* – belonging to the people" (Storey xxi). For the purposes of this thesis, I have adopted the definition offered by Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson in their introduction to *Rethinking Popular Culture*: "We will side step a great many terminological disputes with the inclusive claim that popular culture refers to the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organised, that are widely shared among a population" (3). The texts examined in this thesis do not have the audience of popular culture texts such as the *Marvel* movies or American web texts. If popular texts are considered important for what they can say about the society from which they come, however, then these texts are indicative of African meaning.

The texts examined in this thesis are important for their African representation of Africa. It is important to note that in using the term “African,” I am grouping fifty-four countries of diverse beliefs, customs, and peoples. I do so, however, with the purpose of juxtaposing the texts in this thesis with the prevalence of negative and stereotypical representations of Africa by a Western media system over which the continent has had no control. The popular representations of South Africa, Ghana, Rwanda, and Kenya that are studied in this dissertation are heterogeneous in many respects, but what they have in common is local production and local content. By referring to “African” texts, I mean to highlight the localisation that provides more nuanced representations of the continent’s peoples.

Karin Barber notes that popular art forms “undoubtedly talk about what the people themselves think is important – in their own vocabulary, and through the form they feel to be appropriate” (4), and they are therefore invaluable for understanding African societies. Popular art forms “are themselves means through which consciousness is articulated and communicated,” and that in times of rapid social change, “it seems likely that [they...] will play a crucial role in formulating new ways of looking at things” (4). By referencing subjects that Africans consider important in new, exploratory forms, the digital texts studied in this thesis are playing an important role in presenting new perspectives on Africa.

Appreciating popular culture is, to a large extent, about realising the importance of an audience. The way in which an audience receives an artwork affects the impact of that art, and in the internet age, an audience is increasingly involved in the production of artworks. Barber epigraphs “Popular Arts in Africa” with a quote from Mikhail Bakhtin: “All the acts of the drama of world history were performed before a chorus of laughing people. Without hearing this chorus we cannot understand the drama as a whole” (“Rabelais’ Images” 474). The play, it is clear, is not complete or comprehensible without the chorus.

One of the most common arguments against popular culture is that it is unsatisfying because it is passively consumed and therefore “fails to enrich its consumers” (Barker 50). Under the contemporary understanding of people as active producers of meaning, however, buyers are bricoleurs, constructing meaning by selecting and arranging elements of that which is given them. Scholars concur that popular culture not only reflects society, but also “shapes broader social forces” (Harrington and Bielby 6). John Fiske, building on Williams’ work in the 1980s and 90s, asserted that while popular cultural texts are mainly produced by capitalist corporations, popular culture is constituted by the meanings that people create with it, rather than identifiable within the texts themselves. Audiences have power “as producers

of meaning at the level of consumption” (Barker 61). Fiske introduced this spectatorial power in *Television Culture* as a “semiotic democracy.” He described it as a “delegation of production of meanings” and an “opening up of [television’s] discursive practice to the viewer” (236, 239). In his work on fandoms and participatory cultures, Jenkins has observed that for a fan, “watching the series is the beginning, not the end, of the process of media consumption” (“Reconsidering Fandom” 278). Palfrey and Gasser note that “in a semiotic democracy, the story can be reinterpreted and reshaped by any citizen with the skills, time, and access to digital technologies to do so” and “might just be the most profound difference made possible by the internet for our time” (266).

The idea of an audience participating in the making of meaning, however, is not an altogether new one. In oral traditions, for example, “receptivity to the reactions of the audience” is “an integral as well as flexible part of [the literary work’s] full realization as a work of art” (Finnegan 6). Poststructuralist theory, too, foregrounds the role of the reader in the process of signification. In his 1971 essay “From Work to Text,” Roland Barthes draws a distinction between the “Text” as a poststructuralist form of writing, and the traditional literary “work.” He argues that “*the Text is experienced only in an activity of production*” and that rather than being an “object of consumption” like the work, the Text “asks of the reader a practical collaboration” (157, 161, 163, italics in original). In 1970, he distinguishes between ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ texts – the ‘readerly’ foregrounds its story, while the ‘writerly’ foregrounds the manner in which the story is told, and demands that the reader be “no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (*S/Z* 4). Umberto Eco identifies texts that are resistant to a single interpretation as ‘open’ texts. A closed text attempts to pull the reader “along a predetermined path,” but an open text has interpretation as “a structural element of its generative process” (8,9). In 1987, Fiske argues that both Barthes and Eco are theorizing about “avant-garde, highbrow [texts] with minority appeal,” and suggests that television should be thought of ‘producerly,’ which “combines the televisual characteristics of a writerly text with the easy accessibility of the readerly” (95). The producerly text, he asserts, “treats its readers as members of a semiotic democracy, already equipped with the discursive competencies to make meanings and motivated by pleasure to want to participate in the process” (95). The audience as producer of meaning, then, is not a new phenomenon. New media, however, has made the process of contributing to narrative not only easier, but more concrete. George Landlow proposes that ‘hypertext’ – blocks of text online and the electronic links that join them – “involves a more active reader, one who not only chooses his or her reading paths but also has the opportunity of reading as an author; that is, at any time the

person reading can assume an authorial role and either attach links or add text to the text being read” (41-2). The reader of an electronic text can make readable changes to that text – they now have, for good or ill, the power of authorial creation.

In the age of computers and the internet that makes communication easier than ever before, audiences not only participate in the production of meaning at the level of consumption, but at the level of creation. The internet has opened up new spaces for creators and audiences, frequently making their interactions part of the text. Often, the most successful online texts owe their popularity to a culture which encourages fans to contribute to the narrative. In Chapter Three, this participation of the viewer, known as ‘participatory culture,’ is explored in more detail.

The recognition of the role of the audience is linked to the argument made by early cultural scholars such as Williams that culture is created by ordinary people. Aarthi Vadde argues that “[s]cholars must analyze the kinds of collectivities that are forming around new media platforms for literary and artistic work,” because such groups “require us to revisit how institutional histories of literature have constituted distinctions between amateur and professional creativity and whether those distinctions still hold today” (48). The possibilities of digital media spaces for blurring the boundaries between audience and creator, professional and amateur, reinforce yet again that cultural texts are productions of the people, and that cultural hierarchies create unserviceable distinctions.

## Democratisation of Narrative as a Possibility of Digital Media Spaces

The popular culture with which I am particularly interested is that which is produced more for the sake of an ideology, idea, or story than for the sake of revenue. The Internet, widely available in post-industrial societies, has opened up ways of self-publishing texts, and these are less likely to be controlled by capitalist corporations. Barker notes that “the closer a cultural practice is to the central economic relations, the more they will directly determine it,” and “the further away cultural practices are from the core capitalist production process, the more they can operate autonomously.” His conclusion is that “individually produced art is more autonomous than mass-produced television” (58). That said, I do not wish to convey the idea that I am placing any more value on uncommercial forms of popular culture than on those that generate a profit. To do so would be to create a hierarchy of worth which harkens back to old conceptions of ‘low’ and ‘high’ culture. In this thesis I have focussed on forms of popular art that are non-commercial for two reasons. Firstly, because the motivations for their

existence are simpler to dissect, and secondly, because they attract an audience that might otherwise be unable to access them. Freely available textual forms contribute to democratisation of narrative, which I consider one of the most fascinating characteristics of the Web.

Palfrey and Gasser note two factors that make the internet a hub of creativity: low costs and increasingly easily accessed technology. Digital natives have a “culture of creativity powered by ultra-simple, cheap technologies” (122). Ease of access means democratisation – of information, and of power of expression. Jochim Raschke said in 1985 that “a movement that does not make it into the media is non-existent” (Rashke 343 – quoted in Rucht 25). This may be an exaggeration, but in the twenty-first century, it is not far from the truth. Now that digital media has made self-publishing straightforward, it is easy for individuals and non-professional reporters to disseminate information about issues and undertakings that they consider important. It is no longer imperative to attract the attention of the mainstream media in order to gain the notice of the public. Palfrey and Gasser observe that digital technology “gives everyone the means to express themselves, and it empowers them to speak – and to be heard by others, including those in power – in ways that previous generations could have only imagined” (125). Information and communication technology (ICT), or the electronic devices, networking components, applications and systems allow people and organizations to interact in the digital world, provides enormous potential for democratic spaces. Palfrey and Gasser note that the increasing availability of the internet, and the fact that so many people can access and make contributions to “the online cultural commons,” means that online culture is increasingly diverse. This diversity “provides people with the opportunity to access a wider range of perspectives” drawing people into public conversations and exposing them to new ideas, perspectives, and forms of expression (126). The increasingly diverse nature of the internet has potential to open spaces for localised narratives that can talk about Africa from an African perspective and aid the decolonial project.

It is very easy to be enthusiastic about the possibilities of digital media for democratisation. The internet has been “hailed as a new social space that is not subject to control by any one centre of power, [...] but rather held to be intrinsically open and democratic” (Barker 365). Palfrey and Gasser note that “the creative revolution in cyberspace” is partly about “who gets to control the shaping of culture, the making of ‘meaning’” (125). The December 2006/ January 2007 issue of *Time* magazine recognised the importance of user-generated content on the internet when it made the person of the year

“You” – the millions of contributors to the democratisation of information. The “Great Man” theory of history, wrote Lev Grossman for *Time*, posits that it is “the few, the powerful and the famous who shape our collective destiny as a species.” In 2006, however, “[t]hat theory took a serious beating” (n/p). The story of humanity need not be seen as the story of great men (*sic*), but instead, as the story of the power of the collective:

It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes. (n/p)

Palfrey and Gasser believe that a global online culture that is participatory and that requires digital literacy skills will “lead to stronger democracies” which “will stem from more people becoming engaged in the making, interpreting, and remaking of meaning in the culture” (129). Perspectives like these view the internet as a democratising space, free from the dictates of capitalism and corporate determinism.

It is important, however, not to idealise the spaces of new media, as they are not free of commercialism, disinformation, and hidden motives. “Democracy has always been a see-saw struggle for control between citizens at large and elite economic interests” (44) points out Richard K. Moore, and cyberspace is no different. The contemporary hegemony of global capitalism is a strong adversary for a democratic world wide web and the internet is fast being invaded by advertising and capitalist consumer culture. Search engines and social media sites gather data on user behaviour, and use that information to target users with advertising. Astrid Mager demonstrates that “capitalist ideology gets inscribed in search algorithms by way of social practices” (770) as users respond to targeted advertising and political campaigning. The Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal in early 2018 brought to public attention the ease with which personal data can be mined on social media, and used to influence public opinion in various political matters. The internet also makes it easier for false information to spread. Palfrey and Gasser note that the trend of so many people contributing to human knowledge in digital form means “there are real concerns about cheating, plagiarism, lack of credibility, [and] defamation” (120). Because the net is open to everyone, anyone can disseminate information without it being verified or censored – a condition that has led to the proliferation of ‘fake news.’ Additionally, the semi-anonymity that the internet provides often leads to the worst of human nature being displayed. One only

has to read the comments section of a controversial news post to see the publishing of vitriol and hate-speech that the internet makes possible. Moreover, the internet provides the potential for a new Orwellian dystopia, where the digital devices we use everyday track and store personal information. This possibility has not gone unnoticed by authors – Dave Eggers’s novel *The Circle* (2013) imagines a world in which all online information is collated by a single company under the ideology that ‘All that happens must be known,’ and privacy becomes a type of theft. It is clear that there are dangers as well as advantages to a more digitised society.

It is indisputable that the internet is an imperfect space, but it is nevertheless a rapidly developing one. It is a tool that can be bent for any number of purposes, and it is up to its users to ensure that its effects are positive. Buhle Ngaba, author of *A Girl Without a Sound*, and an advocate for diversity in children’s literature, recently said that the internet “gives people a platform to be what they always wanted and, though it may be imperfect, it should be something we use. I use it to share as much of my work as I can, across borders, waters and skies” (Lever n/p).

### *The Deepening Divide: Digital Culture in Africa*

A person who is born or brought up during the age of digital technology (after 1980) is often termed a ‘digital native.’<sup>2</sup> Palfrey and Gasser, however, are careful to define a digital native as someone who not only was born in the age of digital technology, but who also “has access to networked digital technologies and strong computer skills and knowledge” (346). This distinction is important in certain countries of the global South, where the percentage of millennials that have accessed digital technology is comparatively low. In speaking about the possibilities of digital media spaces in Africa, it is crucial to consider the fact that the internet penetration on the continent is twenty-three percent lower than the rest of the world. This is despite the fact that several more developed African countries have exceeded the world average for internet penetration (“Internet Penetration in Africa”).<sup>3</sup> One of the main limitations to the internet as a truly democratic space, argues Zizi Papacharissi, is access

---

<sup>2</sup>The first recorded use of the term ‘digital native’ is John Perry Barlow’s 1996 paper “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.”

<sup>3</sup>As of December 2017, internet penetration in Africa was 35.2%, whereas the rest of the world was recorded at 58.4%, and North America was recorded at 95%. Some of the continent’s more developed countries, however, are recorded at a closer-to-average internet penetration: South Africa is recorded at 53%, Senegal at 59%, Nigeria at 50%, Libya at 58%. Tunisia and Kenya exceed the average at 67% and 85% respectively. For more detailed figures, see *Internet World Stats.com*.

inequality and the lack of new media literacies that mean that not everyone is able to participate in the virtual public sphere.<sup>4</sup> This limitation is especially pertinent in some areas of Africa. Access and use of ITCs in some emerging economies in Africa happens amongst a very small percentage of the population. Additionally, they are used for purposes that do not have a significant impact, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. This is called the ‘digital divide.’

The ‘digital divide’ is the gap between those who have access to current digital technology such as computers and the internet, and those who do not; more recently, it has also come to refer to the social and educational inequalities that result from such lack of access. Access to the Internet for many Africans is facilitated by mobile devices, and mobile subscription penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa is growing quickly. Ericsson Mobility Reports from 2015 and 2016 showed that in 2010, mobile penetration was just above 50 percent, but grew to an estimated 80 percent in 2015.<sup>5</sup> Mobile devices, then, are seldom the problem. Rather, it is the prohibitively high price of data in some countries that do not yet have widespread wireless local area networking. In South Africa, the Democratic Alliance, the official opposition party to the governing African National Congress, launched a campaign in October 2017, demanding that the government provide an allowance of free mobile data to university students, matric pupils, and job seekers. The leader of the DA Youth, Yusuf Cassim, argued that “the exclusion from information and communication power provided through the internet remains the largest obstacle to the freedom to progress as an individual” and that Internet access is “an economic necessity” (Cassim n/p). It is proof of South Africa’s relatively developed economy and infrastructure that internet access could be considered an economic necessity. Outside of the twelve African countries that have an internet penetration of 50% or above, ICT access and usage in Africa is generally low, exacerbating the plight of developing nations.

In *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*, Jan AGM Van Dijk argues that “the more information and communications technology is immersed in society and pervades everyday life, the more it becomes attached to all existing social divisions” (2). It is a recognised phenomenon that those who have an advantage find it easier to accumulate

---

<sup>4</sup> Papacharissi notes two more barriers to a democratic internet space. The first is that although ICT enables discussions between people on different sides of the globe, they also frequently fragmentise information through special interest subgroups or by presenting one aspect of an issue. The second is that “given the patterns of global capitalism, it is possible that internet-based technologies will adapt themselves to the current political culture, rather than create a new one.” Recognising these inadequacies is critical if the internet is not to be idealised.

<sup>5</sup> See *Sub-Saharan Africa Ericsson Mobility Report*, November 2015 and November 2016.



further advantage; this trend is often summarised in the maxim ‘the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.’ In 1969, the sociologist Robert Merton termed this the ‘Matthew effect,’ after the New Testament verse in the Gospel of Matthew: “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath” (KJV 25.29). Van Dijk notes that this phenomenon is no less true for the way that individuals and communities learn and use ITCs: “those already having the most resources and best positions in society also take the most advantage of every new resource, such as the possession and use of new technology” (96). This means rising levels of information and communication inequality, a deepening digital divide that has profound implications for those already affected by social inequalities. The Matthew effect means that the digital divide is more likely to deepen than to be breached, a problem which, argues Van Dijk, “creates a threat to democracy” (180). In order to understand the importance of technology access in Africa, it is crucial to grasp the link between social, economic, and digital access inequalities. I therefore give a summary of Van Dijk’s argument below.

It is important to recognise that the digital divide is about more than access to technology. When it is seen as “a primarily technological problem,” then the solution is presented as gaining physical access to computers and networks, and therefore it is important that the digital divide is seen as “a social and political problem” (3). When looked at this way, it is apparent that access is more than just a physical factor. Van Dijk discusses four consecutive types of access: motivational, physical (or material), skills, and usage. Firstly, not everyone has the rational or emotional motivation to gain access to computers and networks. The fault here, argues van Dijk, lies not with those lacking motivation, but with the flaws of the technology itself: “lack of user friendliness, usefulness, attractiveness, affordability, and safety” (43). The second phase of access, physical, is the most obvious, and the one focussed on by policy and research. Having physical access to computers and a connection to the internet is necessary for development of the skills needed to use these technologies. Thirdly, skills have to be acquired and improved in managing hardware and software. Computer literacy is rare in areas where traditional literacy is scarce – this is why van Dijk argues that digital divides are linked with older inequalities. The last type of access, usage, is “the ultimate goal of trying to obtain access,” whether that usage be for the purpose of information, communication, transaction, or entertainment (95). Usage is impossible without motivational, physical, and skills access, but having the first three types of access does not necessarily mean that a user will have the “need, occasion, obligation, time, or effort to actually use [computers and the Internet]” (*ibid.*). Van Dijk argues that the most important

part of the digital divide is the usage gap. He contends that the usage gap appears “when some segments of the population systematically and permanently use and benefit from advanced computer and internet applications for information, communication, work, business, and education, and others only use the basic or simple applications for information, communication and shopping and enjoy more applications for entertainment” (129).

The digital divide has greater implications than other forms of inequality, because computers and the Internet are multifunctional technologies that are increasingly being used in all spheres of human life. “Never before,” claims Van Dijk, “have we created media that were so all-embracing and that had such weight in all parts of society” (183). He defends the claim that digital media “mean even more for current and future society than print media, literacy, and television did to the modern mass society of the recent past” (183). The implications of that claim are enormous. If such an assertion proves to be right, then digital literacy is as important as learning to read and write. Williams argued in 1965 that print literacy was a type of revolution:

We speak of a cultural revolution, and we must certainly see the aspiration to extend the active process of learning, with the skills of literacy and other advanced communication, to all people rather than to limited groups, as comparable in importance to the growth of democracy and the rise of scientific literacy.

*(The Long Revolution 11)*

Digital literacy, too, is “comparable in importance to the growth of democracy,” and indeed, is necessary for its continuation. The inequalities of the digital divide are part of the socioeconomic and educational divides, and “digital technology is intensifying [current] inequalities” (6). In which case, the digital storytellers that Africa has now are the forerunners of the continent’s future. Recognising their importance is part of the aim of this dissertation.

I would like to argue that the story of ICT access in Africa is a promising one. Herman Wasserman notes that although the links between economic development and Internet access are similar to the causes for unequal distribution of older mass media like radio and television, “more optimistic assessments have been hoping for a ‘leapfrog’ effect where new media technologies may surpass the introduction of older platforms.” The mobile Internet, for example, has overtaken fixed line Internet, which means that “access to the Internet is not as insurmountable a problem in regions like Africa than it used to be” (132). Wasserman argues that “the story of access is not adequate to understand the historical trajectory of the Internet in Africa” because the “use of the Internet on the continent seldom

takes place in isolation, but in combination or in convergence with other media practices” (132-3). He gives as an example the use of social media by radio listeners in Ghana, where radio stations use social network sites like Facebook, micro-blogging sites like Twitter and web-enabled platforms like WhatsApp to connect with their audiences. Ghanaians, like other Africans, are using the limited digital means within their grasp to inform themselves, and the world, about issues that affect them. ICT use must encourage access, leading, in due course, to a more digitally connected continent.

## Digital Narratives

William Deresiewicz writes that “the novel’s days of cultural preeminence have long since gone,” arguing that the form “rose to primacy across the 19th century, achieved a zenith of prestige in modernism, then yielded pride of place to the new visual media” (para. 19). This is perhaps too strong a claim, but as the world grows increasingly digitised, it is becoming evident that paper-based writing is being replaced, to a certain extent at least, by the screen. Nevertheless, Palfrey and Gasser reassure us, “books are not dead; culture is not collapsing” (251). They agree that the world is “in a period of transition,” but remind us that it has “managed transitions of this sort before” (253). The novel itself was once an unfamiliar form, the very word means ‘new.’ Kiene Brillenburg Wurth notes that “digital screens have been placed in opposition to the book and paper page in the last two decades: either to defend the latter as the last trace of a material humanist tradition against the inclusions of a network of digital distraction, or to promote digitisation as liberation from the material constraints of paper and print” (*Between Page and Screen* 2). She argues that this positioning of the page and screen as antagonistic is fruitless, and suggests instead “an integrative approach to literature and screen-based media,” seeing the latter as a progression from the former in much the same way that oral literature preceded print (1). This “integrative approach” is one I would like to adopt in my thesis as I consider the changing nature of texts in the internet age. What we call ‘the literary’ can only continue to adapt in an increasingly digital age, and I would like to examine these changes as part of the continuous evolution of narrative, rather than as an altogether new development that will forever alter literature.

It is important to realise that while the ICT cannot help but alter the way we communicate, find and disseminate information and entertainment, it is unlikely that it will completely change the way society functions. Palfrey and Gasser point out that television didn’t transform education, and that it is unlikely that the internet will do so either. It can be,

however, “another tool for teachers to use” in the classroom, and “a means by which students learn outside the classroom” (250). Digitisation has meant that bound books aren’t the only way to convey information, but it doesn’t mean that we have ceased to use them. “New media are always pagan media,” observes Liu, “strange, rough, and guileful; either messengers of the gods or spam” (5). John Cayley has argued that “in the field of new media as cultural production, readers tend to be blinded by novelty and so blinded to continuities of artistic poiesis” (179). If we are to acknowledge digital productions as a form of literature, it is important that the connections between new and old media are recognised. It is worth appreciating that every form of narrative we use now was once an innovation. “New media,” remarks Alan Liu, “is a very old tale” (3). I do not want to argue for either, but rather, regard new media as part of a continuum in the history of the tools of narrative. At the same time, it is important to realise that digital texts have significant differences that must be considered in their analysis. “Books are good at delivering essentially linear stories,” writes Matt Margini. Computers, he continues “are good at telling stories of a different kind: procedural, participatory, encyclopaedic, and spatial.” Computers are also “particularly good at telling stories that reflect the digital age—stories about fractured realities, complex systems, and networked ways of being in the world” (n/p). For the texts under discussion in this thesis, I argue that computers have enabled dissemination, the reclaiming of spaces for black African women, and the inclusion of audiences in narrative.

### Digitisation Paving the Way for Literature Dissemination, Localised Narratives, and Participatory Culture

The texts examined in this thesis are mostly popular culture texts, in the sense that they have been made accessible and widely shared on popular media at a grassroots level. This thesis will be more of an overview of the types of digital texts being developed for, in, and about Africa than an in-depth analysis of narrative. Digital media is still relatively new on the continent, and digital literature is only just emerging. I therefore consider an indication of the forms of digital literature emerging in Africa to be of more immediate use than a detailed study of the texts themselves. I have grouped the texts I will examine into three categories – those that make use of digital tools and online spaces in order to disseminate literature in Africa, those that tell localised narratives of urban African womanhood, and those that use participatory culture, including audiences in narrative processes.

The texts in this thesis are predominantly web series. As I began my research into digital and online storytelling in Africa, I found that I was engaging with this form more than any other. The web series is presented in short, digestible segments, but several webisodes together can present a full story. A well formulated web series can pull together the forms of written text, music and film, using visual, written and acoustic technologies. There is an enormous amount of material to examine in a web series – such as the technical aspects, the acting, and the story itself – and as I researched electronic texts that were examples of participatory culture and localised narratives, the categories I found especially interesting, I recognised that my best cases were web series. I could not, however, write a dissertation on digital storytelling without recognising the enormous scope of form that it allows. For that reason, I aim in the second chapter to give a contextual view of the existing types of digital and electronic literatures.

The second chapter of this thesis is concerned with the way digitisation is aiding in the dissemination of literature to a broader African audience. African creators are using new media to make literature accessible to a far wider audience than it would otherwise reach, improving literacy and tapping into an unrecognised reading culture in South Africa. The “African Storybook Reader,” an application for smartphones which provides simple picture stories in forty African languages, makes accessing appropriate reading material an easier process. The FunDza Literacy Project provides relevant texts for South African teenagers, encouraging them to read. Kgauhelo Dube’s project Long Story SHORT is a series of live readings of African literature at community libraries, packaged into podcasts for online consumption. The project is a response to the fact that so few of South Africa’s schools have libraries, and only a small number of the country’s youth have access to reading material, especially African literature. Dudu Busani-Dube’s novel *Hlomu the Wife* first gained popularity on a blog platform, illustrating the web’s potential as an alternative publishing space. These projects prove that digital media have a major role to play in Africa’s education. It is important to acknowledge, however, that online content is only available to those with access to the web – a limitation that it is necessary to consider when judging the efficacy of such projects.

The third chapter looks at two localised narratives that use digital media to tell stories about urban African womanhood. Nicole Amarteifio’s *An African City*, which has drawn frequent comparisons to HBO’s *Sex and the City*, is a glamorous narrative set in Accra, Ghana. It is counter-narrative to representations of African women as uneducated, underprivileged, and unfashionable, presenting a picture of sophisticated repatriates. While it

highlights the patriarchal nature of traditional Ghanaian society, it displays a post-feminist sensibility. Jabu Nadia Newman's *The Foxy Five* is a South African web series inspired by the 2015 Fees Must Fall protests and concerned with intersectional feminism in an urban South African space. Newman's and Amarteifio's use of new media for personal expression and for challenging conventional narrative is expressive of both the postmodern shift away from grand narratives and the way in which the growing digitisation of Africa is placing agency in the hands of ordinary citizens.

The fourth chapter examines two texts that include their audiences in the construction of narrative. The transmedia documentary *Love Radio* is about a popular radio soap opera in post-genocidal Rwanda intended to prevent eruptions of violence. Its creators combine film, photography, audio, text and archive material to produce a story that questions fiction's efficacy in promoting peace in a country so recently devastated by war. *Love Radio* includes records of the soap's audience participation in its own narrative, indicating a recognition of the importance of fan engagement. The documentary also requires its audience to be participatory in that they choose what parts of the narrative to watch, view, read, or share, placing the responsibility of engagement in the hands of the viewer. *Tuko Macho*, a web series by The Nest Collective, explores issues of crime, corruption, and vigilante justice in Kenya. It encourages viewers to vote on whether or not to punish the fictional criminals exposed on screen, and to engage with the series' creators on social media. By doing so, the creators implicate the audience in the retribution process and make them part of the story. These two narratives demonstrate the possibilities of participatory culture in the digital age.

## Conclusion

Williams, in considering culture 'ordinary,' and not the property of the elite and educated, laid the foundations for the study of popular culture. Popular art informs us about the societies in which they are consumed, primarily because the consumption of art is not a one-way process. Whether an audience simply chooses between certain types of texts, or whether they contribute to artistic production, they are producers of meaning, shaping significance and effects. This not a new phenomenon, but the advent of digital media has made it easier and more tangible. ICT makes communication, publication, and access of information simpler – but this can have negative as well as positive effects. Nevertheless, access to computers and the internet is important in a rapidly digitising world, and it is necessary for the countries of Africa, along with other less developed regions, to attempt to bridge the

digital divide that exacerbates other types of inequality. Part of the process of bridging the digital divide, and the aim of this thesis, is recognising the digital narratives being produced in and for Africa, and their place for communicating and addressing African concerns.

W Lance Bennet notes that the internet “is just another communication medium,” but that digital media can “offer capacities for change if people are motivated by various condition in their environments to exploit those capacities” (19). Williams claims that the making of a society “is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land” (“Culture is Ordinary” 93). Texts that exploit digital media’s capacity for change, and remake African societies by embracing individual voices, disseminating literature, and conveying the concerns of the continent are shaping culture and influencing our future. New media has opened a new space for Africans to tell their stories, both for themselves, and to communicate their own picture of their continent to the rest of the world. Africa has “hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling,” and it is critical that these are explored in order that we understand our place in the universal conversation.

## CHAPTER 2

### Digital Literary Platforms: Electronic Literature as an Aid to Reading Culture and Text Dissemination in South Africa

[Digital] platforms connect readers to new writing from the continent – writing that more reflects their own lived realities – in innovative ways.

(Lizelle Bisschoff, “The Future is Digital: An Introduction to African Digital Arts”)

#### Introduction

This chapter gives a contextual view of some of the existing types of digital and electronic literatures available and being used within South Africa, with the intention of illustrating the innovative ways in which, as Bisschoff states, “digital platforms connect readers” to writing from their own locality. I argue that digital platforms are rapidly becoming a crucial dissemination tool for literature, and that South African creators are using websites, mobisites, smartphone applications, and blogs to reach demographics that are under-supplied by the print industry. Additionally, I point out that the choice of platform in a country that largely accesses the internet via cell phone significantly affects the success of dissemination.

I have chosen to use examples from a single country to illustrate the diversity available within a limited area. As one of the more developed countries in Africa, South Africa has a wide range of digital technologies, and relatively widespread internet usage, an implication of which is the proliferation of digital texts. This chapter begins by briefly looking at some of the current thought on electronic literature, including perspectives from Africa. It then reviews examples of the ways in which South African electronic literature is being experienced and disseminated, and the role it plays in the country’s reading culture. African Storybook, developed by the South African Institute for Distance Learning, makes children’s stories available for download in African languages. FunDza.mobi, established by the FunDza Literacy Trust, is an online library meant to be accessed by mobile phones, and hosts content aimed at teenagers and young adults. Kgauhelo Dube’s podcast Long Story SHORT disseminates African literature by recording live readings and making them available online. Dudu Busani-Dube’s *Hlomu the Wife* is a romance novel that first gained popularity as a series of blog posts. African Storybook, FunDza, and Long Story SHORT are driven by educational motives – providing materials with which children can learn to read, which



promote reading amongst youth by being representational of their reality, and which attempt to make African literature accessible. *Hlomu the Wife* differs from these projects in that it is not intended to promote a reading culture in South Africa, but rather it is proof that a reading culture does exist. This chapter is not so much about the texts themselves, but rather about their dissemination, and the platforms that make this dissemination possible. As digital technology becomes a part of everyday culture, the ways in which stories can be told and distributed online multiply. Digital media is truly opening up ‘ways of telling,’ and this chapter examines how electronic literature has both encouraged reading culture in South Africa, and attested to its existence.

### Electronic Literature and the Literary in the Digital Age

The term ‘electronic literature’ is, inevitably, an evolving one. The word ‘literature’ stems from the Latin *litteraturae*, or ‘writings,’ and refers to written texts. Even so this digital age means that if someone has generated a written text, they have most likely done so using a digital medium. The postmodern literary critic Katherine Hayles remarks that literature in the twenty-first century is “computational” because “almost all print books are digital files before they become books; this is the form in which they are composed, edited, composited, and sent to the computerized machines that produce them as books” (*Electronic Literature* 43). This perspective, however, still sees literature as a written production. Alternatively, if approached from the Marxist perspective of historical materialism, literature is a changing form of material production that participates in and illuminates the processes of history. The fact of its being written is less important than what it accomplishes. In this light, electronic text could be considered ‘literature.’ A definition of electronic literature offered by the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) states that the term “refers to works with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer” (Hayles, *Electronic Literature* 3). Hayles differs with this definition, arguing that it is not specific enough, and that “electronic literature, generally considered to exclude print literature that has been digitized, is by contrast ‘digital born,’” meaning a digital object created and intended to be experienced on a computer (*ibid.*). Both of these definitions exclude texts which are watched or heard rather than read, which brings us back to the problematic assumption that ‘literature’ can refer only to written texts. This is due, no doubt, to the fact that print has dominated for the last few hundred years.

Hayles notes that “electronic literature arrives on the scene after five hundred years of print literature (and, of course, even longer manuscript and oral traditions)” (3-4). After 1900, Hayles observes, “media differentiated data streams into distinct technologies”: acoustic, visual, and written. This differentiation, in the words of Friedrich Kittler, “exploded Gutenberg’s writing monopoly” (16). The term ‘literature,’ however, remained the possession of written texts. In order to refer to other forms in a generalised fashion, we use the word ‘text.’ Mike Levy and Rowan Michael observe that “many ‘texts’ are no longer simply constructed with the written word but are now constructed in often complex, multifaceted ways using graphics, animations, and audiovisual material.” They refer to these texts as “multimodal texts” because they contain “multiple modes and therefore require meaning to be made and constructed in different ways” (96). Hayles proposes that “the literary” be defined as “creative artworks that interrogate the histories, contexts, and productions of literature, including as well the verbal art of literature proper” (4). She argues that a knowledge of the “major movements in the literary studies in the last half-century” must lead to the conclusion “that the discipline, in embracing cultural studies, post-colonial studies, popular culture, and many other fields, has been moving towards the broader category of ‘the literary’ for some time” and now, “at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we are poised to extend the interrogations of the literary into the digital domain” (5). Rachael Levy points out that the definition of the term ‘literacy’ is in flux, “as researchers grapple to find ways in which to describe the rapidly changing discourses associated with text analysis and text production” (152). She also to argues that “we need to view the relationship between traditional and digital media as reciprocal” (153). In other words, it is important to understand that experiences of traditional media inform interactions with digital media, and that the use of digital texts informs the digital native’s relationship with all kinds of texts.

It is necessary here to consider the use of the word ‘literature.’ Hayles argues that although she does not consider digital texts in general to be literature, it is a term with restrictions too narrow for contemporary use. The field of electronic literature, she observes “test[s] the boundaries of the literary and challenges us to rethink our assumptions of what literature can be and do” (5). Oral literature, although purely aural, is still named so. This distinction between oral ‘literature’ and digital ‘texts,’ I would argue, demands some examination. These, then, are my questions: Why should a podcast, an acoustic presentation as oral literature, not be considered literature? If we grant a podcast the status of literature, why should a combination of acoustic, visual, and written forms not deserve the name? Literature, in light of our rapidly evolving media, needs to be a far more elastic term than it is

currently. Literature, I would argue, is a crafted narrative. Whether that narrative is crafted of acoustic, visual, or written technologies, or a combination of any of the three; whether it be analogue or digital or an arrangement of both – a skilfully constructed narrative deserves the term ‘literature.’ Identifying a spoken word poem as literature and yet denying the name to a poem with artistically fitting visual accompaniment is an insular way of thinking, and not one that will survive an increasingly transmedia world.

It is important to note that ‘literature’ has hierarchical connotations as well as ‘print’ associations. Historically, a book has been termed ‘literature’ if it manages to retain a sense of cultural relevance or artistic merit. That is not a debate I can cover here, and for that reason I do not wish to make the claim that all of the narratives presented in this thesis are ‘literature.’ Some of these texts have been skilfully crafted, others less so – *Hlomu the Wife* and *The Foxy Five*, for example, have received criticism for their inexpert production. Therefore, while I argue for the reconsideration of our parochial use of the word ‘literature,’ I hesitate to use it to broadly cover the inexpertly crafted as well as the skilfully constructed. The examples of narrative dissemination and narrative construction online that are referred to in this thesis, I contend, should not be excluded from the realm of literature simply because they are not print. While the lasting artistic merit of these narratives remains to be seen, form alone should not prevent their being considered ‘literature.’

## Electronic Literature in Africa

The print literature available in post-colonial Africa is still predominantly created in, or heavily influenced by the global North. Given that the West enforced their print culture on a sub-Saharan Africa that contained predominantly oral cultures, and that colonial education made use of Western materials, it is not surprising that African literature has yet to emerge from the shadow of colonial texts. Jacqui Scott notes that Western books still predominate in Africa:

Printed book supply in Africa has long been dominated by materials imported from Western (British, French, US) publishers, although this has recently changed. [...] In most sub-Saharan African countries, local book production is limited, focusing on curriculum-specific materials and novels. Recently some countries have gained access to digital content through e-readers and phones, primarily accessing imported Western content. (vii)

Increasingly, however, African literature is gaining ground. African authors are producing material, and the audience for literature by and about Africans is an eager one. The principle challenge is connecting producer and consumer. Pumla Dineo Gqola notes that in decolonising South Africa's literary landscape, many interested parties are "unnecessarily committed to a model that too closely resembles" the current system. She gives as an example "the idea that there is a way to find a bookshop or book-selling system that works for black people, that is modelled on the current system but is located differently" (Van Wynegaard n/p). The traditional dissemination process, she argues, will not work. What *has* emerged as a viable process for distributing literature, however, is the internet.

Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed has noted that the recent re-emergence of African literature in the global consciousness "is happening alongside a digital revolution – the introduction and adoption of digital content and electronic reading devices, for example – which is changing the ways in which content by Africans for Africans is being produced, as well as the ways many readers in African countries consume African literature" (378). The digital age has made publishing a more distinct possibility for African writers. Stories can be written and published online, the process of disseminating content is as simple as setting up a blog. This capacity to publish without the need for traditional publishing structures gives contemporary African writers a great deal of freedom – they are beholden to nobody, and can write the stories they want told, and distribute without traditional gatekeepers. Ugandan author Dilman Dila, for example, has stated that he "built [his] writing career on digital platforms" (n/p). Kudawashe Kamupira, the cofounder of Bahati Books, has spoken about the reality of digital platforms being beneficial to digital native authors and readers. The authors "are able to have more control and involvement in the marketing and promotion of their books irrespective of whether they are bestsellers or not" and the readers "have a lot more flexibility to read the kind of books they want to read" (Nesbitt-Ahmed 379). Even traditional book publishing institutions are realising the possibilities of online dissemination. Ankara Press, for example, a division of Cassava Republic Press in Nigeria, publishes its books in ebook format before releasing the print versions. The ebook is presumably intended for an international or expatriate readership, but Moradewun Adejunmobi has pointed out that "prices for download are given in Nigerian currency as well as the United States dollar and the British pound [and this fact] indicates that the press, in adopting a strategy of initial sales through e-books, has not ruled out Nigerian readers" (139).

Hans M. Zell observes that "mobile phone platforms are probably the most fertile ground for new approaches to book publishing on the continent," given that books can be

promoted and delivered at a low cost, to a much wider audience than was formally possible, and allowing new and easy means of dissemination (3). Ereaders are relatively fragile and regarded as prohibitively expensive for a single-use object. Mobile phones, and especially smart phones, are regarded as a better investment. Cheaper, non-branded smartphones from places such as China and Taiwan are aiding the growth of mobile phone penetration in Africa. The low prices and numerous uses of these imports from Asia makes them a more logical investment than an e-reader.

Selling electronic literature is not without its problems. Zell mentions that online payment platforms are problematic both because of security concerns and because many African publishers are unfamiliar with these methods of payment that are still relatively new on a continent that is still developing its ICTs. Another barrier is the lack of knowledge to do with encryption tools, digital assets and rights management which allows publishers to control digital content. Electronic literature in Africa, however, is a growing resource for those who have the technology available to access it. It connects African authors with African consumers, circumventing a book distribution industry that does not serve their interests. In the next section I will examine an example of a book distribution platform that provides children's literature in indigenous languages, serving a consumer need by circumventing traditional distribution processes.

### African Storybook and Childhood Literacy in South Africa

The African Storybook is a literacy initiative that provides openly licensed picture storybooks for early reading in African languages. Developed and hosted by the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide), the African Storybook has an interactive website that enables users to read, create, download, translate, and adapt stories. The initiative addresses the dire shortage of children's storybooks in African languages, crucial for literacy development. Bonny Norton, a researcher for African Storybook, claims that the project is combating "one of the greatest challenges in Africa" – that is, "resources to become literate in the mother tongue" (Hui n/p). As of July 2018, African Storybook hosts more than 1025 stories in 153 languages spoken in Africa, including English, French, and Portuguese, for a total of over 4638 translations. The African Storybook addresses childhood literacy development, which is crucial to a child's educational future. The ability to read is an indispensable platform from which learning, both formal and informal, takes place. South Africa, unfortunately, does not have a positive track record for childhood literacy.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, or PIRLS, is an international study of reading comprehension achievement in fourth graders. According to the 2016 PIRLS literacy tests released in December 2017,<sup>6</sup> South Africa is in a dire situation. The country scored the lowest mark out of the fifty countries that took part in the study,<sup>7</sup> with only 78% of the country's fourth grade students unable to read for meaning.<sup>8</sup> The explanations for this dearth of reading ability were numerous. One significant factor was the absence of a reading culture amongst adult South Africans.<sup>9</sup> Sarah Howie, Sarah, Celeste Combrinck, Karen Roux, Mishack Tshele, Gabriel Mokoena, and Nelladee McLeod Palane noted that “in all of the [official South African] languages, a positive association between parents like reading and learner achievement exists” and that nationally, “there was a 52-point difference in learner achievement if parents enjoyed reading compared to those who did not” (157). Other factors included the lack of school libraries (due in part to the high cost of books) and the lack of quality training for teachers. The implications of this low literacy rate are sombre, simply because the benefits of reading are so far-reaching.<sup>10</sup> Projects like African Storybook, which aim at improving childhood literacy, have the potential to be of vital importance to the country. PIRLS came to several conclusions about factors that contributed to a child becoming a good reader, and among them were the following: a home environment that supports literacy learning,<sup>11</sup> an early start in literacy learning, a positive attitude toward

---

<sup>6</sup>Details of the study can be found in Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Pierre Foy and Martin Hooper's *PIRLS 2016: International Results in Reading*.

<sup>7</sup> The study included mostly high-income countries, but there were a number of middle-income countries such as Iran, Chile, Morocco, and Oman. South Africa lags far behind other countries: While 78% of the country's fourth graders cannot read, in America this is only 4% and in England, 3%. Even compared to middle-income countries, South Africa compared unfavourably – in Iran only 35% of Grade 4 students could not read for meaning and in Chile it was only 13%.

<sup>8</sup> They cannot locate and retrieve explicitly stated information or make straightforward inferences about events and reasons for actions.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note here that the lack of reading culture amongst many adult South Africans stems from the country's history of segregation and prejudice, and the systemic racism which resulted in inadequate education for most people of colour during this time. Educational deficiencies and a lack of representative reading material made it difficult to develop a reading culture.

<sup>10</sup> Reading develops imagination, empathy, critical thinking, the understanding of cause and effect, vocabulary and a general mastery of language. A study by Mark Taylor at the University of Oxford in 2013, “Reading for Pleasure in Britain: Trends, Patterns, and Associations,” found that reading books was the only out-of-school activity for 16-year-olds that was linked to getting a managerial or professional job in later life. A study at Stellenbosch University in 2009 by Martin Gustafsson, Servaas van der Berg, Debra L. Shepherd and Cobus Burger, “The Costs of Illiteracy in South Africa,” found that education is the single most important factor requiring urgent policy change to improve South Africa's economic development. They estimated that South Africa's GDP would be 23% – 30% higher if the population was fully literate.

<sup>11</sup> Supportive home environments included home resources that support learning (books in the home, study supports, and educated parents with professional/technical occupations), more digital devices in the home, and parents who like to read.

reading, and little difficulty reading online.<sup>12</sup> African Storybook, if used in the home, has the potential to enable these factors.

The site allows people to read, translate, and adapt the available stories, and to create new ones. The user interface is divided into READ, MAKE, and USE. In READ, users search for a story by language, title, reading level, or date published and can then download the stories to read onscreen or print a hard copy. African Storybook has five reading levels, ranging from books that are picture-heavy and contain simple sentences to stories that have up to 150 words on a page. MAKE allows users to create a new picture storybook, translate a story into an African language, or adapt a story for a different reading level. This aspect of the site requires a fair amount of computer proficiency, but given the variety already available on the site, it need not be used at all. The USE page provides articles on how the African Storybook has been used by teachers, community libraries, and education organisations. The “African Storybook Reader,” is an app for smartphones which allows users to access the stories for immediate reading on a smartphone or tablet.

Many of the stories available on African Storybook are about African children, representing black-skinned characters for readers who too often are exposed to white characters as a default. Use of indigenous African languages makes reading a more familiar experience and reinforces the importance of these languages. Many of the narratives use traditional folktales, or portray a traditional way of life. *Abantwana Bekhandlela*,<sup>13</sup> for example, is based on a Southern African folktale about children made of wax, in danger of melting in the sun. Violet Otieno’s *Holidays with Grandmother* tells the story of two children who visit their grandmother in her rural home. While there, the children eat traditional *ugali* or cornmeal porridge, herd cattle, collect eggs, and go to a local market. By using folktales and representing traditional activities, these stories both circulate indigenous narratives and normalise occupations that are common in many rural African societies.

---

<sup>12</sup> Other factors that PIRLS noted as contributing to a child becoming a good reader are attending well-resourced, academically orientated schools; learning in safe, orderly environments; and attending school regularly while neither hungry nor tired. These elements are prominent by their absence in many South African schools, especially those in lower socio-economic brackets. Systemic problems like these, however, are clearly outside the ambit of a project like African Storybook.

<sup>13</sup> IsiXhosa for “Children of wax,” or translated literally, “Children of candles.”

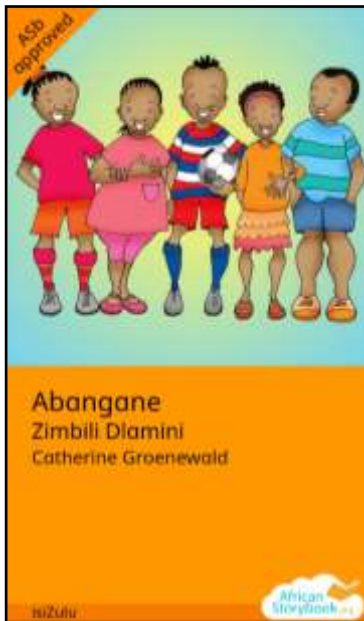


Figure 1: The 'cover' of *Abangane*, isiZulu for 'friends'

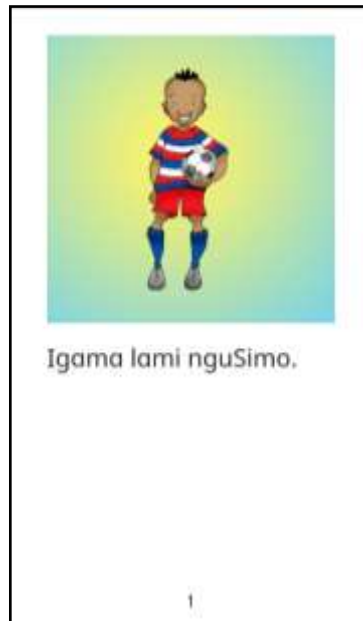


Figure 2: "My name is Simo"

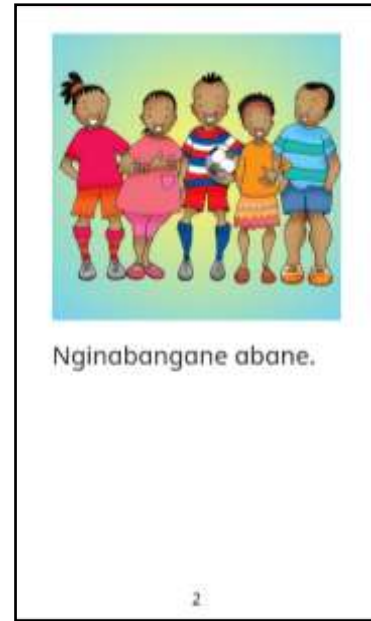


Figure 3: "I have four friends"

Figures 1 to 3 above are screenshots of the 'cover' and first two pages of the book *Abangane* by Zimbili Dlamini, as seen on the African Storybook Reader. The brightly - coloured illustrations, simple sentence structure and easy-to-read font are typical of African Storybook's texts. *Abangane* is written in basic isiZulu, and it is also available in the South African languages of English (*Friends*), isiXhosa (*Abahlobo*), Afrikaans (*Maatjies*), and Sesotho (*Metswalle*). *Abangane* is a Level 1 book, which means it never has more than one sentence or eleven words on a page. The story introduces the character of Simo and his friends, who all like to do different things, and thus exposes the new reader to various verbs. Like all of the stories on African Storybook, the book is licenced under Creative Commons, which makes reproduction legally possible.<sup>14</sup>

Information and narratives published under the Creative Commons licence have the potential to contribute to a more equitable distribution of knowledge resources over time. Dennis Young argued in 1994 that part of Africa's literacy problem was that "traditions of reception and book usage [...] have not been sufficiently disseminated to the masses of people in ways which allow for innovative and locally-adapted patterns of usage." He also noted that, in order to achieve cultural autonomy, a society or cultural group must "produce widely-available knowledge and find the means to sustain the elaboration of specific cultural

<sup>14</sup>Material under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License can be copied and redistributed in any medium or format, and may additionally be adapted for any purpose, even commercially, as long attribution is given to the relevant creators.



meanings and identities through broad popular access to communication channels and information sources” (2). These are problems that an indigenous text distributed under a Creative Commons licence has the potential to address. By removing the direct cost of a book, an author publishing under Creative Commons makes a wide distribution of their book a greater possibility, and therefore encourages local patterns of usage. A teacher or parent accessing a book through African Storybook may have to pay for the data necessary to download the document, or printing costs if they require a hard copy, but the outright cost of the book has been eliminated. The books distributed by African Storybook “sustain the elaboration of cultural meanings and identities” because they represent African cultures through both use of language of representation of cultural realities. Their broad dissemination, therefore, can only aid in Africa’s decolonisation project. The proliferation and circulation of representative narratives reinforces indigenous traditions, knowledge, and languages, undermining the damage that can be done by the abundance of children’s books that represent a Western reality.

Brightly illustrated children’s books with simple, entertaining stories about characters that have recognisable names and live in a familiar environment are easily accessible for most English speakers in the global North. Representational books are less readily available for African children, which is a hindrance to children learning to enjoy reading. An external accountability evaluation for African Storybook reports that the project has been successful in addressing this problem. The attractiveness “of the full colour artwork, and the fact that the stories are, as one teacher put it, ‘culturally exciting’ has increased the excitement of reading for both teachers and learners” (Gultig 59). Norton notes that part of what makes African Storybook so apposite is that “Africans are constructing their own stories, writing their own stories, and uploading these stories that can be shared” (Hui n/p). By creating a platform on which teachers, parents, and children can access attractive, easy-to-read texts in their own languages, African Storybook facilitates many of the factors that PIRLS concluded were important for children to become good readers. Accessed from a smartphone at home, the stories promote a home environment that supports literacy learning and encourages reading online. The simplicity of the lower levels supports an early start to literacy education, and the bright colours and representational nature of the stories fosters an enjoyment of reading. Facilitating accessibility via an online platform is an innovative and practical solution to literacy on the continent. This same solution has been successfully adopted by FunDza, a project aimed at an older age group.

## FunDza and Reading Culture in South Africa

The FunDza Literacy Trust, founded in April 2011, is a South African non-profit NGO dedicated to improving literacy among teenagers and young adults. FunDza aims to popularise reading, grow communities of readers, and develop young writers. It does this primarily by making fiction available on a mobisite,<sup>15</sup> accessible by both cell phones and smartphones. The mobisite also hosts non-fiction, plays, poems, and educational resources. Each week FunDza publishes a new specially commissioned short story, and releases it in a serialised format, a chapter at a time. The trust derives its name from the isiXhosa word for “read” (funda). The name also plays on the idea that reading should be a “fun” activity and the domain identifier for South Africa on the Internet is ‘za.’ The trust has proved its efficacy, and in 2017, received three accolades for its work: the Gold Award at the Impumelelo Social Innovations Awards, the inaugural Joy of Reading prize (an international award given at the Next Library Festival in Denmark in June), and the prestigious UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy. FunDza reported that in the 2016/17 financial year they reached approximately 600,000 readers through a combination of print or electronic means. Like African Storybook, FunDza aspires to further a reading culture in South Africa.

South Africa lacks an active reading culture – that is, a culture in which reading for pleasure or information is habitual. According to a 2016 national survey into the reading and book reading behaviour of adult South Africans commissioned by the South African Book Development Council, only 14% of the country’s adults were identified as active readers, whereas 74% were identified as having “low potential” to take part in any kind of reading activity (*Final Report* 4). The study concluded that two of the main barriers were the cost of books and access to reading materials, with 58% of households lacking any kind of book whatsoever. This is the context in which FunDza is at work.

---

<sup>15</sup> A mobisite or ‘mobile site,’ is a website designed for use on a small mobile device such as a cell phone, where a regular website might be difficult to navigate due to being miniaturised for a small screen. They are particularly important for cell phones, which do not have the internet capabilities of smartphones.

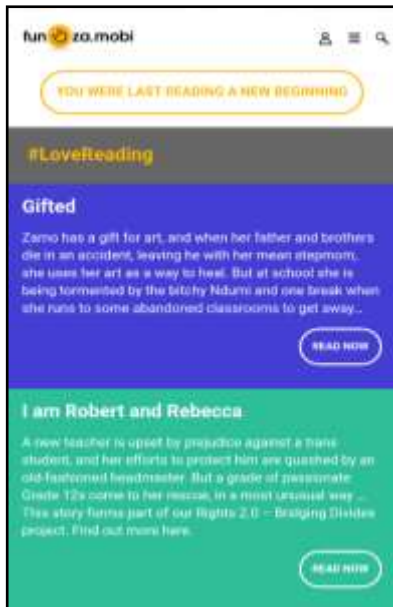


Figure 4: The homepage of the FunDza mobile site.

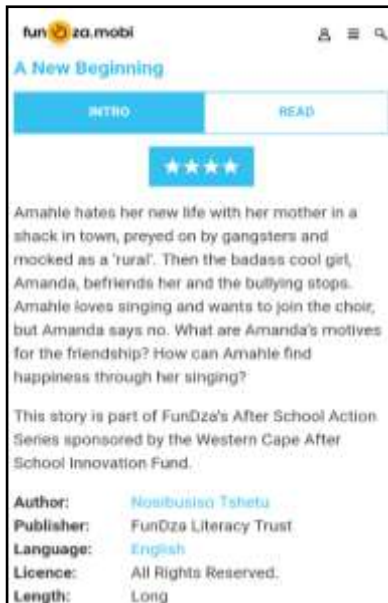


Figure 5: The 'Intro' page for "A New Beginning," showing a summary and publishing information.

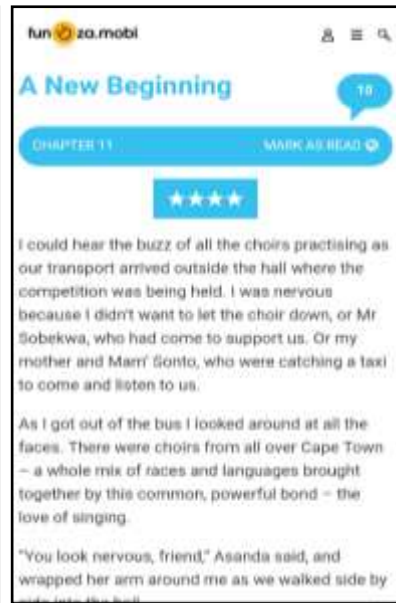


Figure 6: Chapter 11 of "A New Beginning."

Figures 4 to 6 above are screenshots from the FunDza mobile site (*live.fundza.mobi*). As is evident from figure 4, the homepage is clearly laid out and easy to navigate. Each story has an introductory page which gives a brief teaser for the narrative, reveals the rating given to it by previous readers, and indicates length. Each chapter, as seen in figure 6, can be 'marked as read' so that readers can keep track of their progress in the story. This is both practical and affirmatory, as reluctant readers can feel a sense of accomplishment when they view a list of their read chapters.

In order to foster a reading culture, it is necessary to target a demographic with reading material that is both relevant and attractive. Fredrick Wawire Otike has observed the educational system can be more of a hindrance than a help to the promotion of a reading culture, as it "places more emphasis on reading for academic purposes instead of reading for leisure or broadening of knowledge" (4). This impacts foundational literacy – that is, reading, writing, and meaning-making skills. Hilary Janks argues that literacy is "both a set of cognitive skills *and* a set of practices" (xiii, emphasis mine). If literacy is a social practice, then the popularisation of it will be far more effective if people are exposed to literature they *want* to read, than if they are forced to read material which is unappealing. FunDza focuses on making sure that the stories are set in a familiar South African environment, with recognisable and relevant characters and themes. Nosibusiso Tshetu's story "A New Beginning," for example, is told from the perspective of Amahle, a young girl who has to make the transition from a rural environment to living in a shack in a Cape Town location.

The story is sprinkled with isiXhosa phrases, exclamations, greetings, and customs. Amahle's mother tells a fellow traveller that "*Uyaqala ukuhamba ekhaya*"<sup>16</sup> (Chapter 1), following the Xhosa practice of referring to the place one grew up as 'home,' rather than the place one lives. Amahle addresses the individuals she speaks to as "*Makhulu*" and "*bhuti*"<sup>17</sup> (Chapter 1, 2), reflecting the traditional etiquette of acknowledging people in familial terms. The story relates a reality that many South Africans experience, such as doing homework by candlelight and cooking on a paraffin stove. Discussion questions at the end of chapters help readers to engage with the stories by asking them to consider what might happen later in the narrative and to reflect on the story's relevance to their own life or past experiences. By ensuring that their stories reflect the lives of their target readers, FunDza supports a growing number of young South Africans reading for pleasure.

The trust works at making reading accessible and affordable, and as part of this aim, they use inexpensive platforms to disseminate reading material. Up until Mxit<sup>18</sup> servers closed in September 2017, FunDza was still publishing stories through a portal. They urged Mxit users to convert to FreeBasics, an app which allows affordable access to selected Internet services to less developed countries by increasing efficiency. A survey in December 2016 revealed that 86% of the respondents were accessing the FunDza through FreeBasics. FunDza sends out WhatsApp broadcasts to those that sign up for them in order to alert readers to new content. Maintaining contact with their users on the platforms that they commonly use has contributed hugely to FunDza's success.

FunDza has been successful in its aim to popularise reading. Mignon Hardie, FunDza's Executive Director, observes that responses from readers and beneficiary groups frequently confirm that "reading and writing with FunDza is making a difference in their lives: by improving language skills, boosting reading or writing confidence, increasing enjoyment of reading or writing, or simply encouraging thinking and reflection, discussion and debate through the power of the story itself" (*Annual Report 3*). A great deal of FunDza's success is due to the fact that it uses a platform that is economical and easy to access with limited mobile data. Long Story SHORT, the project covered in the following section, has been less effectual, in large part due to its inappropriate choice of medium and platform.

---

<sup>16</sup> "We have just left home."

<sup>17</sup> IsiXhosa for "grandmother" and "brother."

<sup>18</sup> Mxit was a free instant messaging application developed in South Africa. It was created for feature phones, and its data-light nature meant that it found an international user-base. It shut down in 2016, due to its inability to evolve fast enough to compete with newer messaging platforms like Blackberry Messenger and WhatsApp.

## Long Story SHORT and the Efficacy of Digital Literacy Projects

Long Story SHORT is a series of live readings of African literature at community libraries, packaged into podcasts for online consumption. The project was a response to the fact that so few of South Africa's schools have libraries, and only a small number of the country's youth have access to reading material, especially African literature. Brainchild of media consultant Kgauhelo Dube and curated by novelist Yewande Omotoso, Long Story SHORT "is an innovative digital project that seeks to showcase African literature through a combination of reading and recordings that are then packaged as free downloads on both online and mobile platforms to be accessed by the general public" (Magano n/p). The seven readings took place in Pretoria community libraries between April and December of 2015, with an eighth happening at the Rutanang Book Fair held in Potchefstroom in June 2016. The texts selected were pieces of writing by African authors, and the readings were delivered by various South African actors and voice artists.

The project was well-conceived: the celebrity status of the performers drew a young audience who might not otherwise listen to literature readings, and the packaging of the readings as podcasts<sup>19</sup> meant the readings could be widely accessed. Long Story SHORT was making it possible for African literature to reach a demographic that it might not otherwise touch. The project had the potential to have a positive impact in two areas in particular: promoting a reading culture amongst the youth, and aiding in the decolonial project. Because of the lack of school libraries, Dube wanted to make learners aware of community libraries. Her aims for the project were to introduce young people to African literature, and to encourage them to interface with their community libraries. Poet laureate Keorapetse Kgotsitsile, who was also special adviser to Arts and Culture Minister Nathi Mthethwa, observed that Long Story SHORT had the potential to promote a reading culture. Kgotsitsile noted that "South Africa is confronted with the challenges of illiteracy" and that these challenges "call for robust interventions to get South Africans to read; that is the only way to develop an informed society" (Masilela n/p). Long Story SHORT also had the potential to aid in the process of decolonising South Africa's literary landscape, firstly by disseminating African literature, and secondly, by publicising literature in African languages. Advocates of the decolonial project recognise that literature has a history of communicating and shaping cultures and identities, and that it is therefore important for young Africans to experience

---

<sup>19</sup> A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files or, less commonly, video files, which a user can stream or download.

literature from their own continent. Thando Mgqolozana<sup>20</sup> has argued that literary festivals should not take place in elite spaces such as universities “because black people can’t access them,” but that literature should be taken to “where the majority of black people are” (Sosibon/p). In an interview with the SABC in 2015, Dube said that she hoped future readings would use other African languages. She noted that as an African, she “cannot amplify European culture in media” because doing so would be “spurious” and she wants to work with material from the continent (Magano). The intentions for the project, then, were positive, and as it progressed, Long Story SHORT seemed to be well-executed.

The stories chosen by Omotoso for Long Story SHORT are poignant and relevant, and their readers made their deliveries with expression and flair. Zukiswa Wanner’s “The F-Word” is a topical narrative handling gender stereotypes and homophobic behaviour. Thando Mgqolozana’s “The Weeping Willow” considers the changing nature of ‘home’ for a young man whom education has separated from the traditional values of village life. The last podcast available on the Long Story SHORT YouTube channel is of Presley Chweneyagae reading from Sabato Mpho Mokae's novel *Ga Ke Modisa*.<sup>21</sup> The book, and therefore the reading, is in Setswana,<sup>22</sup> making it an exciting addition to the project in terms of disseminating indigenous-African-language literature. Unfortunately, over two years after the publishing of the *Ga Ke Modisa* reading online, there have been no further podcasts.

Long Story SHORT, in terms of its online reach, has been something of a failure. Long Story SHORT may claim that its making “African literature [go] digital” but the digital audience numbers are very low. The YouTube video of Khulu Skenjana reading “The Weeping Willow” had received only 1134 views as of October 2018, and this was the most viewed of all the podcasts. The project’s podcast is packaged as video files, which may have contributed to its lack of popularity. As video files require substantially more data than audio files to stream, it is unlikely that the lower-income demographic that Dube was aiming her podcast at would have been willing to access the files. Digital accessibility for the audience that Dube tried to reach is a problem, and the appeal of the performers is not enough to combat the data price of watching a video. Long Story SHORT nevertheless has the potential to impact young South Africans. If this type of project worked on their attraction factor and

---

<sup>20</sup> Mgqolozana has become a well-known figure in the fight for literary decolonisation in South Africa since his statements at the 2015 Franschhoek Literary Festival went viral. He announced that he was “quitting” the “white literary system in South Africa” because it “systematically excludes black people.”

<sup>21</sup> The title is a Setswana phrase, which can be translated as ‘I am not my brother’s keeper.’

<sup>22</sup> Setswana is one of South Africa’s eleven official languages. Its speakers (about 8% of the population) form the fifth-largest language group in the country.

used a media platform that ameliorated costs, it would have the potential to disseminate literature to an audience who would otherwise never be exposed to some of the greatest literature this continent has produced.

In order to be efficacious in South Africa, digital literacy projects have to be both economical and pleasant to use. The success of digital literacy projects depends a great deal on how they read their target users and then adapt to the commonly-used platforms and needs of those users. Long Story SHORT has not been a great success, because its creators forgot to take into consideration its target audiences' habits and accessibility problems. African Storybook and FunDza, however, have been successful because their creators have been careful to shape their projects to the requirements of their consumers. African Storybook has been effective not only because it has met the need for attractive children's books in African languages, but because its platform allows for the fact that users may not have internet access at all times. FunDza has done well because it aims to meet its target users on platforms they habitually use (Mxit and now WhatsApp) and because it has taken into consideration the prohibitive price of data in South Africa and found ways to overcome it. Digital media has enormous potential to aid in South Africa's literacy – but the ways in which it does so must be carefully targeted if it is to be successful.

African Storybook, FunDza, and Long Story SHORT are all literacy projects, aiming to increase and improve childhood and young adult reading practices and exposure to African literature. These projects have focussed on readers of school-going age, and rightly so, as this is the age when reading habits are developed. South African adults, as was noted earlier in this chapter, are reported to be unenthusiastic readers. This, as the following will demonstrate, is not completely true. The lack of reading culture in South Africa may very well be attributable to the South African publishing industry, which neglects a large portion of the country's demographic. The success of representative narratives disseminated online, such as *Hlomu the Wife*, demonstrates that South Africans are eager for reading material with which they can identify.

### *Hlomu the Wife* and Publishing Online

Dudu Busani-Dube's novel *Hlomu the Wife*, a love story set in Johannesburg, began as a series of blog posts that she shared on social media in 2014. The book and its two sequels *Zandile the Resolute* and *Naledi His Love* have since become enormously popular with young

black South African women, and sold tens of thousands of copies.<sup>23</sup> Dube is now, in the words of *Johannesburg Review of Books* editor Jennifer Malec, “a publishing phenomenon” (n/p), and the popularity of her books is proving that South Africans will read if they are given texts that appeal to them.

After publishing the blog posts that comprised the first few chapters of *Hlomu the Wife*, Dube asked a number of her friends to read and suggest edits. Her friends, however, were not much help in giving critical feedback, and instead “went crazy about the characters” (Paine, 0.57). The chapters went viral, and, under a lot of pressure from fans who were eager for the rest of the story, Dube published the novel as an ebook. In 2015, Dube decided to take the next step and publish the books. Opting to be independent, she self-published and has marketed and sold her books almost entirely by herself. She notes that it took time for bookshops to catch on to the popularity of the novels:

I tried bookshops but they were not interested because most of them don't sell self-published books, so I just started selling my books myself, from the boot of my car and through friends and strangers and pop-up sales. Online bookstores such as My African Buy were the first to take my books. They were popular and they were selling like crazy, but mainstream bookstores were just not hearing it. Adams Books and Bridge Books were among the first physical stores to stock my books. The others only started calling a year later.  
(Malec n/p)

Dube did not approach the publishing industry because she felt that it would not understand “what [she] was trying to say, who [she] was writing for, and who [she] was writing about” (Paine 4.00). Her experience has pointed to a problematic trend in South African publishing – a propensity to cater to a middle-class white audience.

Despite a lack of quantitative data on the publishing industry in South Africa, and the subsequent dearth of studies on book production and consumption in the country,<sup>24</sup> it has become evident that South African publishing industry is skewed towards white consumers. George Fredericks and Zolile Mvunelo argue that “publishing in South Africa is characterised primarily by the fact that it does not reflect the demographic constitution of South Africa.” They continue by observing that it “caters predominantly for the white market, through English and Afrikaans, despite the fact that the two languages, or for this matter, the white South Africans, constitute a small percentage of the total population” (134). Wanner has

---

<sup>23</sup> Due to the unusual publishing history of the novels, exact numbers are not available

<sup>24</sup> See Francis Galloway's “Notes on the Usefulness of Publishing Statistics for a Broader South African Book History” in *English Studies in Africa* 47.1: 109-118.



argued that the publishing industry labours under the delusion that “middle-class white women are the biggest readers and buyers of books, and that nonfiction sells more than fiction.” She contends that publishers are not willing to distribute books by and for the black population because there is a “fallacious belief that a certain demographic of people does not read” (n/p). Wanner’s assertion is borne out by Dube’s experiences in attempting to find a bookshop that would sell her work. Dube believes that she was unable to distribute her book because she was writing about and for a demographic that “the whole publishing industry believes do not read” (Paine 4.00), and therefore she disseminated her work online. Dube’s experience is illustrative of Dina Ligaga’s argument that the internet in Africa has “introduced an assertive form of literacy that has given agency to categories that previously did not have an outlet” (“Virtual Expressions” 4). Authors previously unable to publish through conventional methods have found that the internet has given them agency to assert their own literatures. Many black South African authors, failed by the book industry, have turned to a publisher without gatekeepers – the internet.

Recent statistics show that South Africa has as many as 21-million internet users, most of which are accessing the net with mobile networks (Shapstack n/p). As was seen in the first section of this chapter, much of the country’s population has low levels of foundational literacy.<sup>25</sup> It is at the intersection of these two seemingly unrelated facts that South Africa’s online fiction finds its niche. South African writers are authoring stories online that are interesting and relevant to a demographic that does not often find itself represented in print, and proving that in order to get people to read, you simply need to present them with an appealing story that reflects their reality. This trend is reflected elsewhere in Africa as well: Dila observes that his literary e-zine, *Lawino*, that promotes African and Ugandan literature, has generated surprisingly high traffic on social media, and countered “the misconception that Ugandans do not read – on the contrary, it shows a real hunger for our literature” (n/p). The popularity of Dube’s novels is evidence that black South Africans have a ‘real hunger’ for literature to which they can relate.

For young black South African women, Dube’s writing is meeting a need for representative fiction. A reader noted that she felt that “the books are all relatable” (Paine 7.27), and another said that “it’s not every day that you meet an African woman who’s written such an amazing story that’s so relevant to us South African women who are living in

---

<sup>25</sup> It is important to note here that lack of foundational literacy does not always connote lack of literacy altogether. Forms of literacy such as civil literacy, which is understanding one’s role as a citizen, or cultural literacy, which is the knowledge of one’s own culture, are not dependent on foundational literacy.

the year 2000 (7.37). Ayanda Paine commented that when she was in Soweto, she noticed “an informal book club going on” (2.40), in which “young black women [were] feasting” on Dube’s novels. She attributes the success of the novels to their accessibility, the use of colloquial language that “reads like a conversation between friends” (4.30). Dube noted that her aim was to encourage reading, and that she wanted her readers to find “something [they] are familiar with” on the first page. (4.48). The familiarity of the stories is what make them so popular in South Africa. Paine commented that Dube’s stories are “uniquely ours” (*Part 2*, 0.13). Dube in turn told Paine that her books are “about you and me and any other girl” (5.34). Considering that Dube and Paine are two black South African women, this statement is not as innocuous as it sounds. The fact that the experiences of young black South African women are being normalised is, in itself, revolutionary. Two black women having a conversation about a piece of media that is about lives similar to their own is an indicator of the significance of localised narrative for representations of Africa, a topic that is covered in more detail in Chapter Three.

Growing internet accessibility in South Africa, combined with what Wanner has referred to as a “parochial” publishing industry, means that black South African authors are turning to the internet to disseminate their work. The eagerness with which this work is accepted is proof that a reading culture amongst adult South Africans does exist – as long as potential readers are given texts that are relatable and representative. While the book industry refuses to publish and distribute books by, for, and about black South Africans, that demographic will use the internet to publish and consume texts, developing a literature culture that is all their own.

## Conclusion

African literature, being primarily oral in nature, was inhibited by colonial print culture. It has since, however, begun to reassert itself. I have noted in this chapter that digital platforms and electronic literature are serving the re-emergence of African narratives by providing dissemination methods that bypass traditional publishing institutions. I also argued that the term ‘literature’ has historically been narrowly defined, but an increasingly transmedia world can only expand that definition. Africa is in a unique position to accept alternative forms of literature, because its own oral literature has juxtaposed print culture. Literature in Africa has not been defined by its ‘written’ status, and therefore electronic literatures will perhaps be more easily accepted.

Not every author can make it onto the narrow podium of published print works, but the internet has opened up an alternative dissemination method. As one of the more developed countries in Africa, South Africa has a wide range of digital technologies, and relatively widespread internet usage, an implication of which is the proliferation of digital platforms for text dissemination. Digitisation and internet connections have provided the opportunity for educational projects like African Storybook and FunDza to distribute relevant and engaging reading material for children and teenagers. These projects have an important role to play in promoting literacy and reading culture in South Africa, and have proved to be successful. Long Story SHORT, however, has demonstrated that simply making materials available on the internet is not sufficient – it is imperative that educational projects consider the access needs of their target consumers. Distribution online has proved to be viable, too, for authors wanting to disseminate their work. The popularity of Dube’s *Hlomu the Wife* has attested to the reality of a reading culture in a demographic that is largely uncatered for, and the internet was the medium through which she gained her following. By using websites, mobisites, smartphone applications, and blogs, South African creators are reaching an increasingly connected country. The digital age has made publishing a more distinct possibility for African writers, and digital platforms have made dissemination of African narratives an easier process. Stories can be written and published online, and distributed to an audience that is eager to receive them. Digital literary platforms are rapidly becoming a crucial dissemination tool for literature and connecting readers to writing from their own locality. If the relationship between traditional and digital media is reciprocal, as Levy suggests, then it is possible that the success of African literature disseminated online will encourage South African publishing institutions to cater for a wider audience.

The texts disseminated by the digital platforms discussed in this chapter are aimed primarily at South Africans. To return to the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, they “connect readers to new writing from the continent – writing that more reflects their own lived realities – in innovative ways.” I have argued that by demonstrating an awareness of the needs of the country for both literacy programmes and representative literature, the creators of these platforms are innovatively serving South African interests. There are indeed many ‘ways of telling,’ and their proliferation is being used to purpose by literacy projects and authors to reach previously ignored demographics. In the following chapter, I explore how the creators of the web series *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* use new ways of telling to represent the lived realities of urban African woman, a demographic that has historically been much maligned. Much as the platforms examined in this chapter distributed representative

South African stories, the web series in the next chapter use YouTube to disseminate localised stories of urban African womanhood.

## CHAPTER 3

### “[R]eclaiming urban spaces for women”: *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* as Tales of Black Female Urbanity

The novel thus functions as a means of reclaiming urban space for women through the challenge it offers to patriarchal ideology.

(Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*)

#### Introduction

This chapter briefly explores the history of black women in urban Africa, and the stigmatisation that single women have had to face in cities, and then looks at the ways in which the web series *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* reclaim urban space for the black African woman. It argues that the characters of these shows are able to resist being marginalised because they are supported by communities of friends who affirm their right to the spaces of the city. Additionally, it claims that by creating localised narratives about black women living in urban spaces and making them available for consumption on the internet, the creators of these shows provide representation that asserts the black African woman's place in both urban spaces and on the internet. The digital platforms explored in the previous chapter have enabled the circumvention of traditional publishing institutions, thereby connecting South African readers with writing that serves South African interests and more accurately portray the lived realities of the country's peoples. Similarly, the web series studied in this chapter have been distributed on the public platform of YouTube, enabling both local and global audiences to experience personal and localised narratives of African womanhood.

*An African City* and *The Foxy Five* relate the stories of women living in the urban spaces of Accra, Ghana, and Cape Town, South Africa. Written, produced, and disseminated in Africa, these localised narratives are remarkable for both their representation of black urban womanhood, and for the way in which the internet has enabled their dissemination. The premise of each is very different. *An African City* is a narrative about the repatriation of wealthy professionals in Ghana, and *The Foxy Five* follows the experiences of young women of colour in the still-racialised environment of South Africa. *An African City* portrays five

modern African woman who are professional, glamorous, and open about their sexuality, combating depictions of poor, rural and unsophisticated African womanhood. It is a story of hybrid identity, and of being caught between modern sensibilities and traditional expectations. *The Foxy Five* narrative focuses on intersectional feminism, the five characters displaying a keen awareness of the racial and gender politics that surround them and presenting a picture of vibrant and knowledgeable young women. Nevertheless, both relate the narrative of the modern, urban woman in Africa.

Neither Nicole Amarteifio, creator, writer, director and executive producer of *An African City*, or Jabu Nadia Newman, creator, writer, and director of *The Foxy Five*, were professional filmmakers when they created and disseminated their web series. Both women, however, saw a gap in the narratives of black African women, and decided to tell stories strongly reminiscent of their own experiences. Frustrated with the conventional depictions of African womanhood, the creators constructed plots and characters that defy the ‘single story,’ and which chronicle different accounts of African women. They told these stories on digital platforms, embracing the ease of dissemination that the internet allows in order to circulate better representations of the urban African woman. Newman and Amarteifio’s use of new media for personal expression and challenging conventional narrative is expressive of both the postmodern turn from grand narratives, and the way in which the growing digitisation of Africa is placing the power of this shift in the hands of ordinary people.

The epigraph to this chapter is taken from Florence Stratton’s analysis of Flora Nwapa’s *One is Enough*. She claims that Nwapa’s novel serves as a tool for reclaiming urban space for women by challenging patriarchal ideology. I would like to demonstrate in this chapter that *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* operate as instruments of a similar type. The series claim city and internet spaces for black women by resisting the racial and patriarchal powers that have historically governed those spaces. *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* have been selected for study in this thesis because they provide fresh portrayals of African womanhood, and because their creators used new forms of expression and dissemination to tell their stories, claiming a space for black women in the city and on the internet.

This chapter will begin by looking at the history of the marginalisation and stigmatisation of black African women in urban spaces, and the ways in which female African writers of the colonial era claimed a place for black women in the city. This history and narrative ancestry will be used to provide context for the web series studied in this chapter. It will then examine the various ways in which *An African City* portrays the sophisticated urban women in Africa, and briefly consider several aspects of the series

through the lens of post-feminism. Thereafter, it will explore *The Foxy Five's* representation of young urban women living under the interlocking oppressive systems of racism, sexism, and gender discrimination.

## African Women Writing Urbanity

This section sets out to examine the ways in which colonial and patriarchal discourses stigmatised single black women in the city space, and the legislation which inhibited these women from migrating to and inhabiting urban areas. It considers some examples of early African literature in English which challenged the discourses mentioned above by presenting the urban space as one in which a woman could thrive – these examples provide a context and lineage for the creators of *An African City* and *The Foxy Five*. Lastly, it reflects on the single black woman in contemporary urban Africa, and the ways in which a community can affirm her identity and place in the city.

Since the colonial period, the ideal African woman has been portrayed as a gender-normative figure inhabiting rural spaces, representing motherhood and nationhood. Ligaga notes that the African woman “who travelled to urban spaces and embraced modernity is painted as antithesis to the ideal woman” (“Popular culture” n/p). The challenge that the independent urban woman presented to patriarchal and colonial ideologies in colonial-era Africa resulted in the enactment of legislation that obstructed the entrance of single women into the city space. Christine Obbo reports that in Kampala during the 1950s there were laws requiring authorities to repatriate “all single women found ‘loitering’ in town.” Single black females “were branded as ‘prostitutes’ or ‘loose’ women who were intent on satisfying the sexual needs of the male migrants and consuming some of their money, but who were not destined for marriage” (26–27). Kenneth Little notes that in early 1940s Sierra Leone, “it was resolved at a chiefs conference [...] that women strangers in a town should be ‘signed for’ by their landlords [...] until called for by the husband or his representative” (16–17). The *Rand Daily Mail* reported in 1927 that an important factor in the “slum problem” facing Johannesburg authorities was “the lack of control over native women of undesirable character, who take up residence in urban areas” (12). In 1930, they recorded the Minister of Lands, Pieter Grobler, as stating primly that young black women were flooding into the towns “for reasons unnecessary to state” (11). Walker points that this concern resulted in legislation that prevented women from traveling to town without the “permission of the magistrate in their home districts in addition to that of the local urban authority” (42). The

movements of black women, especially single black women, were controlled on the grounds of morality. Systems of power embedded in race and gender have long justified the regulation of bodies – and thus, black women’s bodies and the regulation of their sexuality is inextricably linked to power relations.

Patricia Ruddy observes that the control over the movements of black women during the colonial period served the interests of both colonial and male African powers. These interests were the maintenance of power:

On the colonial side, keeping women—and thus African family life—situated firmly in the villages prevented the full proletarianization of African men labouring in the towns; senior men in the villages shared this interest, for with women/wives tied to the rural areas the junior men who had migrated to the towns would continue to make remittances [...] Male migrants themselves had an interest in leaving their wives and families in the villages, for in this way they could both earn urban wages and retain their foothold in the rural economy. (Quoted in Stratton, 16)

The reasons cited for the restriction of women’s urban migration were moral, but in truth, the motivations were about control – control that was often defined by economic power.

Preventing black African women from entering the urban space benefitted colonial authorities in that it inhibited the urbanisation of black families and therefore made it easier for cities to remain firmly under colonial rule. Keeping women in the rural areas profited traditional rural authorities because it ensured that money would continue to flow into the village, and aided male migrants in maintaining a grasp on both urban and rural economies. Stratton argues that legislation in the name of morality “contributed to the process of women’s economic marginalisation by relegating them to the rural economy, which in practice often meant subsistence farming” (16). In contrast to the rural economy, Cherryl Walker notes that economic life in urban areas “is based on the individual worker rather than the family unit” which enables women to define their own financial life. In town, she continues, “education opportunities are far greater, the range of organisations - political, social, cultural – open to women considerably enlarged.” Women living in urban areas, she argues, “have generally gained in independence and mobility” (3). This independence and mobility is a threat to both patriarchal and colonial authority, undermining the social stability that supports their hegemonic power. It benefitted the authorities, therefore, to brand the women entering the urban space as amoral, a danger to society as well as authority. Undermining the regulation of black female bodies as a social necessity, African literature



from the late 1900s attests to the potential ‘independence and mobility’ that urban areas represented for women.

The experiences of women living in city spaces has been represented in African novels since the 1960s. Cyprian Ekwensi was one of the first authors to create a narrative of the urban African woman in his novel *Jagua Nana* (1961). The narrative of an aging sex worker is set in the rapidly urbanising environment of 1950s Lagos, and although the novel decries the inherent moral corruption of the city, it portrays the economic advantages for women living in the city. Its eponymous heroine aspires to become one of the city’s “merchant princesses,” who were “independent women” and “free” (103). Ekwensi wrote about the possibility of a woman achieving independence through trade, and many of the African women writers after him continued to portray the city as a space in which a woman could achieve a measure of freedom.

Novels written by women in the colonial era often represented cities as sites of female development and self-determination, creating what Stratton calls a “theme of empowerment through urban migration” (118). Characters who embraced the opportunities that urban areas afforded were often contrasted with more rural or conventional characters who could not surmount the restrictive nature of their lives. In Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* (1975), the character Akunna and her stepsister Ogugua receive vastly different upbringings, Akunna in the city and Ogugua in a rural community. The juxtaposition of the two characters calls attention to the effects of an urban upbringing and formal education on Akunna’s independence and strength of self-will. Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) contrasts the character of Adaku with the protagonist, Nnu Ego. Adaku recognises the fact that her status as a second wife who has not borne sons means that she will always be marginalised. She leaves her marriage to become an independent woman, eventually earning enough from her trading activities that she does not need to be dependent on men at all, whereas Nnu Ego’s husband and sons consume her trading profits. Flora Nwapa’s *One is Enough* (1981) is a novel in which urban migration provides the protagonist with opportunities to define life on her own terms, much as it did for Adaku. The protagonist, Amaka, moves to Lagos, where she makes her fortune as a contractor and finds happiness as a single woman. Stratton points out that in indicating “that cities are good for women,” Nwapa stands in contrast to many of her male predecessors and “undermines the notion embedded in much male fiction, as well as other types of discourse, that cities are male territory” (103). These novels reveal the promise of financial independence and freedom from constricting convention that urban spaces held for black women in the colonial era. By creating narratives of female development, the

writers of these novels portrayed women as having the potential to be active, dynamic, and self-defining. By embracing the theme of empowerment through urban migration, they subvert the idealisation of the traditional and conventional African woman. While the web series examined in this chapter are not novels, their representations of single urban black women do draw on this history of black women writing female empowerment through urbanisation.

The representations of the single urban woman in post-colonial, contemporary Africa are contradictory. A woman with support networks which affirm her right to city spaces can be depicted as properly belonging in those spaces, and yet, in some societies, she may still be censured for alleged immorality. Even in the twenty-first century, some traditional societies exhibit unease about young women moving freely in urban spaces. Katrien Pype notes that in Kinshasa,<sup>26</sup> masculine anxiety about female mobility has manifested in the designation of young women who own mobile phones as ‘nyari ya Berry’ (Pype translates this as BlackBerry girls), and girls who obtain driver’s licenses and drive 4x4s as ‘basi ya jeep.’<sup>27</sup> Both of these terms indicate that a girl is of the *mwasi mabe* or ‘bad girl’ type, referring to “young girls who enjoy the luxuries of modernity, including wearing nice clothes and being mobile, which allows them to escape the control of men, both their guardians and their lovers” (406). Power within urban spaces, it is clear, has been slow to change hands, and this has much to do with the social identities which are ascribed in normal social processes. Elaine Salo, Mario Ribas, Pedro Lopes and Márcio Zamboni assert that “social identities are relational and asserted, reproduced, challenged or rendered invisible during social interaction.” During this social process, “physical space is threaded through with the meanings of power that are attached to these identities, rendering them relatively hegemonic or marginal within that particular location” (300). For black women, both historically and contemporarily, the power dynamics that bestow marginality are emphasised, to the extent that the black female personhood is either overlooked or scrutinised.

Rasul Mowatt, Bryana French and Dominique Malebranche posit that the black woman is either invisible or hypervisible. The invisibility refers to unseen systematic oppression and ongoing marginality, and the hypervisibility, to stereotyping and

---

<sup>26</sup> The capital and largest city of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

<sup>27</sup> The association of forms of transport with urban African woman, and tangentially, their sexuality, has been noted by Kenneth Little. Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana* is named so because she is associated with the luxury vehicle brand Jaguar: “They called her *Jagua* because of her good looks and stunning fashions. They said she was *Ja-gwa*, after the famous British prestige car” (5). Little adds that the term ‘Champion,’ originally a type of bicycle, “came to indicate a sophisticated woman [...] who had gained some notoriety for her sexual skills” (105).

commodification. In other words, the black woman is disregarded in everyday discourse, and when she is not, she is a source of spectacle. Kristen Warner argues, however, that hypervisibility of the black woman need not be read as negative, but rather as the beginning of a new narrative of agency. Building on Warner's argument, Ligaga claims that "occupying the space of negative comment and feedback, with regard to dominant moralizing discourse, is in itself, an act of self-assertiveness and reinvention of the image of black womanhood" ("Popular culture" n/p). The black woman who intentionally inhabits a space that challenges moralising ideology, therefore, is asserting agency. It is unlikely, however, that she would do so without some kind of peer support. The women which Warner and Ligaga refer to as examples of intentional hypervisibility are groups of women on reality TV series, and their self-construction is fed by the women around them. Part of surmounting the marginality of invisibility or externally-imposed hypervisibility, therefore, is the development of a community with which one identifies.

In order for young black single women to assert a particular identity which claims legitimacy in urban spaces, it is necessary for them to build support networks which support their self-assertion and right to those spaces. Pype has noted that "Africanists have emphasized the central role of ethnic, professional, and territorial associations as important networks for survival in urban worlds" (395). Friendships, professional relationships, and other connections within urban spaces aid in holding down those spaces. The women of *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* are able to assert their belonging in their respective spaces of Accra and Cape Town because they have a community of friends that affirm their right to those spaces.

### Sex, Glamour and Urban Womanhood in *An African City*

Amarteifio's *An African City* is a counter-narrative to representations of African women as uneducated, underprivileged, and unfashionable, unmistakably influenced by HBO's *Sex and the City*. The series centres around five women, Nana Yaa, Makena, Zainab, Ngozi and Sade, who have spent much of their lives abroad in Europe and North America, and who have decided to settle in Accra. The five friends navigate their professional lives, love lives, and cosmopolitan Accra, portraying African women who are well-educated, sophisticated, and fashionable. Watching reruns of *Sex and the City*, Amarteifio was inspired to create an African narrative "of beauty, glamor and intelligence" to counteract the perception of Africa as a place of disease and poverty (Karimi para. 9). Influenced by the format of the web series

*Awkward Black Girl*, the real-world issues of the TV series *Being Mary Jane*, and a desire to portray strong female friendships, Amarteifio created a web series that immediately became popular with Africans both home and abroad. The first episode of the ten-episode season was released on YouTube in March 2014, and got a million views within several weeks of its release. The following year, Amarteifio, a Ghanaian raised in London and the United States, was listed as one of *The Financial Times* 2015 “Top 25 Africans to Watch” and received the “Creative Artist of the Year Award” at the Africa Diaspora Awards. A self-taught producer and director, Amarteifio has since been dubbed the “Shonda Rhimes of Ghana,” a tribute to her impact on popular culture. Her work since the first season of *An African City* has included a pilot episode for a series, *The Republic* (2017), about a political fixer, and *Before the Vows* (2018), a feature-length romantic comedy about a soon-to-be-wed Ghanaian couple. Firstly introducing the characters of the series, this section will examine the various ways in which *An African City* presents a picture of sophisticated urban women in Africa. It will look at the ways in which the series explores hybrid identity through its African-born and Western-educated characters, and the challenges that it offers to patriarchal discourses and ideologies of Western superiority. It will briefly consider some features of the series that can be better understood through the lens of post-feminism, and lastly, will reflect on the show’s digital means of dissemination.

Before beginning an analysis of the series, I would like to make note of *An African City*’s similarity to *Sex and the City*, and the inevitable questions that arise about the ‘authenticity’ of an African web series that so clearly borrows form and content from an American television series. I would like to argue that this ‘borrowing’ does not detract from *An African City*’s worth, either culturally or aesthetically. Elsewhere, George Ogola posits that African popular art is “especially ‘parasitic’, allowing a great deal of borrowing and experimentation.” He goes on to theorise that “[t]he syncretism of African popular literature is such that it cannibalizes or feeds on other cultures while at the same time retaining an identity against which it defines its peculiarity” (30). *An African City*, by Amarteifio’s own admission, draws on *The Sex and the City* as a source of inspiration. I would argue that the web series does not diminish its “peculiarity” by doing so. *An African City* “cannibalizes” or “feeds” off *Sex and the City*, but maintains its own identity as a localised text about diasporic returnees to Accra. The characters of the series have been shaped by both their national and international experiences; traditional and modern are in dialogue rather than dichotomy. I contend, therefore, that the web series’ source of inspiration does not make it ‘inauthentic’. Rather, it follows Ogola’s concept of “parasitic” African popular texts, while situating itself

as part of a global conversation. A crucial part of this situation, as I show below, is the characters' positioning as cosmopolitan women of the world.

The five protagonists of the series are all African women who have spent much of their lives abroad. Nana Yaa is a Ghanaian who was raised in New York. She has returned to Ghana after earning her graduate degree in journalism and is the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of a radio station. In the style of Carrie Bradshaw, Nana Yaa provides narration that links the various scenes of an episode, musing over the group's experiences and love-lives in voice-overs throughout the show. Sade is a Ghanaian-Nigerian raised in Texas, returned to Ghana as a marketing manager for a prominent bank. She is outspoken, confident, and sexually adventurous. Ngozi is a Nigerian raised in Maryland. A devoted Christian and the conservative of the group, she becomes uncomfortable when the group gets frank about their sex lives. She is a vegetarian – “a non-meat eater in Africa” remarks Sade while rolling her eyes (Ep. 1, 6.54) – and works for a United States Agency for International Development. Zainab is a Ghanaian who was born in Sierra Leone and grew up in Atlanta. She is an entrepreneur, and is usually the voice of reason within the group. Makena is a Kenyan who spent most of her life in London. She had a successful career as a corporate lawyer, but decided to move to Ghana after divorcing her husband. The five characters are different in many ways, but all share the experience of being multicultural, globally aware Africans returned to their home continent.

Due to the cross-continental nature of their lives, the women of *An African City* have hybrid identities – by this I mean that they have complex ways of representing and positioning themselves within the social constructs of race, social class, gender, and culture. Born in the African countries of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, spending a significant portion of their lives in America and England, and then making their homes in Ghana, the women of the series have inculcated values from various parts of the world. Their perspectives on relationships, careers and fashion have been influenced by both African and Western cultures. Shereen Marisol Meraji observes that Amarteifio wanted to present a narrative about Africa that captured the continent in the twenty-first century: “a moment when young professionals [...] are coming back to start businesses, work for NGOs or as executives for international companies” (n/p). This repatriation of Africans in the diaspora is referred to colloquially as “reaspora,” and it is something that *An African City* captures well. Nana Yaa, Sade, Ngozi and Zainab have spent much of their lives in the US, and Makena, in London. Having lost knowledge of traditions and language, the women have complicated relationships with their home continent. When Nana Yaa is unable to respond to her ex's

girlfriend in Twi,<sup>28</sup> she feels inferior. “She represents everything that I’m not” Nana Yaa says despairingly to her friends. “I mean, look at me, I’m a Westernised African, and I’m lost, and then she’s Ghana, she’s African.” (Ep. 4, 3.50). The fact that Nana Yaa’s inability to speak her country’s primary language makes her feel like a “Westernised African” implies that there is an ‘authentic’ way to be African, and that Nana Yaa’s Western education has made her less authentically African.

The women are aware of Western exceptionalism in certain situations, and attempt to counteract it. “Why is the Western one or the white wedding the real wedding?” asks Zainab in a discussion of the primacy placed on weddings conducted in Judeo-Christian tradition. “A traditional African wedding is just as real as anything else” (Ep 6, 2.27). The women are also taken aback by the Western beauty standards evident within Ghana. Nana Yaa is aghast that she cannot find a hairdresser to care for her natural hair, and Zainab horrified to be offered bleaching cream by a shop assistant who tells her that “you would be so beautiful if you weren’t so black” (Ep 5, 6.00). Jada Smith perceptively points out that part of *An African City’s* appeal “comes from the ability to turn the same discussions that women around the world are having over cocktails and in group texts into a salient critique of Western and African cultures” (n/p). Whether the women are talking about their identity politics, weddings, or beauty standards, their cosmopolitan experiences provide a lens of cultural critique. This is not to say that the characters are always conscious of their own cultural prejudices. On occasion, the women are unaware of their own attitudes that prize Western culture – Zainab claims that her “perfect-on-paper guy” is “US-educated,” whereupon Makena says that she prefers “Oxford-educated” men, and Nana Yaa pronounces that her ideal man is “a Harvard graduate” (Ep 3, 1.48, 3.40, 5.01). None of the women see the contradiction in valorising an elite Western education while disparaging the Western exceptionalism they see elsewhere. Navigating hybrid cultural identity is a complex process under any circumstances, however, and the character’s lack of awareness about their own prejudices feels authentic.

Along with its critique of Western exceptionalism, *An African City* is critical of many of the patriarchal attitudes still evident in some African societies, providing a space for a narrative exploration of what Akinyi Ochieng describes as “evolving beliefs between tradition and contemporary life in a rapidly changing society” (n/p). The characters battle with outdated perceptions of womanhood that value appearance over their intelligence and

---

<sup>28</sup> The chief language spoken in Ghana.

professional expertise. For example, Makena struggles to find a job despite having a law degree from Oxford, and often finds herself being propositioned by the men she is being interviewed by. “We’re not really hiring” she is told by a prospective employer, “but I think you and I should keep on seeing each other” (Ep 5, 5.00). Although Makena has impressed the man with her education and ability to speak French, he is clearly more interested in her potential as a girlfriend than her potential as an employee. “Every single job interview turns into ‘You’re so beautiful,’” she tells her friends frustratedly (6.50). It is evident that, for many men in Ghana, Makena’s qualifications and skills are less significant than her physical attractiveness.

It is not only in work spaces that the women encounter patriarchal expectations of womanhood. The men that they relate to in the private spaces of home value traditionally feminine and domestic skills far more than academic ability and professional competence. When Ngozi is questioned by a date about her culinary skills, the friends have a conversation about the expectations of food preparation that are often placed on African women. Zainab argues that womanhood is not defined by the ability to cook. “Globally, it isn’t,” replies Makena, “but in Africa it sure is” (Ep 8, 7.28). “The day I graduated HBS”<sup>29</sup> remarks Sade, “my father asked me to make him jollof rice with goat meat” (7.41). Nana Yaa is exasperated: “It’s like no matter how successful a woman gets, it always boils down to whether she can fry plantain, or boil a piece of chicken” (7.52). The friends’ discussion makes the point that womanhood in Africa is still strongly linked to domesticity, and that the role of woman is considered to be more important than her professional life. Their difficulties in getting men to take them seriously proves that the ideal African woman in the postcolonial state is the one who performs gender normative roles.

The patriarchal nature of Ghanaian society also means the women find themselves being evaluated against a Madonna-whore dichotomy,<sup>30</sup> which typecasts them as either ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ Ngozi, Zainab and Sade go on a group date with three men who work for the Parliamentary Committee for Health – and are therefore responsible for the government’s policies on health. Ngozi’s date is surprised that Zainab uses condoms because she “look[s] clean” (Ep.9 3.55). The women are visibly shocked, prompting another of the men to clarify that they “look too clean to have HIV” and ask why they “bother with condoms” (4.04). The third man points out a woman at the bar who he says does not ‘look clean’ and therefore he

---

<sup>29</sup> Harvard Business School

<sup>30</sup> The Madonna-whore dichotomy denotes polarised perceptions of women as either chaste and pure or as promiscuous and seductive.

suspects of having HIV. “We only sleep with girls who look clean” he concludes (4.37). The implication is that only women who do not ‘look clean’ can transfer STDs. The men who work for the Health Committee have evaluated Ngozi, Zainab, Sade and the unnamed woman at the bar against an indefinable gauge of their own, and determined that the friends are ‘good,’ uncontaminated girls, and the woman at the bar a ‘bad,’ tainted one. When Zainab points out the contradiction between the men’s jobs and their attitudes to condom use, the men shrug: “You see, there’s *policies* and then there’s ...” “what you *practice*” interjects a frustrated Sade. (4.52). Furious that the men think that they’re bestowing compliments, Sade and Zainab reveal that, despite ‘looking clean,’ they’ve both had chlamydia in the past. The men are clearly baffled – having classed the friends as ‘good’ girls, it is impossible to comprehend that they could have had venereal diseases. In the classing of femininity into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ types, it is the ‘bad’ girls, observes Ligaga, that are the “bearer of sexual diseases” (“Popular culture” n/p). The scene brings to light both a traditional stereotyping of women and their sexuality within Ghanaian society and the frustration of modern women who have to contend with it.

Stereotypes of sexuality and unequal gender dynamics become an important plot point in the second episode, “Sexual Real Estate,” in which the characters face the implications of having transactional relationships with older men.<sup>31</sup> The friends are divided in their opinions about the associations and consequences of these relationships. Sade is quite content to have a sugar daddy – “the answer to every woman’s problems” she proclaims, is “the so-called ‘uncle’” (Ep.2, 3.06). Nana Mensah, the actress who plays Sade, contends that a woman “is in peak possession of her sexual capital at a young age, when perhaps she doesn’t have access to vast resources while the older man is the one with assets.” Sade, she claims, recognizes this disparity “and decides to cash in her sexual capital into actual capital—almost like a retirement plan” (Ochieng n/p). Seen this way, transactional relationships are equal-power affairs, both parties giving and receiving something of equal value. Zainab has a different perspective, disputing that women who offer sexual favours in return for money have any power in that relationship: “Men use their money and their power to get sex,” she argues, “and women feel so powerless that they end up giving into that kind of system” (Ep. 2, 3.16).

---

<sup>31</sup> Transactional relationships between younger women and older men are a common occurrence in contemporary urban African societies. See Tshikala Kayembe Biaya’s ‘Les Plaisirs de la Ville: Masculinité, Sexualité, et Fémininité à Dakar (1997-2000)’ in *African Studies Review* 44.2; and Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas’ *Love in Africa*. Katrien Pype’s “Blackberry Girls and Jesus’s Brides” in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 46 explains that in Kinshasa, mobile phones are often linked with female sexuality because they are a common item exchanged for sex.



Ngozi takes a moral stance on the argument, claiming that “it is all wrong, it’s just plain wrong” (5.14). No one agrees with Ngozi’s standpoint, but by the end of the episode, the plot signals a disapproval of transactional relationships by indicating that they exact an emotional price and hamper a woman’s independence. Despite her claims that exchanging sex for gifts is “a strategic agenda” (10.55), Sade is hurt when she sees the man who bought her an apartment with another woman. She realises that she was more emotionally invested in the relationship than she had bargained for. “It’s wonderful until you run into them in public and you’re hit in the face with the truth,” she tells Nana Yaa. “You’re one of many, when you should be someone’s one and only” (12.20). Nana Yaa, who has been having a transactional relationship of her own in order to afford an apartment, ends the relationship because it has diminished her independence. She puts down a deposit on her dream apartment with her “own hard-earned savings” and support from what she wittily terms “a different kind of sugar daddy – a financial institution” (13.17, emphasis in original). The emotional price that Sade pays for her style of living is high, and the handbags and cars, it is inferred, are not worth the pain. Nana Yaa’s decision to rely on a less personal way of acquiring an apartment is clearly one that positively affects her sense of self. These plotlines depict the concept of a transactional relationship in a negative light. The price of having a sugar daddy, the series implies, is too exacting of emotions and autonomy to be worth it.

It is important to note that the transactional relationships of *An African City* take a toll on the women’s emotions or their independence – never their bodies. Sex is not a ‘price’ that the women have to pay for the benefits of a transactional relationship, but rather an incentive. Sade claims that accepting gifts from men is “not in exchange for sex, the sex is just a perk” (5.33), making the point that women’s sexuality is something they can take pleasure in. In much of Ghana’s often conservative society, sex is a taboo topic, and the show pushes boundaries in its representation of female sexuality. Sade attempts to retrieve her vibrator from Customs, Nana Yaa battles to get a partner to dispose of his condoms in an acceptable manner, Ngozi defends her decision to remain a virgin until marriage, and the women discuss the sexual proclivities of their current partners – scenes like this present sexuality as a normal part of life, something to be owned, enjoyed, and occasionally navigated. Amarteifio notes in an interview that the series’ showcasing of female sexuality was a deliberate effort to counteract the silence and shame that so often surrounds the topic:

I created the show to highlight women who own their sexuality and sensuality [...] I wanted a show like this because for centuries women have been told that

sex is not for them. Women have been sex-shamed for far too long. Sometimes men sex-shaming women, sometimes women sex-shaming other women. My show, itself, is a message: we will not be sex-shamed. (Ochieng n/p)

By presenting sexuality and sensuality in the way that it does, *An African City* flouts the idea, held in many African societies since colonialism, that sex is a prohibited topic, or that it is anything which one need be embarrassed about. It is because of this kind of deliberate disregard of traditional convention that Ochieng argues that *An African City* is “a pop cultural touchstone” for the urban African woman, “combining unabashed conversations about womanhood with global representation” (n/p).

While the series defies certain African conventions around sexuality and domesticated womanhood, it does present a circumscribed version of femininity. The show portrays its characters as upper middle class through symbols of professional success, money, education, and carefully maintained appearances. All of the women are consistently dressed in fashionable clothing, have expertly applied make-up and skilfully created hairstyles. Placing *An African City* within a framework of post-feminism provides a way of understanding this circumscription of femininity. Post-feminism is an ambivalence towards, or even rejection of, feminism, grounded in the perception that feminism has achieved its primary aims, and that it suppresses traditionally feminine roles and pursuits. Simidele Dosekun argues that post-feminism is paradoxical in that it circumscribes ‘femaleness’ while contending that women’s actions are entirely their own:

[Post-feminism is] a contradictory sensibility marked by elements such as an emphasis on femininity as a bodily property; the growing imperative for women to (hetero)sexually self-objectify; women’s disciplinary consumption of fashion and beauty; and an insistent casting of women’s actions as freely chosen, knowing, and self-pleasing [...] With its individualizing logics that downplay and depoliticize the fact that women continue to face gendered inequality, and with its constitutive imbrication with consumerist notions of ‘choice,’ post-feminism is also understood as a fundamentally neoliberal sensibility. (960)

Most literature on post-feminism positions it as Western culture. Dosekun, however, makes an argument for post-feminism being a transnational culture – and therefore applicable to black African women. Post-feminism is grounded in the perception that the goals of feminism have been achieved – just not in developing nations, which, as a homogenised group, ‘still need feminism.’ Dosekun states that “the post-feminist rhetorics of ‘girl power’ popularly broadcast in the global North are being variously translated with reference to the global South

to rhetorics of ‘girls to be empowered’” (962). Such views fail to account for class difference within the global South, and consider the ways in which privileged women within developing nations might have lifestyles which engender post-feminism. Dosekun contends that “as a thoroughly mediated, commodified, and consumerist discourse, post-feminism is readily transnationalized via the media, commodity, and consumer connectivities that today crisscross more borders more densely and more rapidly than ever before” (965). The characters of *An African City* are arguably post-feminist. Their wealthy families, prestigious educational backgrounds, and professional success pose them as self-pleasing and independent women. In order to be the elite members of modern Ghanaian society that they are, however, it is necessary for them to maintain a feminine, fashionable, and attractive appearance, as well as a certain lifestyle.

The show undoubtedly presents a glamorous picture, and has received criticism “for the distance it maintains from the side of Ghana that doesn’t yet have street signs or personal chauffeurs” and that it is a show about the country’s “1 percent, portraying a lifestyle that few on the continent can relate to” (Smith n/p). Viewed through the lens of post-feminism, however, the elitism that the show is accused of becomes understandable. The characters undoubtedly live luxurious lives. The women have their conversations in dimly lit restaurants, in elegantly decorated apartments, and lounging by the side of a pool. Their clothing is exquisite, and there are very few scenes in which they are not made up. The group’s privileged attitudes are established in the first episode, as they complain about electricity outages and water restrictions (common in developing countries) and talk about suspecting the “the help” of stealing underwear. Nana Yaa claims that she does not know how she is “going to survive without Starbucks coffee” now that she is back in Ghana (Ep. 1, 3.12) and Sade has a class system that she has ascribed to email accounts (9.29). The character’s careful curation of their lifestyles and appearances, their consumerism, commodification, and portrayal of bodily femininity, is all a result of the post-feminist discourse that they ascribe to.

These post-feminist attitudes and behaviours evident within *An African City* affirm Dosekun’s claim that post-feminism is a transnational discourse, manifest in developing countries as well the global north. Its representation is one of many ways in which the series undermines stereotypical narratives of African women as rural, unsophisticated, and deprived. Amarteifio said that she “wanted a TV show about modern, beautiful, educated African women.” (Karimi n/p). This is not to relegate the women of *An African City* to a dichotomous narrative in which an African woman is either a glamorous post-feminist or a

staid traditionalist. Danai Mupotsa suggests that the show provides a tension in which the women figure is a “hermeneutic code that translates various temporalities at once”. She goes on to claim that the dichotomy between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ characters, and “the temporal markers those figures carry, are instead a translational process in which there is no original, only an original crisis that erroneously gets meted out as a dichotomy” (9). There are many ways of being an African woman, and in contrasting the characters of *An African City* to stereotypical representations of the African woman as poor and disadvantaged, I do not intend to create a binary. Echoing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s claim that Africa has more than a ‘single story,’ Amarteifio argues that “[w]hen it comes to the African woman, there is room for many stories” (Karimi n/p). To create a dichotomous representation of African women would be as injurious as Adichie’s ‘single story’. It is therefore important to realise that while Amarteifio’s characters demonstrate qualities of transnational post-feminism, they are in dialogue with forms of enacted womanhood, rather than delineating a certain type. Amarteifio created her web series to be one of the “many stories” of African woman, stories that Africans “can take control of and share with the world.” *An African City*, she concludes, “is about our visibility” (Karimi n/p).

An important factor in taking control of African stories and sharing them with the world is the means of their dissemination. Ligaga argues that because of its “global presence, fluid nature, and multi-user characteristics, the Internet has grown into a space that makes it possible to imagine and create new narratives reflective of the desires and social lives of its consumers” (“Virtual Expressions” 5). This is precisely what *An African City* has done in its first season – created a new narrative which reflects a glamorous lifestyle and made it freely available for consumption. Season One of the two-season show was made available on YouTube. Women began sharing the episodes across social media, and the show gained fans around the world. Amarteifio noted that she began “getting emails from women in Korea, Puerto Rico, [and] Italy,” telling her how much they had related to and enjoyed the show (Hauser n/p). Disseminating the series on YouTube also meant that Amarteifio “would not lose any creative control to a TV network,” and therefore would be able to tell the story that she felt needed to be told. Free distribution meant that the show was not commercially successful, but Amarteifio notes that “season one was really about just doing something in regards to the narrative, even if I had to use my own savings to get that done” (Karimi n/p). When the show became a success, however, she decided that she needed to generate some revenue from a second season. The second season is available on *AnAfricanCity.vhx.tv*’s streaming service for \$19.99. This may not be a large amount of money for the international

viewers, but it is a prohibitive cost for many African fans. New ways of telling must certainly include streaming services, but unfortunately, these are services with prices that make the sharing of African stories with Africans a more difficult process.

*An African City* depicts hybrid identity, telling a story of ‘reaspora’ with which many repatriated Africans can identify. It critiques Western exceptionalism, African conservatism, and patriarchal ideology. The show affirms female sexuality, and represents post-feminism as a transnational discourse. Most importantly, however, the series represents African women who navigate urban spaces with panache and depicts them living a lifestyle with which they are rarely associated in Western media. The narrative of African women living lives of ‘beauty, glamour, and intelligence’ rather than of disease and poverty is important for undermining the ‘single story’ of Africa. The visibility of urban black womanhood is growing, and Amarteifio has played a critical role in making it part of popular culture.

### Intersectional Feminism and South African Black Female Identity in *The Foxy Five*

Newman’s *The Foxy Five* is a web series about intersectional feminism and being a woman of colour in post-apartheid South Africa. Styled with 1970’s fashion, recalling the era of Steve Biko and the Soweto Uprising, the series follows five young women negotiating gender, race, sexuality, and the socio-economics of Cape Town. The six episodes that comprise the series, released between 19 June 2016 and 19 June 2017, were funded initially by members of cast and crew, and thereafter by crowdsourcing. The series is partly inspired by Newman’s own experiences at the University of Cape Town (UCT) while studying Film, Media and Politics. Newman was studying towards her degree when the growing frustration with South Africa’s colonial legacy ignited the 2015 student protests, and she decided to make a web series which reflected some of the country’s issues. Having studied film and co-produced the fashion short *Dirty Laundry* (2016), Newman was not entirely new to film-making, but she was by no means a professional. She decided to take a leave of absence from her studies to create *The Foxy Five*, and has subsequently become a recognised film and photography artist. The series gained a reputation for its portrayal of politically-aware womanhood, and was featured not only in South Africa, but also toured Europe. Newman’s projects since *The Foxy Five* have included a documentary about queer activists called *Femme In Public* (2017), a photography exhibition entitled *Mokwena, Mac Quena, Mac Quene*, and a music video for duo FAKA. First situating the series against the backdrop of the

student protests of 2015, I will use this section to examine how the young black women of the series navigate identity politics while living in the historically segregated urban spaces of Cape Town.

In 2015, student protestors at various South African universities brought to public attention the inequalities that remain in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>32</sup> Issues ranging from student housing to curriculum content were debated and denounced as vestiges of the country's colonial past. These protests highlighted the depths of the political, social, and economic inequality faced by many students every day, and underscored the fact that the young people of South Africa were aware and concerned about the state of their country. The movement emphasised the need for confronting oppressions such as patriarchy, racial prejudice, socio-economic restrictions, as well as decolonising the countries' institutions of higher education. It was recognised by many that these oppressions were linked. South Africa's colonial history and apartheid legislation had led to the socio-economic depression of much of its black population, and the continued privilege of much of its white population. Many female participants in the movement also pointed out that black women had suffered under a double burden of race and patriarchy and drew attention to the need to understand interlocking systems of power in approaching the problems of South Africa's present. This is the backdrop to *The Foxy Five* – young people of the country realising afresh the inequalities in their society, and attempting to represent their lived experiences with multiple oppressions to their fellow citizens.

The interdependent systems of power that oppress young black women in contemporary South Africa is a core theme of *The Foxy Five*. A necessary analytical tool for understanding the series, therefore, is intersectionality – a theoretical approach to sociology that is premised on the interconnected nature of social categorizations that create overlapping

---

<sup>32</sup> In March 2015, a student at threw excrement at a statue of Cecil John Rhodes, initiating a movement called #RhodesMustFall. The ensuing protests highlighted the lack of racial transformation in South African institutions after apartheid. In October, the #FeesMustFall movement began in response to an increase in fees at South African universities. Protests started at the University of Witwatersrand and spread rapidly to other universities across the country. The situation quickly escalated, students were accused of violence and police of brutality. The protests ended, however, when the South African government announced that there would be no tuition increases for the following year. In February of 2016, students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) erected a shack on upper campus as a symbol of the struggle for student housing and financial exclusions. After a day the university management ordered demonstrators to move the shack and the situation escalated, infamously involving the burning of paintings from a nearby residence, a vehicle, and a fire in the Vice Chancellor's office. This incident was named #Shackville, and the call for restorative justice that followed was designated #ShackvilleTRC, referencing the 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In August, an announcement by the government that there would be an increase in fees in reignited the #FeesMustFall movement. The protests of 2016 were even more violent than those of the year before, and caused a significant amount of turbulence throughout the country.

systems of discrimination and disadvantage. Intersectional feminism, then, is a feminism which recognises that the way which women experience oppression and discrimination is impacted by factors such as race, class, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, and not simply by gender. Kimberlé Crenshaw argues in 1991 that “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference,” but rather that “it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (1242). The erasure of difference in identity politics is problematic because the oppression that many people and especially women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities. Crenshaw notes that “feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains.” Feminist and antiracist practices that do not recognise the overlap between facets of identity are problematic because when they “expound identity as woman or person of colour an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of colour to a location that resists telling” (1242). Black women in South Africa have historically been economically marginalised, and have therefore suffered under the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class. This was an issue raised repeatedly by women during the student protests, and the prevalence of strong female leaders advocating for intersectionality inspired Newman. In an interview with Veli Ngubane, she stated that she was “so inspired by the womxn-student-led movement” that she started writing a script about the experiences of black women and the issues that are important to them (n/p). *The Foxy Five* was the resultant text – a story about five women dealing with various forms of oppression and fighting for intersectional feminism in post-apartheid South Africa.

It is important to note here that the characters of *The Foxy Five* are represented as undergoing far more oppression than the characters of *An African City*. This is as a result of their creators having two very different aims. While Amarteifio wished to represent an elite group of women adjusting to repatriation, Newman’s goal was to illustrate the inequalities still evident in post-apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, the wealth of Amarteifio’s characters does not prevent them from experiencing patriarchal and racial oppression, and the working-class backgrounds of Newman’s characters does not preclude their enjoyment of recreation. To dichotomise the two sets of women would be to undermine the aims of both creators to tell the diverse stories of African women. The women of both series represent varied ways of being a woman in urban post-colonial Africa, and their womanhood is, as Mupotsa suggests, a “translational process” (9).

Newman designed each of *The Foxy Five*'s characters to be representative of "a different struggle and oppression in society," as well as a facet of feminism (Ngubane n/p). Prolly Plebs is a 'coloured' woman, part of a South African demographic that has a complex history of power dynamics.<sup>33</sup> She is "the definition of a flower child," and although her ideas "are a bit utopian and unrealistic, her heart is in the right place" (Ep. 1, 1.13). Prolly is named for the association with 'plebeian,' designating the lower classes. Blaq Beauty, her name recalling Biko's Black Consciousness values which inspired pride in blackness, is a young woman raising her two younger brothers and struggling to provide them with an education. She is a militant feminist, "the kind of Pan-Africanist honey that wants to marry Steve Biko whilst having an affair with Malcolm X" (0.56). Femme Fatale is a queer woman facing all the attendant prejudices of her sexuality. She campaigns for sexual freedom and expression. Femme is named for the *femme fatale*, the stock character of a seductive 'bad girl.' Newman's naming of her queer character is appropriate, as Femme is the antithesis of the ideal gender-normative African woman. Womxn We suffers from mental health issues, and at times struggles to cope with the academic pressures of UCT. She is "intellectual," "conservative," and, being an academic, has a solid grounding in feminist theory (1.41). 'Womxn We' is spelled so intentionally, following the feminist practice of using alternative spellings of 'women' as a refusal of traditions that define women by reference to a gender norm.<sup>34</sup> Unity Bond is the leader of the group, attempting to balance the various needs of her very different friends and keep the group intersectional in their aims. She is a representation of the unity of purpose which bonds her very different friends – intersectionality. Each of the characters has an episode named after them, and which focuses predominantly on the particular oppression that they have to face. By having the five characters fight different social, economic, and mental battles, the series attempts to address the many inequalities of South African society.

Many of the inequalities of South African society have their roots in its racial and gendered history. Race and gender, then, are two focal points in *The Foxy Five*. Newman made it a point of pride to have an all-female and predominantly women of colour production

---

<sup>33</sup> Under the South African Population Registration Act of 1950, 'Coloured' designated a person of mixed racial or ethnic origin. Coloured identity has a history of so-called 'miscegenation,' which denigrated persons of mixed race due to the assumption that there is such a thing as a 'pure' race. In the hierarchy of apartheid South Africa, the coloured population did not suffer the same restrictions as the black population, which resulted in a complex identity politics.

<sup>34</sup> The first such spelling was 'womyn,' but this spelling has been associated with 'women-only' movements and therefore with transphobia, whereas 'womxn' is seen as more intersectional in that it also refers to transgender women.



team, ensuring that the people involved in the series would understand its aims. *The Foxy Five* make its preoccupation with black womanhood clear, making it evident that whiteness and maleness are qualities that impose themselves. The group are very conscious of their identities as black women. Although their negotiations of race are an important plot line in the series, they are not always carried out with a great deal of nuance. Prolly's light skin, for example, means that she is caught between white privilege and feeling rejected by other people of colour. She has to continually consider how other people perceive her. She and Unity Bond want to get a flat together, but once the estate agent sees their photographs, Unity Bond is told that there is no room, while Prolly is accepted. Knowing that this is a race issue, Prolly hides her acceptance from her friend. She recognises that her lighter complexion is often resented and this causes her a good deal of disquiet. She has an unpleasant interaction with a taxi driver who tells her that she is stuck-up because she thinks she is white, and later has a dream in which unfriendly voices call her "yellowbone"<sup>35</sup> and "*umlungu*"<sup>36</sup> These descriptors make evident Prolly's concern with her light skin, and with the way in which other people perceive her. The same dream is one in which Prolly comes to terms with her racial identity, as an affirming voice tells her that "You are you for a reason, fluid and flowing like a river" (Ep. 5, 8.26). Prolly's acceptance of her race is a healing moment for her character, but the portrayal of her realisation lacks a complexity which would add depth to her story. Nevertheless, the importance of race in a South African context is made clear, and its representation is a significant component of the show's preoccupation with intersectionality.

Episode Three, "Womxn We," contains a spoken word poem that addresses black womanhood, intersectionality, and decolonisation:

We are black. We are black women. We are trans black women.  
 We are non-binary. We are women with disabilities.  
 We are the working class. We are the black working class. We are the proletariat.  
 We have gods. We have ancestors. We will be ancestors.  
 We have knowledge. We have indigenous knowledge. *Sinolwazi iinsinto*.<sup>37</sup>  
 We are seen. We are scrutinised. We are ignored. We are invisible.  
 We are heard, but never listened to. We are silenced.  
 With rights, come responsibilities.  
 With black skin, comes the double consciousness.

<sup>35</sup> A term used to describe a black woman with light skin. The word is inextricably bound to colourism, and therefore has connotations that are both fetishist and pejorative.

<sup>36</sup> An isiZulu word used to refer to white people.

<sup>37</sup> IsiXhosa. Literally, "We have knowledge of things."

With this body, comes objectification, bleeding, rape.  
We have no rights, only responsibilities.  
We have no land, only farm work.  
We have no jobs, only a *baas*.<sup>38</sup>  
Who will heal you? We must heal ourselves.<sup>39</sup> (Ep. 3, 12.56)

The first lines of the poem embrace the multiplicity of black women's identity, as black, female, queer and disabled, emphasising the inclusiveness of intersectionality. The poem then asserts the existence of indigenous South African beliefs, and validity of indigenous knowledge. In keeping with the decolonial project that was a central concern for the student protests, proclaiming that "We have knowledge" claims the necessity of using African philosophies and sources of information. The line about being both 'scrutinised' and 'ignored' is a demonstration of the idea that black women are both hypervisible and invisible. The reference to double consciousness is an allusion to the concept that W.E.B. Du Bois introduced in "The Souls of Black Folk" (1903). Double consciousness forces black people to view themselves not only from their own unique perspective, but to also as they might be perceived by the others, much as Prolly does. The last few lines speak powerfully to the discrimination and disadvantage that comes with being both black and female in a country still living with the legacy of apartheid. The decision to "heal ourselves" reiterates the oft-repeated mantra that 'Africa needs African solutions to African problems. The poem is both an assertion of intersectionality and Afrocentrism – emphasising that black women have many different concerns and that African knowledge can be a resource for addressing those concerns.

The poem above emphasises that trans and non-binary persons, those that do not ascribe to traditional gender norms, are included in the faceted nature of black South African women's identity. In keeping with the show's aspirations to represent intersectional feminism, the episodes deal with gender identity. While the group is accepting of Femme's homosexuality, they are less sensitive to non-conforming gender identity. The sporadic failure of the five to treat non-conforming individuals with respect highlights the problematic reality of gender discourse. For example, in the fourth episode, a trans woman, Lebo, is introduced to the series. She tells Femme that ever since she came out to her as a trans

---

<sup>38</sup> Afrikaans, "boss." A term used, especially during apartheid, to refer to or address a white man in charge of people of colour. The term is sometimes used even when the man has no direct authority over the person speaking, reflecting his position of power and privilege.

<sup>39</sup> I have transcribed the poem from the video, and therefore the form and punctuation are my own interpretation.

woman, Femme has been trying to “prove how woke” she is.<sup>40</sup> Lebo accuses Femme of treating her as a “transact trinket,” a “trans token that you get to wave around in this performance of yours” (Ep. 4, 11.38). Femme, a queer woman herself, is guilty of fetishizing Lebo, underlining the complexity inherent in navigating gender identity. Newman also underscores the way in which gender conforming women are often blind to the discrimination that queer women face: “Cis<sup>41</sup> women and their privilege, hey, you too busy being woke *apha*”<sup>42</sup> says Blaq Beauty when Unity Bond claims she would never treat Lebo the way that Femme did (Ep. 5, 1.08). The truth is that the entire group, despite their claim to intersectionality, are often blind to the lived reality of others and trivialising of their claims. When Prolly asks to be referred to by the gender-neutral pronoun ‘their’<sup>43</sup> as she negotiates her gender identity, the group rolls their eyes. Blaq Beauty says that “Prolly loves trends” (Ep. 6, 16.19), and treats the issue dismissively. By having her characters, aware as they are about sexual identity, exhibit problematic behaviour in their dealings with gender-queer people, Newman makes it plain that conscious re-examination of South African attitudes about gender are necessary. In the last episode, Femme sums up the series’ approach to gender identity, suggesting that “maybe gender is like a universe and there’s no centre and there’s no boundaries or borders and [people] can decide for themselves where they fit into that (16.05). Gender identity, she confirms, is as much a choice as sexual orientation.

While gender identity is portrayed as a choice, *The Foxy Five* makes it clear that being female, or presenting as female, comes with a great deal of oppression. The series is realistic in its portrayal of sexism, and the women are by turns pragmatic, saddened, and incensed by their patriarchal society. In the first episode, when the girls go out for the night, Unity Bond narrates that they went “to go do what every single twenty-first century feminist would do – we went to go shake our big fat black asses to Nicki Minaj while slapping away the hands of misogynistic men” (Ep. 1, 7.38). For the first stage of the evening, the women are matter-of-fact about the objectification that they face, but later, cornered by men propositioning them on the street, they become angry: “I’m so fucking sick of this shit!” Femme declares angrily. “Can’t a girl just fucking live?” (Ep. 1, 8.36). Throughout the series,

---

<sup>40</sup> ‘Woke’ is a term that refers to an awareness of racial or social discrimination and injustice.

<sup>41</sup> “Cis” is an abbreviation of “cisgender,” a term for people who identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth.

<sup>42</sup> IsiXhosa, “here.”

<sup>43</sup> A gender neutral pronoun is one which does not associate a gender with the individual who is being discussed. If a person does not identify with a binary gender or is genderqueer, ie., does not identify as a man or woman, it is considered respectful to use a gender neutral pronoun when referring to them.

the women face the harsh reality of sexism. Lebo articulates powerfully that being a femme<sup>44</sup> in a world that is often violent towards women is “like standing in a minefield and all you want to do is dance” (Ep. 4, 10.08). It is made clear that being female can feel dangerous.

One of the dangers attendant on being female in a patriarchal society is the complex power dynamics that can make heterosexual relationships difficult to navigate, and yet this is not something that the series deals with in any depth. In the third episode, it is revealed that Womxn We has a blesser<sup>45</sup> – she is in a relationship with her lecturer, who gives her gifts and helps support her family. This sort of relationship is undoubtedly complicated, and yet the group is predominantly positive about the fact their friend is in a transactional relationship. Prolly claims that there is a difference between a sugar daddy and a blesser, the former being “a beat-up perv who dates high-school girls” and the latter being “a man who sprinkles gold dust on his woman” (Ep. 3, 5.33.). Femme says that “all blessees are beating the patriarchy at its own game” (5.22) and Unity Bond concludes easily that “As long as you’re in control, I’m about the blesser” (5.48). These statements by Femme and Unity Bond are problematic: they assume that it is possible for the power dynamic to be in Womxn We’s favour, despite the fact that the relationship is with a man that is in a position of authority over her. The show makes it clear later that this was not the case, as Womxn We reveals that she had found it difficult to assert her opinion.<sup>46</sup> She tells her friends that she had been “stifled” (15.20) and had therefore broken off the relationship. While the rest of the five congratulate her, there is no meaningful discussion about the inherent potential problems in blesser relationships. Asandele Sondiyazi, in her critique of the show, argues that *The Foxy Five*’s failure to be nuanced in its portrayal of such relationships is an important one: “Rather than giving the complicated power dynamics of these relationships centre-stage, or even investigating Womxn We’s decision to enter into an explicitly transactional relationship, the show simply delivers competing definitions of blesser and one-line views on whether women who are being blessed are beholden to or fighting the patriarchy.” She goes on to observe that *The Foxy Five* “frequently misses opportunities such as this to have nuanced discussions on topics relevant to young South African black women” (n/p). This failure of the show to have nuanced discussions is something which I explore further below.

---

<sup>44</sup> A ‘femme’ is a queer person who presents as traditionally feminine in identity or appearance.

<sup>45</sup> In South Africa, a ‘blesser’ is usually an older man who has a transactional relationship with a younger woman (the ‘blessee’), giving her gifts in return for her company or sexual favours.

<sup>46</sup> As with the transactional relationships in *An African City*, sex is not a ‘price’ that Womxn We pays for the benefits of being in a relationship with her lecturer. It is the tax on her identity and autonomy, and not any sexual requirement, that causes her to end the relationship.

I do not believe that an analysis of *The Foxy Five* would be complete without pointing out its weaknesses – its characters are underdeveloped, it attempts to cover too many topics in too short a space of time, and the presentation lacks professionalism. The women are thinly drawn and badly developed, despite each one having an episode devoted to her. Sondiyazi argues that this “thinness is rooted in Newman’s apparent belief that the most interesting thing about these women is those aspects of their identities that make them especially vulnerable to violence, both systemic and intimate.” She continues by observing that the result “is characters that do not read as complex humans whom viewers can care about or sympathise with; rather they are vehicles for Newman to illuminate important issues operating in the lives of black millennial women” (n/p). A text that is more issue-focussed than character-driven is not necessarily deficient, but *The Foxy Five* covers its issues with no more nuance than it does its characters. The series is undoubtedly ambitious. The six episodes that comprise the show cover sexual harassment, racism in primarily white schools, mental health, blessings, self-care during protests, trans misogyny, and colourism. It is impossible, however, for the show to cover these issues in a nuanced manner given the short time devoted to each, meaning that topics of great importance receive only a shallow treatment. *The Foxy Five* brings attention to the topics which concern it, but fails to discuss them in a way which would illuminate the subtleties and complexities inherent in such subject matter. This is a disservice to issues which desperately need better representation in the South African context. The series also lacks a certain professionalism – Episode 4 begins with a warning that the episode addresses trans misogyny and advises “Viewer discretion” (*sic*) (0.32). While recognising that the series is flawed, however, it is important to acknowledge that *The Foxy Five* addresses topics that are important to young black women in South Africa, and yet which lack representation. The effectiveness with which the show does this work, and the enthusiasm with which its representative nature was received is reflected in its wide dissemination.

The breadth of *The Foxy Five*’s dissemination and the eagerness with which it has been embraced is testament to the relevance of its content. The series has been featured not only at Cape Town’s Design Indaba, The Labia Theatre, and Johannesburg’s Bioscope, but also internationally. Screenings of *The Foxy Five* were held in various European venues, including Amsterdam’s CREA Cultural Centre, Paris’ Centre d’Animation Place des Fetés, Berlin’s B-Lage Cinema, and London’s Ritzy Cinema. The curatorial platform Album Corp hosted a sound piece in Somerset House Studios in London incorporating the themes from *The Foxy Five* and Germany’s *Analyse & Kritik* newspaper featured an article on the series.

Newman's story of African black womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa has reached a wide audience, telling an African story from an African perspective to a global audience.

A great deal of the credit for the ease with which *The Foxy Five* gained popularity must be given to its platform. Releasing the episodes on YouTube made it easy for the show's fans to watch and share them, and the lack of cost associated with accessing YouTube media meant that expense was not a hurdle for low-income viewers. Newman noted that she wanted to make Foxy Five for those who may not have the opportunity to learn about the concepts that it embodies. She wanted "the younger generation [...] to watch this and without knowing what feminism is, to recognise it through everyday experiences." She wanted her "web series to be seen by the young women who don't have the opportunity to read and study these concepts" (Chiénin n/p). The new forms of digital expression that Newman used to communicate her story of South African black womanhood are important because online platforms are global platforms. Her narrative conveys lived realities, and these narratives are reaching an audience that might otherwise have a limited story of post-apartheid South Africa.

Newman is passionate about the representation of black women in the media, and although her show may lack nuance, it does an important job of addressing the experiences of a demographic that is too little represented. She argues that it is "very important for black womxn to be telling black narratives" because the work of decolonisation encompasses "the media, film and the narrative form" (The Daily Vox n/p). Many of the incidents in the series were based on real experiences which lacked exemplification:

[A] lot of the things that are in the series have actually happened to these womxn. They've come to me with these stories. We've all spoken about these experiences – so everything we've put in the series is something at least one of us has literally experienced [...] I want to reflect what black womxn are talking about right now. What we're feeling, what we're dealing with – and doing that unapologetically. (The Daily Vox)

Newman underlines Sondiyazi comments that the "absence of any consideration of *The Foxy Five* beyond its representational value and its potential didactic function has made for superficial critique that sidesteps the question of whether the team has managed to tell stories that are compelling, well-crafted and worth viewers' time" (n/p). I would argue that in the absence of sufficient representation of black African womanhood, feminists in South Africa need to treasure the attempts of artists to depict black female lives. Nala Xaba, who acts as Womxn We, contends that in many ways, "South African feminism is a lot more radical than

African-American feminism,” and yet online platforms do not represent it as such. “When we go online and want to learn about intersectional feminism,” she continues, “we have to follow the vloggers who are African-American” (Matakala n/p). Newman argues that “we need more representation and more real and authentic stories” (Ngubane n/p), and this is what she has striven to give her audience. Newman’s characters are realistically flawed, and their creator is clearly conscious of the restrictions of a single person writing about black womanhood. She observes in an interview with Amie Soudien that she would like others to write and direct the series in the future, noting that she cannot “write these types of stories just from [her] point of view anymore because it’s very limiting.” This demonstration of self-reflexivity, remarks Soudien, “is palpable throughout Newman’s repertoire, resulting in a sensitive gaze that creates space for others, both aesthetically and professionally” (n/p). Although, as I have noted, the series has some artistic flaws, *The Foxy Five* succeeds in creating a “space for [marginalised] others,” and that, I would argue, is its most important characteristic.

Inspired by the intersectional nature of the student protests of 2015, *The Foxy Five* addresses the inequalities that the black women of South Africa face. The series makes clear the difficulty of living under the interlocking oppressive systems of racism, sexism, and gender discrimination. While the characters and themes may lack depth and nuance, in part due to the brevity of the series, the show accomplishes an important undertaking – representation. By depicting the lives of young black women in South Africa and the issues that are important to them, *The Foxy Five* makes a valuable contribution to the country’s localised narratives.

## Conclusion

The women of *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* are able to assert their belonging in the respective urban spaces of Accra, Ghana, and Cape Town, South Africa, because they have a community of friends that affirm their right to those spaces. This does not mean that they are always made welcome – Unity Bond is refused a lease because of her blackness, and Nana Yaa finds it difficult to buy a flat without male backing. Nevertheless, by challenging the racial and patriarchal ideology of urban spaces, and simply by being present within the city, their support network confirms the legitimacy of black womanhood within those spaces. The same could be said for the existence of *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* within the global space of the internet. Blaq Beauty argues metatextually that the internet is “practically only for whites and men, and that’s not even considering who has access to it and who creates the

content” (Ep. 2, 9.07). By creating content about the ordinary lives of black women living in urban spaces and making it available for consumption on the internet, Amarteifio and Newman provide representation that affirms the black African woman’s place both in urban spaces and on the internet.

Both *The Foxy Five* and *An African City* are about negotiating identity as an African woman. That is not to homogenise their experiences – all the women in the two series have different identities, different struggles, and different ways of confronting those struggles. What Newman and Amarteifio have done is portray the lives of African women in unique ways. Newman has taken the concerns of socially and politically aware young black women in South Africa and woven them into a story that reflects the experience of those women. Amarteifio has portrayed African women’s lives as glamorous. The women in these texts defy the picture of the African woman as an uneducated, rural, emotionally emaciated child-carer. The characters are complex and their lives are full. They express themselves through their clothes, having both the money and imagination to do so. These are things that normalise an existence, and therefore these are the things that Newman and Amarteifio portray. Newman observes that the more an image is seen, the greater the likelihood of its being accepted. “That can be bad when we’re looking at violence and desensitising ourselves,” she notes. “But when we think about showing different images of people [...] that means we’re creating dialogue around those ideas” (Soudien n/p). Amarteifio observes in her interview with Karimi that she “wanted something for African women, something for us and by us” (n/p). This type of representation is precisely what she and Newman have given to the black women of Africa.



## CHAPTER 4

### Co-constituting meaning: Participatory Culture in *Love Radio* and *Tuko Macho*

[T]he reader's, listener's and viewer's role in co-constituting textual meaning remains essential.

(Karin Barber, "Audiences and Publics")

#### Introduction

While *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* use the internet to disseminate localised representations of urban African women to a global audience, *Love Radio* and *Tuko Macho* invite their viewers to participate in the narratives of Rwanda and Kenya that they create. This inclusion of consumers in the creation and dissemination of narrative is termed 'participatory culture.' The term is a relatively recent creation, but the concept is not a new one. Culture has always been a shared production, and digitisation and ICTs have simply made participation easier in the modern world. The texts examined in this chapter, *Love Radio* and *Tuko Macho*, use new media to include audiences in their production, meaning creation, and dissemination. These texts have been selected for inclusion in this thesis because they tell African stories online while innovatively using digital media to make their viewers part of the process of meaning-making. In this chapter I will link Henry Jenkin's concept of 'participatory culture' and the participatory nature of oral literature, arguing that these are fundamentally similar. I will then consider how increasing digitisation is allowing interactivity in new ways. I examine the Rwandan soap *Musekeweya* and the web documentary, *Love Radio*, that explores the soap's effects, and the ways in which these texts include their audience in the creation of meaning and distribution of content. Lastly, I look at the Kenyan web series *Tuko Macho*, which not only implicates its viewers in the events of its plot, but which has creators and audience engage on social media.

Both *Tuko Macho* and *Love Radio* pose rhetorical questions to their respective audiences in the course of their narratives. If you had the chance to condemn a criminal to death, would you do it? If you had the opportunity to experience a story with a happy ending, would you look further for a dingier reality? The texts do this by inviting their viewers to participate in the process of storytelling, or, as Barber phrased it, to "co-constitute textual meaning." By this, she means that the audience, along with the creators, determines

denotation and forms sense in the text, that they have agency in creating meaning. The digital tools and web systems that the creators of *Love Radio* and *Tuko Macho* use to include their audience are new ones, but the process of involving an audience in the telling of narrative is as old as humanity itself. “Human beings are social creatures,” declares Clay Shirky. “Sociability is one of our core capabilities, and it shows up in almost every aspect of our lives as both cause and effect” (*Here Comes Everybody* 14). Nothing, perhaps, is more human than telling stories, and it is one of the primary ways in which we demonstrate our sociability. Storytelling has, for most of history, been a social occasion. An audience gathered around a storyteller lit by the light of a fire, their presence and responses an indispensable part of the narrative process. It was not until the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century that there was a remove between storyteller and audience, and narrative became something to be often experienced alone. We are still sociable creatures, however, and constantly seek ways of engaging with one another, and with one another’s narratives. The rise of digital media has given us the tools to do so with an ever-widening community.

Participatory culture is increasingly evident in this age of computers and the internet. Wikipedia, community forums, citizen journalism, and even the comments on what we post on social media illustrate the possibilities of digital media for a culture in which many are involved. Story-telling, among other creative acts, is becoming more of a participatory act on the part of the audience. In his 2004 book *We the Media*, Dan Gillmor refers to what he called ‘the former audience’ – once mere consumers, and now producers of content. One might argue that we have never been mere consumers, and that our increasingly evident production is simply a result of the tools we have available to us – that digital media is making it easier for us to be participatory audiences, that it is providing metaphorical fires for us to gather around.

## Participatory Culture and the Public Sphere

Since the early 1990s, Jenkins has been at the forefront of exploring and writing about audiences, fans and consumers contributing to the stories that they love. He coined the term “participatory culture” in his 1992 book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* to describe the interactions and productions of fan communities, making a distinction between fans and other kinds of audiences. At the time, fan communities were marginal, often derided and socially maligned. Jenkins, a fan himself, wanted to provide an alternative narrative in which fans were creative and critical media consumers. *Textual Poachers*

rejected stereotypes of fans as indiscriminating consumers who are unable to separate fantasy and reality, and reframed them as active producers of meaning. In 2006, Jenkins published *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Intersect*. Fourteen years after the publication of *Textual Poachers*, fan activity was an accepted part of media culture. The growth of new media technologies had made it easier for audiences to communicate, appropriate, and circulate content. Furthermore, institutions of law and education were beginning to recognise the impact of ordinary people on media. Participatory culture was defined as “a culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (290). Jenkins noted a rapid proliferation of various forms of cultural participation and acknowledged that fans were only one instance of a broader trend of participatory culture. He observed that participatory culture “is emerging as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways” (8). In 2013, Jenkins, together with Sam Ford and Joshua Green, published the third book in his informal “participatory culture” trilogy: *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in A Networked Culture*, which focusses on the way that audiences actively shape media circulation. The authors express that the term ‘participatory culture’ has developed, and that “[a]s the concept has evolved, it now refers to a range of different groups deploying media production and distributions to serve their collective interests” (2). The term ‘participatory culture,’ created to describe fan culture exclusively, has now broadened in meaning to refer to the participation of everyday users in our media-saturated culture. Rather than media conglomerates dictating and disseminating media, it is now a common occurrence for groups of people to utilise media to serve their own interests, and for audiences to play an active role in the making of meaning.

Jürgen Habermas, in his study of the rise of the public sphere the late eighteenth-century, emphasises that the technological developments of the time could not have had the impact that they did without the simultaneous social and economic changes. Habermas defined the public sphere as a virtual community of private citizens engaging in rational and critical debate. In its ideal form, the public sphere is “made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state’ (176). With the rise of capitalism, and the “commercialisation of cultural production” art was “[r]eleased from its functions in the service of social representation,” and became an object of consumption (Habermas 38, 39-40). Art forms were now ‘open’ – “individual consumers now had to determine their meaning and evaluate their significance for themselves, by means of rational

communication with one another, rather than receiving their meaning from their religious or social superiors” (Barber *The Anthropology* 141). Barber argues that “changing modes of constituting and addressing audiences were bound up with changing ideas about text and textual meaning” (144). As Williams points out, ‘art’ and ‘culture’ owe the sense in which we now understand them to the eighteenth century. Jenkins observes out that while, historically, “critics have seen consumption as almost the polar opposite of citizenly participation,” in the present, “consumption assumes a more public and collective dimension—no longer a matter of individual choices and preferences, consumption becomes a topic of public discussion and collective deliberation; shared interests often lead to shared knowledge, shared vision, and shared actions” (*Convergence Culture* 222).

In writing about media as a distinctive type of institution that lies between subject agency and the structure of our social systems, Klaus Bruhn Jensen points out two “great cultural divides” of our time. The first is high versus low culture, the second is “the distinction between culture as finished products and as open-ended processes of communication” (106). Digital media has meant these cultural divides are now on centre stage. Firstly, “[b]oth authors and audiences can engage fine art and popular culture on the same media platform” and secondly, [t]hrough meta-technologies, cultural products – from photographs to videogames – are embedded in one-to-one and many-to-many processes of interaction, online and offline” (*ibid.*). The opposing definitions of culture pointed out in my first chapter inform these cultural divides. The high-low divide, observes Jensen, “assumes that privileged insights derive from privileged works, institutions, and individuals – the genius philosopher or singular artist – rather than from a division of labor within cultural industries, let alone a mass of ordinary people.” Furthermore, the product-process divide “has mostly given priority to ‘works’: culture as delimited and fixated for contemplation and introspection, rather than as recreated and redeveloped in communication” (107). These two divides jointly “suggest a descending scale of quality and legitimacy – from the unchanging classic to a mass of individuals fancying the latest fad” (*ibid.*). Jensen references the polemic debate over the merits of Wikipedia and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that followed a report by Jim Giles showing that the former came close to the latter in the accuracy of its science entries. The issue at stake was not the quality of the encyclopaedias, but rather the differing definitions of culture that underlie the questions of whether knowledge is a product or a process, and who is qualified “- individually and collectively – to present certified knowledge in public” (107). The evidence is that, qualified or not, an increasing number of people are contributing to a community of global knowledge. Ligaga argues that the internet “offers a

space for a vast majority of people to articulate their opinions and desires, perform their identities, present the unsaid, circulate informal information, and to generally negotiate the meanings of political and cultural issues in their lives” (“Virtual Expressions” 2). The ways in which media circulates are evolving and constantly changing – Jenkins terms this ‘convergence culture,’ a space “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (*Convergence Culture* 2).

It has been pointed out that the new ways in which we are thinking about textual ownership, knowledge, and participatory production are similar to the ways in which these were considered by our ancestral cultures. Barber argues that although American mass culture has reached most of the globe, “neither print capitalism nor the electronic media” can create “universal modernity” or create a single worldwide culture. She notes that research into popular cultures from developing countries show that “many new textual genres continue to be fundamentally connected with specific, local, historical formations [...] What we see is the continued vitality of local ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’ oral cultures, and the local generation of numerous hybrid, modern genres which are not imported, though they are vitally linked to global culture” (172). William J. Mitchell contends that “we must abandon the traditional conception of an art world populated by stable, enduring, finished works and replace it with one that recognizes continual mutation and proliferation of variants - much as with oral epic poetry.” He continues by claiming that perceptions of “individual authorial responsibility for image content, authorial determination of meaning, and authorial prestige are correspondingly diminished” (52). If, as Barber and Mitchell argue, our considerations of art are becoming similar to the way in which art was considered in oral cultures, it is orature to which we must now turn.

### Audience Contributions in the Performance of Oral Literature

Participatory culture – a culture in which consumers actively participate in the creation and circulation of content – was named so very late in the twentieth century, recognition of its reality emerging with the rise of new media that perpetuated it. I would argue, however, that participatory culture has long been a part of cultural performance. Especially pertinent to this chapter’s argument about the participatory nature of storytelling is the point that oral literature has always been reliant on audiences to complete its process of signification. This

section looks at the work of scholars from the mid-1900s to the present which emphasise the importance of audience contributions to the performance of oral literature.

The fact that an oral literary performance's audience is crucial to its full realisation as a work of art has long been recognised by scholars. William Bascom points out in his 1953 article "The Four Functions of Folklore," that the social context of 'folklore' is extremely important, and one of the forms of social context is "audience participation in the form of laughter, assent or other responses, running criticism or encouragement of the narrator, singing or dancing, or acting out parts in a tale" (334). Ruth Finnegan's classic 1970 study, *Oral Literature in Africa*, claims that "the participation of the audience is essential" in the process of oral performances:

It is common for [the members of an audience] to be expected to make verbal contributions—spontaneous exclamations, actual questions, echoing of the speaker's words, emotional reaction to the development of yet another parallel and repetitious episode. Further, the audience contributes the choruses of the songs so often introduced into the narration, and without which, in many cases, the stories would be only a bare framework of words. (374)

Finnegan also notes that, when ending their performance, many oral storytellers use a closing formula that is inclusive of their audience. An Akan storyteller from Ghana might end stylistically with the statement: "This my story, which I have related, if it be sweet, (or) if it be not sweet, take some elsewhere, and let some come back to me" (368). With this conclusion, the teller both indicates to the audience that the story's enjoyability is in their perception of it, and that its dissemination is their responsibility. Finnegan observes that in closing with such expressions, "the narrator hands over, as it were, to the audience, as well as making it clear that his story is concluded" (368). Richard M. Dorson, in his 1982 book *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, states that "[i]n the functional theory, the text itself is meaningless apart from its living presentation, or performance to a responding audience" (24-5). Anthropologist David B. Coplan argues in 1994 that performances of oral literature should be known as "auriture" because the term encompasses the aural as well as the oral and the written. He adds that the term "places the emphasis on the ears of the hearers, who include both performer and audience, and hence, properly on the intended and experienced aesthetic transaction between all participants in a performance event" (9). He emphasises that aurality "is a product of agency, and its performance has specific authors whose circumstances of interaction with their audiences are both identifiable and crucial to composition and interpretation" (10).

Contemporary scholars continue to acknowledge the significance of the audience in the performance of oral literature. Sule E. Egya terms the members of an audience of an oral poetry performance “audience-participants” (193). Barber, making reference to the Yoruba proverb: “We say half a word to the wise; when it gets inside him or her, it will become whole,” notes that “audiences make the meaning of the text ‘whole’ by what they bring to it” (137). Gladys Agyeiwaa Denkyi-Manieson and Patricia Beatrice Mireku-Gyimah observe that during the process of oral story-telling, “the audience intermittently interjects, to correct, supplement or simply add flavour to the story or events being narrated” and assert that “the audience invariably determines the quality of the oral performance” (2). Audiences are participants in the performance of orature, completing the process of meaning-making by bringing to it their own understanding and experience, and by interjecting their own vocalisations. It is well-established, then, by both contemporary and earlier scholars, that the audience of an oral performance is crucial to its existence.

Russell Kaschula argues that it is important that oral and written literature be considered part of the same continuum, and that to portray literacy as replacing orality is myopic. He contends that “literacy and orality clearly intersect” and that contemporarily, “this is largely fuelled by modern technology where the oral and written is ever-present, co-existing side by side.” He goes on to observe that “all forms of literature, including oral literature have, and are being dramatically transformed by the digital media” (352). In 1977, Finnegan asserts that “[i]t is difficult to argue that [oral poets] should be ignored as aberrant or unusual in human society, or in principle outside the normal field of established scholarly research. In practice there is everything to be gained by bringing the study of oral poetry into the mainstream of work on literature and sociology” (*Oral Literature* 2). “Perhaps, suggests Kaschula, “Finnegan's statement could now be adapted to include not only work on literature and sociology, but also to modern-day technologies” (353). Building on Coplan’s argument for the use of ‘auriture’ mentioned above, Kaschula coined the term “technauriture,” which he proposed should represent the intersection of technology, auriture and literature.

Oral literature, then, was and is clearly participatory before the term ‘participatory culture’ was invented. Jenkins, Ford, and Green argue that “participatory culture is not new – it has, in fact, multiple histories [...] which go back at least to the nineteenth century” (297). The scholarly claims examined in this section, however, make it plain that a culture that expects contribution from an audience is much older than the nineteenth century. If participatory culture refers to people “actively participat[ing] in the creation and circulation” of stories (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 290), then we have had that culture since long

before we had the written word. In considering oral, printed, and digital texts as part of one continuous evolution of narrative, I would like to argue that the participatory culture of new media texts such as *Love Radio* and *Tuko Macho* are a continuance of the participatory nature of orature.

## Authors and Audiences in the Digital Age

Clay Shirky notes in his foreword to Dan Gillmor's *Mediactive* that in order to "live up to the ideal of literacy," we have to become "active users of media." He continues by asserting that "literacy, in any medium, means not just knowing how to read that medium, but also how to create in it, and to understand the difference between good and bad uses" (x). Jenkins *et al* argue that twenty-first century literacy should be understood as a social skill, and that the skills needed to be literate in this digital age are those that "enable participation in the new communities emerging within a networked society" (*Confronting the Challenges* 103). Gillmor coined the term 'mediactive' to describe the state of being an active and informed user of media, and argues that in a participatory culture, "none of us is fully literate unless we are creating, not just consuming" (xvii). That claim might seem extreme, but as we have seen in the above discussion of oral literature, literacy has never been just about consumption. In considering historical theatre, too, it is clear that a creative and participatory audience was customary. The emphasis on inactive watching and listening observed in traditional theatre is a relatively recent development in the history of Western theatre. Susan Kattwinkel observes that the "passive audience really only came into being in the nineteenth century" (ix) and Gareth White notes that prior to the 1800s, "the sense of activity that was appropriate to an audience was much broader, as it still is in many non-European cultures and other performance traditions (such as stand-up comedy or popular music)" (7).

The truth is that listeners, audiences and readers have never been completely passive. Reader-response criticism, achieving prominence since the 1960s, maintains that the meanings of a text are produced, at least in part, by the reader. Barthes states that "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (*S/Z* 4). Coleridge said in 1917 that the submission of the mind to an imagined world is "the willing suspension of disbelief" – an action on the part of the reader. Janet Murray, however, takes the idea further, arguing that the 'suspension of disbelief' "is too passive a formulation even for traditional media." When a reader or viewer immerses themselves in a fictional world, she reasons, they "exercise a creative faculty" and "do not



suspend disbelief so much as [...] actively *create belief*.” An invested reader uses their “intelligence to reinforce rather than to question the reality of the experience” (110, italics in original). Writers rely on their readers bringing a context or experience to the act of reading. Murder mysteries, for example, rely on readers to be aware of certain conventions, and writers either fulfil those expectations or undermine them. There is no such thing as a completely passive consumer.

Audiences, however, are not only contributing their experience and contextual knowledge to the narratives that they consume. In the digital age, more people than ever before are creating content, or contributing to the creation of content. Gillmore claims that “Publishing today is what we all do.” He observes that although the word “carries historical freight, [...] it’s now an everyday act” (*Mediactive* 95). Shirky observes that this ease of publishing is a factor of our new media landscape:

Every time a new consumer joins this media landscape a new producer joins as well, because the same equipment -- phones, computers -- let you consume and produce. It's as if, when you bought a book, they threw in the printing press for free; it's like you had a phone that could turn into a radio if you pressed the right buttons. That is a huge change in the media landscape we're used to. (“Social Media” 4.43)

Ease of publishing is ease of production, and audiences have growing amount of tools at their disposal. Our new publishing tools, too, allow easier and wider dissemination. Shirky notes that where “the phone gave us the one-to-one pattern, and television, radio, magazines, books, gave us the one-to-many pattern, the Internet gives us the many-to-many pattern” (“Social Media” 3.31). It is no wonder that creation is the new literacy. Part of comprehending this new online world is participating in its creation, and the consumer who does not also produce is only half able to understand it.

Jenkins, Ford and Green and note that viral videos become viral “because the participating public is more collectively and individually literate about social networking online; because people are more frequently and more broadly in contact with their networks of friends, family, and acquaintances; and because people increasingly interact through sharing meaningful bits of media content” (11). The sociable impulses that humanity has always had now have a new outlet, and “what happened in a predigital world now occurs with exponentially greater speed and scope, thanks to the affordances of online social tools” (12). New technologies make stories available across a wider range platforms and, specifically in the case of Web 2.0, encourage interactive use. Social and cultural practices,

and the technological tools that are available in the 21<sup>st</sup> century lead to what is called a ‘networked culture’: when knowledge is less the production of one, and more the links between many. Gillmor notes that “online culture is inherently participatory and collaborative” (xvii). Shirky explains that humanity’s increasing interaction and collaboration online is due to the fact that we now have the tools to carry out an innate instinct for community cooperation:

For most of modern life, our strong talents and desires for group effort have been filtered through relatively rigid institutional structures because of the complexity of managing groups. We haven’t had all the groups we’ve wanted, we’ve simply had all the groups we could afford. The old limits of what unmanaged and unpaid groups can do are no longer in operation; the difficulties that kept self-assembled groups from working together are shrinking, meaning that the number and kinds of things groups can get done without financial motivation or managerial oversight are growing. The current change, in one sentence, is this: most of the barriers to the group action have collapsed, and without those barriers, we are free to explore new ways of gathering together and getting things done. (*Here Comes Everybody* 21-2)

The formality of group activity, Shirky points out, is not inherent. We have operated with procedures and structures because they have been the least confusing means of collaborative action, but that is no longer true. Our increasingly networked culture and growing digital literacy means we have informal ways of collaboratively producing that we did not have before.

Network culture is the linking of disparate units to form a knowledge process. A tangible example of this is hypertext. Hypertext is a software system which allows extensive cross-referencing between related sections of text and graphic material, or “the linking of related pieces of information by electronic connections in order to allow a user easy access between them” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). Landlow defines it in 2006 as “the convergence of poststructuralist conceptions of textuality and electronic embodiments of it.” Because it “does away with certain aspects of the authoritativeness and autonomy” hypertext “reconceive[s] the figure and function of authorship” (126). It “creates an active, even intrusive reader [...] infring[ing] on the power of the writer, removing some of it and granting it to the reader” (125). Hypertext alters our traditional conceptions of single-source authorship:

[N]etworked hypertext systems [...] produce a sense of authorship, authorial property, and creativity that differs markedly from those associated with book

technology. Hypertext changes our sense of authorship and creativity (or originality) by moving away from the constrictions of page-bound technology. In doing so, it promises to have an effect on cultural and intellectual disciplines as important as those produced by earlier shifts in the technology of cultural memory that followed the invention of writing and printing. (142)

Hypertext requires a user to make choices which dictate the direction of information consumption and is therefore, in its very nature, participatory. The invention of writing and printing allowed more people to access knowledge, and hypertext has the potential to allow users to choose the direction that they take that knowledge. Information is no longer provided in a linear manner, it is sought in varying and complex patterns. The responsibility for those patterns lies, at least in part, with the user.

There is an ongoing debate between scholars about the attribution of authorship that should be given to consumers who manipulate digital narratives. Jan Murray, in her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, discusses the way that computer game designers design systems that allow and react to players' actions, thereby manipulating participation, and argues that authorship "in electronic media is procedural" (152). She contends that this creative act is not so very different from the way in which writers create works of literature: "Procedural authorship means writing the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the texts themselves. [...] The procedural author creates not just a set of scenes but a world of narrative possibilities" (152-3). Steve Dietz asserts that "Procedural authorship [...] moves the author's traditional role over, so to speak, and without the reader/interactor, there is nothing authored except possibility" (n/p). Murray argues that "the interactor is not the author of the digital narrative" although "they experience aspects of artistic creation" when they exert "power over enticing and plastic materials." This, she claims, "is not authorship but agency" (153). White, however, reasons that authorship "is generally a relationship of agency with regard to an art object or a relatively defined art experience" (195). Whatever the minutiae of the debate, it is obvious that digital media is profoundly affecting our conceptions of knowledge and authorship. Audiences, it is clear, are producers too. The exact ways in which viewers produce meaning in the digital narratives of *Love Radio* and *Tuko Macho* are explored in the following sections.

## “The viewer can choose”: Participation, Inclusion, and Curation in *Musekeweya* and *Love Radio*

*Love Radio: Episodes of Love and Hate* is a transmedia documentary about the Rwandan radio soap *Musekeweya*, which was created to foster understanding of group violence following the Rwandan genocide of 1994. *Love Radio* not only indicates a recognition of the importance of fan engagement by making the responses of ordinary Rwandan citizens to popular culture a part of their documentary, but also includes its own audience in the production of meaning by inviting viewers to curate and circulate the content of its narrative. This section will first review the history of the Rwandan genocide and the role that hate radio played in the escalation of violence. It will then look at the ways in which both the narrative and the medium of the soap inspired fan engagement, and why that audience engagement was necessary if *Musekeweya* was to accomplish its goals of reconciliation and trauma recovery. Lastly, it will examine the ways in which the documentary made participatory culture a part of its narrative. The participatory nature of the soap and the documentary provide an opportunity for both Rwandan citizens and a Western audience to better understand group violence and its aftereffects.

In order to appreciate the value of *Musekeweya*, it is necessary to understand the historical context of the soap. During a one-hundred-day period between April and July of 1994, Rwanda suffered an ethnic genocide. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April Rwandan armed forces, and the Hutu militia groups, Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi, began the systemic killings of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The armed wing of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), backed by the Ugandan military, gained control of the capital, Kigali, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, after which there were reports of revenge killings on the Hutus by the Tutsis. Estimates of Rwandan deaths lie between eight and twelve hundred thousand. The RPF is credited with halting the genocide, and has led rapid economic growth in the country. Reconciliation and the prevention of further bloodshed is paramount, and yet the ban on speaking about ethnicity prevents many Rwandans from knowing how to move forward from the collective psychological scarring.

It is also important to know that one of the major catalysts of the Rwandan genocide was an extremist radio station, ‘Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines.’ The radio station was dubbed ‘Radio Machete’ after the weapon used by many of the killers, and urged ordinary Hutu citizens to join in the murder of their Tutsi neighbours who were referred to as ‘inyenzi’ or ‘cockroaches.’ The station guided killers to specific victims, broadcasting the

names, license plate numbers, and hiding places of Tutsis. The culpability of the radio station has since been recognised, and in 2003, three Rwandan news media executives were convicted of genocide in international court. The court stated that the “power of the media to create and destroy human values comes with great responsibility” and that those who control the media “are accountable for its consequences” (Lafraniere n/p). Considering the role of ‘Radio Machete,’ the medium of *Musekeweya* assumes great significance.

The radio soap *Musekeweya* (which can be translated from Kinyarwanda as ‘New Dawn’) addresses issues pertinent to the people of Rwanda with the intention of preventing violence and healing trauma. In 2001, Ervin Staub, an expert on the psychology of peace and violence, George Weiss, a television producer, Anneke van Hoek, a criminologist, and Laurie Pearman, a traumatologist, initiated a public education programme, ‘Rwanda Reconciliation Radio’ intended to promote trauma recovery and prevent future violence. *Musekeweya* was part of that programme. It started broadcasting in 2004, ten years after the genocide, expanding to Burundi in 2005 and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006. It is broadcasted from the same frequency as the former Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines, which in 1994 incited the murder of the Tutsi. The soap tells the story of two villages, Muhumoro and Bumanzi, which serve as symbols of the Hutu and Tutsi. Families from both villages live off the land but Bumanzi's fields are more fertile than Muhumoro's, and animosity and envy lead to violence. Batamuriza and Shema are star-crossed lovers from opposite sides, and their relationship plays a role in the two villages becoming reconciled. The intention was that the soap would teach Rwandans about the signs of group violence, and the steps that could be taken to prevent such violence. By broadcasting positive messages of reconciliation from the same frequency on the same medium that incited such violence in 1994, the creators of the radio soap have reclaimed the power of this media for good.

Twenty years after the genocide and ten years after the first broadcast of the radio soap, *Love Radio* used transmedia narrative to tell the story of *Musekeweya*, and of Rwanda's complex journey of recovery. The new media form of *Love Radio* has enabled a wide reach, delivering Rwanda's compelling and multifaceted story to an international audience. Its name is meant to juxtapose the platform that urged the group violence of 1994 – hate radio. Produced collaboratively by two Dutch creatives, photographer Anoeke Steketee and journalist/filmmaker Eefje Blankevoort, the project both retells the story of the radio soap and documents the process of reconciliation. For one hundred days from April to June 2014, closely approximating the dates and duration of the genocide, an episode was added every second week. The project comprises a web documentary of seven dual episodes, short visual

stories for smartphones or tablets, and an exhibition at Foam Museum in Amsterdam. Each dual episode consists of an “On Air” section, which tells an abbreviated version of the story related in *Musekeweya*. The “Off Air” section contains interviews and discussions with the director, screenwriters, and actors of the soap, as well as fans of the show, and Rwandans who relate their experiences of the genocide and the country’s attempts at reconciliation. The episodes are each accompanied by essays by various journalists and academics, and by slide shows containing film, photography, audio, text and archive material. The intention was to relate the impact of the radio soap on Rwandan citizens, and to reveal the complex nature of a nation’s recovery from horrific violence.

The radio soap and the documentary clearly have different intended audiences. *Musekeweya* is broadcast in Kinyarwanda, the official language of Rwanda, and a language that is spoken by many in the Eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and in parts of Uganda. As such, it reaches a wider audience than is contained in Rwanda. A listener from the DRC noted that the broadcast can be clearly received “here, close to the border with Rwanda” and that “the messages are still very relevant here” (Ep. 4, “Listeners” slideshow). This reach beyond Rwanda is important, as many refugees from the genocide took refuge in the bordering countries. *Love Radio*, conversely, is an informational documentary about the soap and Rwandan history, clearly aimed at an audience who would be relatively ignorant about both. Steketee acknowledges that *Love Radio* is meant primarily for a Western audience, “but not only for Western audiences but a worldwide audience” (Jansen n/p). Steketee and Blankevoort observe that although they “definitely want to bring the project to Rwanda,” the chief purpose of the project was “to tell a Western audience about the soap, the genocide in Rwanda and the complex process of reconciliation” (Linington n/p). In speaking about the challenges of reducing a story that had been running for a decade into twenty minutes, Steketee noted that the characters had “complicated names,” and that it was part of her aim to “make [the story] interesting to a Western audience” (“Picture Story”). The intended audiences make a great difference in how the two narratives are presented.

In seeking a media form to disseminate their message, it was clear to the creators of *Musekeweya* that radio was the obvious choice. In 1994, it was the extremist radio station ‘Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines’ that played a crucial role in creating racial hostility against the Tutsis. A radio is an affordable piece of technology and is part of the daily life of Rwanda. “Listening to the radio is, as we often say here, the second life of Rwandans,” notes director Aimable Twahira. “Because everyone loves the radio, everyone listens to the radio” (Ep. 1, Off Air, 0.26). The ubiquitous presence of the radio means that it

“is a very efficient tool to educate people.” (0.46). He comments that Rwanda is a post-conflict country in which radio has been used “to mobilize people” and in order “to accelerate the killings, to accelerate the genocide” the government “broadcasted messages on the radio, messages of hate” (1.51). The use of this medium is intentional, because the team wishes to use the same tool that disseminated hate speech to “convey a message of reconciliation, unity, prevention of conflict, and the healing of trauma” (2.05). Steketee, too, notes that the soap is very aware of the role of its medium:

The story of *Musekeweya* symbolises [a] universal topic: the role of the media in a society, its manipulative power and the emergence of collective memory. Media – in particular radio – played a significant role in dehumanising victims in Rwanda (“Your time is over, cockroaches!”). The use of propaganda to reduce the other to the enemy is a recurring phenomenon – even in countries where outbreaks of violence of the kind seen in Rwanda are absent.

(Linington n/p)

The medium of the soap promotes reflection about how media influences society, while providing a message that encourages its audience to think critically. Conversely, *Love Radio* wanted to tell both the story of the soap and provide context, while giving the audience choice about how much of either they wanted to engage with. Steketee notes that the documentary team “came to the conclusion that [they] needed to provide a context, use the audio of the soap and find a form to tell a layered, nuanced story of the relation between the fictional story of the radio soap and the daily reality of contemporary Rwanda.” They decided that “a Web documentary was [...] the ultimate way to tell this story” (Love n/p). The radio form of *Musekeweya* enabled easy access by the soap’s target audience, and the new media form of *Love Radio* enabled both access by an international audience and the layered telling of a complex story. Additionally, as is explained below, the different mediums used by the soap and by the documentary enable different ways of including audience participation.

An engaged audience is important for the aims of both *Musekeweya* and *Love Radio*. The different platforms of the two narratives, however, entailed different types of engagement. Radio programmes use basic technology and one-way broadcasting, and one would not think that this would open up the story to audience participation. An invested audience, however, leads inevitably to a participatory culture. Audience investment in and identification with the show is important to its production team. Charles Rukundo, a scriptwriter for *Musekeweya*, remarks that the letters from listeners “show that they identify with the characters” (Ep. 2, Off Air, 3.12). André Musagara, another scriptwriter, notes that

the audio-only medium of the radio means that “everyone can imagine the characters as they wish,” and that different people will imagine the characters differently (Ep. 2, Off Air, 3.12). An interviewed audience member, Claudine Nyirabera, said that she thought that she “look[s] like Batamuriza,” and that the character is her size and age (Ep. 2, Off Air, 5.00). Some audience members become reflective: “*Musekeweya* has saved me from ethnic and racial segregation thought,” wrote one listener. “I come from the North, and from the age of 5, I had been indoctrinated that I should hate people from Nduga [the South]” (Ep. 3 “Fanmail” slideshow). Another observed that the youth in his village “were saddened by the breakup between Batamuriza and Shema” because they ended their relationship “when we much needed them to be a model of reconciliation, regardless the sad past of our parents” (Ep. 3, “Fanmail” slideshow, *sic*). Listeners also send in fanart, demonstrating the investment of their time, interest, and emotions. Twahira comments that the show receives calls from Rwandans who ask the team to visit them, saying that *Musekeweya* echoes their own lives. He notes that this identification is important for the message of the show to be communicated effectively. This responsiveness on the part of the audience is participatory culture similar to the type demonstrated in orature. Their engagement can be compared to Finnegan’s observations of the members of an oral storyteller’s audience, who make contributions to the narrative in the form of “spontaneous exclamations, actual questions, echoing of the speaker’s words, [and] emotional reaction to the development [of the plot]” (*Oral literature in Africa* 374).

At times, *Musekeweya*’s audience has an impact on the storyline. Twahira relates that the production team receive letters not only “from people that are touched,” but also from audience members “who give advice on what can be improved, [and] who give advice to the characters” (Ep. 3 Off Air, 5.32). “Rutaganira, Zanika and Kanaga should stop spoiling the Rwandan society,” advised one listener. “Enough is enough with their divisive thoughts” (Ep. 3, Fanmail). The fan’s consumption of product has, in Jenkins’ words, become “a topic of public discussion and collective deliberation” (*Convergence Culture* 222). The scriptwriters periodically use the ideas that the fans give them, including them in the process of generating narrative and creating a participatory culture in the more modern sense. The fans are actively participating in the creation of new content, influencing plotlines and narrative trajectory. They do this because they are invested in the story, an investment that is important for the soap’s aims of communicating its message of reconciliation. As Jenkins observes, “shared interests often lead to shared knowledge, shared vision, and shared actions” (222). By sharing the construction of their narrative with their audience, the creators of *Musekeweya* are perpetuating a shared vision for the future of Rwanda.



An invested audience is important for the show's goals of creating a more aware and critical Rwanda, and of promoting reconciliation. Emmanuel Manirakiza, a local pastor, believes that the genocide is "a question of intellectuality," and that if the common people of Rwanda had been critical thinkers, they would not have killed their fellow Rwandans on the orders of the politicians. The politicians have emigrated, but "the peasants are here" living with the effects of the civil war (Ep. 3, Off Air, 1.51, 2.12). Rukundo agrees, saying that "people have to be critical, and criticize things that are not good" which includes critiquing those in power (3.42). It is unclear if this goal has been achieved, but it is more evident that the show has had success in advancing reconciliation in the country. A farmer whose family was killed in the genocide noted that "The governmental unity and reconciliation program helped us somewhat [...but] although we were taught to reconcile, we still didn't talk to each other" (Ep. 6, Off Air, 4.10). Jean Claude Mutarindwa, whose village was involved in the genocide, says that he would listen to the soap every Wednesday night, and after "hearing how Muhumuo and Bumanzi villagers asked each other for forgiveness," he organised a meeting for his village to discuss "what to do in order to approach our neighbours that we wronged" (4.33). Following an old Rwandan custom for asking forgiveness, Mutarindwa and his village planted crops for the family of the people who had been killed in the neighbouring village. Before, people from the two villages would avoid one another. "But now that we have forgiven one another," explains Mutarindwa, "we meet and chat, they give us jobs and we work for them" (10.42). He attributes this community reconciliation to the impact of the show, saying that "we got all of that in the radio soap called *Musekeweya*, broadcast on Radio Rwanda" (11.02).

Another objective of the soap is helping Rwandans recovering from their collective trauma. Laurie Pearlman notes that the psychological aid often used in the West, such as referring traumatised persons to a psychologist, is not an option in the country. "There are only a handful of psychologists in Rwanda, and an individual approach such as this does not suit the collective culture of African countries." (Ep. 4, "Collective Recovery" essay). Pearlman may be generalising about 'the collective culture of African countries,' but group approaches to healing have proved to be effective after collective trauma (Staub 874). Pearlman argues that the *Musekeweya* "encourages pluralism, active bystandership, and a neighbour-to-neighbour trauma recovery" (Ep. 4, "Collective Recovery" essay). Connection is part of the programme's philosophy of healing, and the soap "encourages connection through its venue, radio, to which most people in the region listen in natural community groups" (*ibid.*). "Five years down the road we see that *Musekeweya* is achieving its vision,

but this success can be largely attributed to the public which embraced it with enthusiasm and the actors who have done their best to send a constructive message to the masses,” pointed out Twahirwa (Gahigi n/p). If, as Jenkins *et al*, suggest, participatory culture is “a range of different groups deploying media production and distributions to serve their collective interests,” then the groups involved in *Musekeweya* are, by definition, part of a participatory culture.

All of the examples of audience engagement and participation used above are only available to the viewer of *Love Radio* because the creators of the documentary made them a part of its narrative. Recognising that audience’s responses to the soap were imperative to its efficacy, that they revealed much about the current state of Rwanda, and that they were an integral part of *Musekeweya*’s greater story, Steketee and Blankevoort made the soap’s audience participation part of *Love Radio*. The participatory culture of the soap became part of the narrative of the documentary. In addition to recording *Musekeweya*’s fan engagement, *Love Radio* recognised the power of participatory culture by requiring its own audience to curate their experience of the transmedia project.

The transmedia nature of *Love Radio* means that it includes a truly extensive range of different media. The “On Air” abbreviated fictional story is accompanied by photographs and video of Rwanda, as well as the actors and listeners of *Musekeweya*. The “Off Air” videos contain interviews and discussions with the director, screenwriters, actors, fans, and ordinary Rwandan citizens. The “Off Air” section also contains essays by various journalists and academics, and slide shows containing film, photography, audio, text and archive material. If accessed by a smartphone, the *LoveRadio-Rwanda* website provides short ‘tap stories,’ more detail of which are provided further down. Blankevoort refers to the documentary as a *gesamtkunstwerk* – a German term which can be loosely translated as an ‘all-embracing art form.’<sup>47</sup> This form provides a unique type of opportunity for the viewer – that of choosing how, when, and which parts of the documentary to experience.

*Love Radio*, directed to a Western audience, one with greater access to digital tools, can encourage audience participation more directly than the radio soap. “We liked the idea of putting the viewer in the director’s seat” said Blankevort about the audience’s choice in

---

<sup>47</sup> Richard Wagner conceived of the *gesamtkunstwerk* as an ideal work of art in which drama, music, and other performing arts were integrated and subservient to the whole. It is now used to refer to art works which make use of all or many art forms or attempt to do so, especially in architecture and mass media. More pertinent to the subject of this thesis, the term has been used in relation to new and multimedia, linking concepts such as virtual reality to Wagner’s immersive opera. See Packer, Randall, and Ken Jordan, eds. *Multimedia: from Wagner to Virtual Reality*. WW Norton & Company, 2002.

navigating between the ‘on air’ and ‘off air’ sections (“On the Move” 1.06). Steketee relates that the creators of the documentary wanted their audience to have the ability to pilot themselves through the narrative, and determine how much they wanted to engage:

“[W]e wanted the viewer to decide for themselves how deep they wanted to go with the story. At first glance it tells a linear, almost fairy-tale narrative, retelling the original story of *Muskeweya*. The viewer can choose to stay. But the viewer can also choose to go deeper than the soap where happy endings predominate, and also see that reconciliation in real life is more intransigent. (Jansen n/p)

The “On Air” layer tells a linear story, and while it deals with betrayal, anger, hatred and violence, the story ends happily – the villages become reconciled, and the lovers get married. The “Off Air” layer contains the context – background information from the makers of the soap, from audience members, and evaluations from academics about the state of Rwanda. Steketee notes that “it is up to the viewer to choose if they only want to see the simplified version of reconciliation, as told in the soap, or see different perspectives” (Linington n/p). The transmedia nature of the documentary means that there is no linearly constructed story, and that the viewer builds their own story by means of the multiple routes offered. The viewer navigates through the “On Air” and “Off Air” layers of their own choosing, therewith becoming a participant in a story, instead of solely being audience. Heleen Peeters noted that “by layering their topic with different voices” Steketee and Blankevoort “make clear that the truth does not exist, there are solely different perspectives on the truth” (Kabalt n/p). It is up to the viewer, however, to decide whether they even go beyond the simpler story and engage with different perspectives. The viewer curates their own narrative experience, ‘actively participating in the creation’ of the story that they are told.

It is not only in the greater narrative of the documentary that the viewer has choices. Steketee’s photography, too, prompts the viewer to imagine realities beyond their own. She remarked that in her photography, she was deliberately trying to “leave the viewer enough space for their own imagination,” space in which the audience could enter and participate in the creation of the story.

I’m trying to create a sort of alienation [...] a distance that leaves enough room for people’s own interpretation ... to somehow make it real that behind the surface of what we see, the beautiful surface, other realities may exist. Realities we don’t know, we don’t see, especially for an outsider. I’m always trying to play with that. To give the viewer a sort of alienated feeling,

provoking them to think: ‘Ok, there’s something going on with this image. I don’t know what it is but there must be a story behind it.’ (Jansen n/p)

This provocation of the audience is an attempt to make them engage with the stories of Rwanda’s people, to make them go beyond the scope of the soap’s narrative and seek the complex reality of reconciliation after genocide.

As mentioned above, one of the media that *Love Radio* uses in its multimedia narrative is ‘tap stories’ – short stories in photography and text that are navigated by tapping the screen.<sup>48</sup> Users who access *LoveRadio-Rwanda.org* via a smartphone are automatically directed to a site with seven tap stories. The stories are taken from the experiences of *Museweyeka* listeners, voice actors, and ordinary Rwandan citizens, and were designed to complement the fortnightly *Love Radio* episodes. These stories are not available to desktop, only smartphone and tablets. This, amongst several other factors, makes them an interesting study in participatory culture.

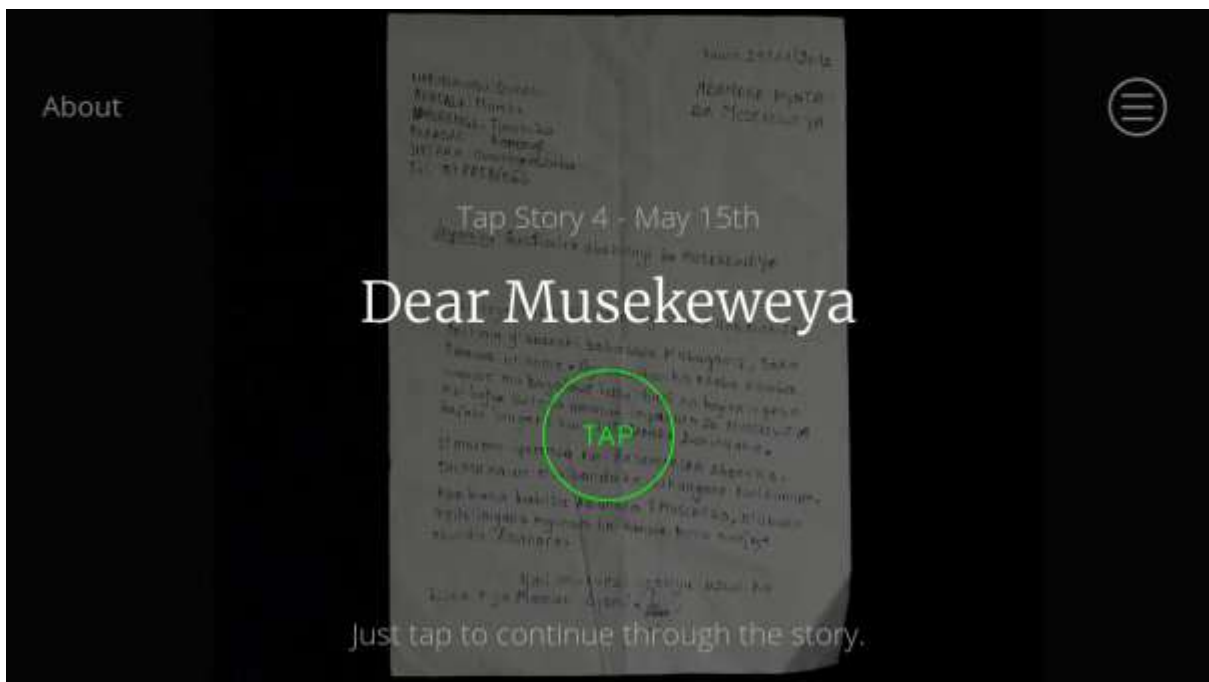


Figure 7: The first image or ‘cover’ of the tap story “Dear Musekeweya.”

<sup>48</sup> The tap story or essay was invented in 2012 by author and programmer Robin Sloan as a way to tell a simple and uninhibited digital story. The original product, “Fish: a tap essay,” was created as a smartphone application. A similar format has since been adopted by Snapchat, and by Instagram and Facebook as ‘stories,’ becoming increasingly popular. Facebook’s chief product officer, Chris Cox, stated in early 2018 that the increase in the “Stories format is on a path to surpass feeds as the primary way people share things with their friends.”



Figure 8: Image 36



Figure 9: Image 37



Figure 10: Image 39

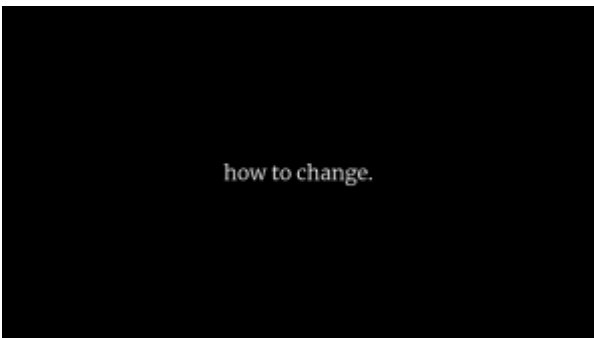


Figure 11: Image 40

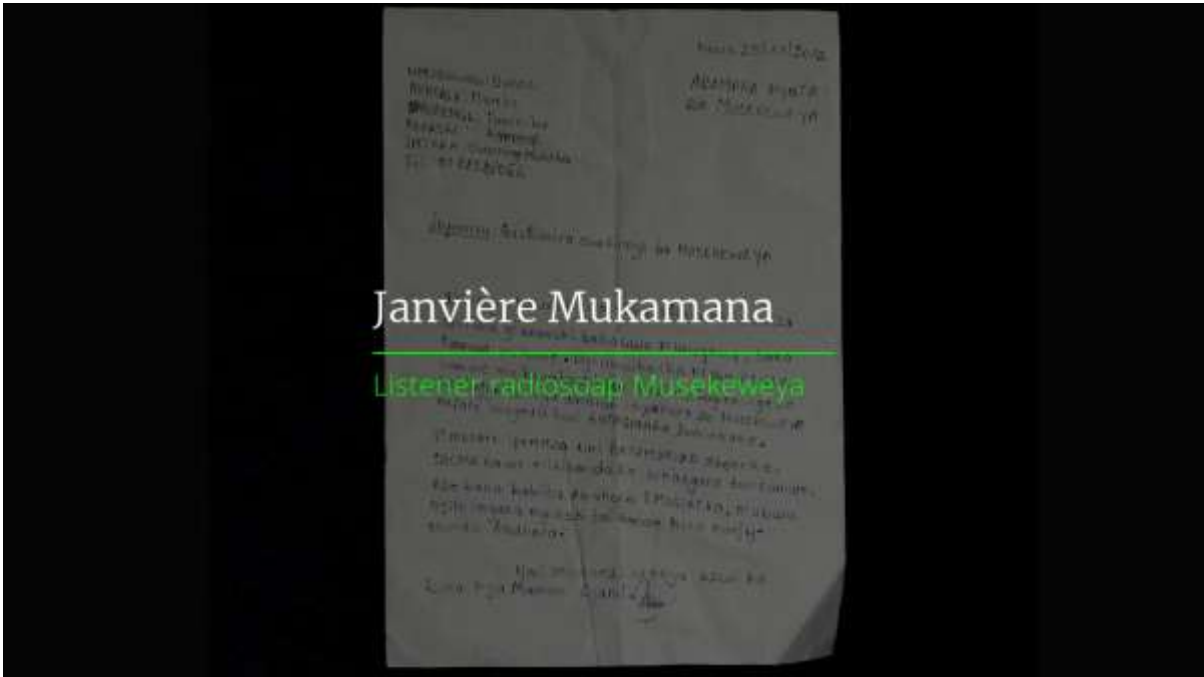


Figure 12: Image 57, recording the source of the content text.

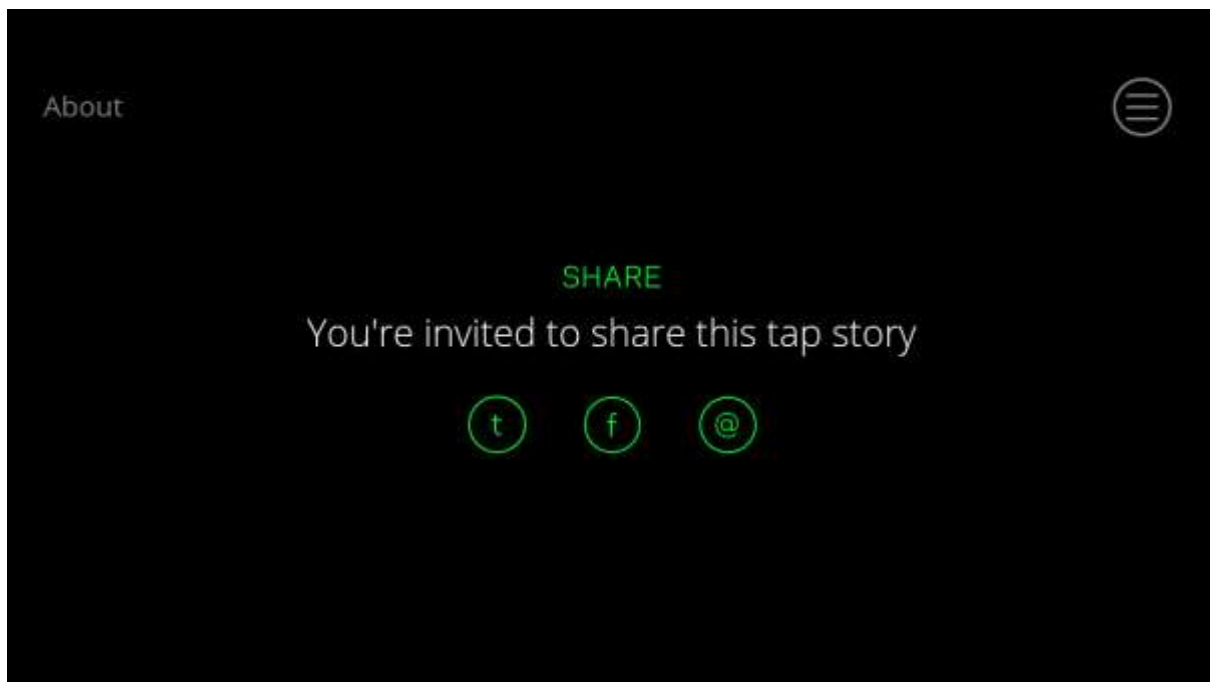


Figure 13: Once the last image has been tapped, the viewer is invited to share the story via Twitter, Facebook, or email.

Figures 7 through 13 are screenshots from the tap story “Dear *Musekweya*,” based on a letter written to the radio soap by a listener, Janvière Mukamana. This particular story is an example of participatory culture on several levels. Firstly, Mukamana has written to *Musekweya*, relating to its creators the impact that the soap has had on him, and how he has identified with the characters in the story. This is culture as Jenkins first envisaged it – fan production that engages with its source inspiration. Secondly, the *Love Radio* team has used this fan engagement in their own project, recognising its importance to the greater story of the radio soap. Thirdly, a user can choose whether to view the tap stories – an addendum to the primary website and yet still a part of the transmedia project – making that user a curator of their own experience within the documentary. Lastly, the viewer is invited to share the story via social media or email. This is a recognition, on the part of the creators, of the role of the viewer in the circulation of content. In multiple different ways “Dear *Musekweya*” acknowledges, identifies, and relies upon audience participation in the creation of narrative.

*Love Radio* and *Musekweya* have different aims, different intended audiences, and use different technologies to disseminate their messages. Both, however, intend for their audiences to be participatory. In the case of *Musekweya*, the soap seeks a participatory audience because it indicates investment, and an invested audience is more likely to help accomplish the show’s goals of making citizens critically aware, and promoting reconciliation and healing in Rwanda. *Love Radio*, by including records of the soap’s

audience participation in its own narrative, indicates a recognition of the importance of such participation to *Musekeweya*. The documentary also requires its audience to be participatory in that they choose what parts of the narrative to watch, view, read, or share placing the responsibility of involvement in the hands of the viewer. Together, the soap and its documentary indicate the possibilities for engagement inherent in participatory culture. The examination of *Tuko Macho* that follows below demonstrates that such engagement can be used to promote an awareness of social justice.

### “You Decide”: *Tuko Macho* and Implicating an Audience in Issues of Social Justice

*Tuko Macho* uses participatory culture to create consciousness and feelings of accountability for issues such as distribution of wealth, social privilege, and processes of justice. This section will first examine how the creators of the series made space for audience participation, and then look briefly at the collective which created the series, exploring why it decided to make *Tuko Macho* a collaborative narrative. It will then examine the format of the series, and the publishing decisions that allowed interactivity between creators and audience. Lastly, it will show how the participatory culture of the narrative supported the themes of social justice and culpability.

*Tuko Macho* ('we are watching' in Swahili) by The Nest Collective is a web series released on Facebook, dealing with issues of crime and vigilante justice in Kenya. Similar to the way in which *An African City* was inspired by *Sex and the City*, *Tuko Macho* was inspired by director Jim Chuchu's watching "too many Batman movies." Imagining Nairobi as a "darker Gotham" (Peck 10.12), Chuchu created a series which poses questions of social justice and group culpability. *Tuko Macho* experimentally included its audience in decisions about the progress of the narrative as it developed in the months of June through October of 2016. It is a fascinating demonstration of participatory culture, and a template for future productions that would like to include audiences in the production of meaning-making.

In order to understand how *Tuko Macho*'s interactive nature is important to its narrative, it is necessary to lay out the sequence of events in the first episodes. In this first video of the series, a group of vigilantes catch a hijacker called 'Charlo,' who, one explains directly to the camera, was stealing a car for the eighth time in three months. The police have been unable or unwilling to catch him, and "Tonight," states Biko, the vigilante narrating the video, "we'll try to change things just a bit" (4.49). On the screen some text appears: "Guilty

or not guilty? You Decide” along with a web address for a blog (5.00). The viewers who were watching the episode in the week that it was released could go to the blog site and record their vote, which implicated them in the result of Charlo’s ‘guilty’ verdict – death by lethal injection. This capture of criminals, request for a verdict and execution reoccurs throughout the series. Another way in which *Tuko Macho* was interactive was through the comments section on Facebook. The Nest Collective engaged with their audience, answering questions, speculating on future plot points, and explaining artistic decisions. By asking their audience to participate in the fictional narrative, as well encouraging critical comment on the videos, the collective made viewers a part of *Tuko Macho*. This pushing of traditional boundaries is what audiences have come to expect from The Nest Collective.

A multidisciplinary Kenyan creative group working with film, fashion, visual arts and music, The Nest Collective was established in 2012 to “collect talented thinkers” in Nairobi (Peck 2.03). ‘The Nest’ first became well known in 2014 when *Stories of Our Lives*, an anthology of five short films about LGBTQ life in Kenya, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) Given that homosexuality is illegal in Kenya, *Stories of Our Lives* was hailed as a brave and revolutionary piece of art.<sup>49</sup> Two years later, the first two episodes of *Tuko Macho* were screened in the 2016 TIFF Primetime program. George Gachara, assistant director and executive producer of the series, noted that *Tuko Macho*’s interactive nature was very much a result of *Stories of Our Lives* being banned in Kenya. The collective felt that their “work was in exile” and therefore wanted to “come back home” and engage intensely with the “city’s sensibility” (Peck 13.46). Audience engagement with Kenyan citizens was a driving force in the creation of the web series.

The possibilities for audience engagement that the internet allows was the reason that the collective decided to publish their series on Facebook. In speaking about why it was important that *Tuko Macho* aired online as opposed to a local TV station, the production team stated that they felt that placing the show online allowed them to access their intended audience more directly:

---

<sup>49</sup> Due to apprehension about the implications of being seen to represent LGBTQ Kenyan lives, *Stories of Our Lives* originally ran without individual credits. Following the premiere at TIFF, three of the collective’s members – Jim Chuchu, George Gachara and Njoki Ngumi – opted to reveal their names at the screening and in an interview with Toronto’s LGBTQ newspaper *Xtra!* The film was rejected for distribution and screening in Kenya by the Kenya Film Classification Board, on the grounds that the film ‘promotes homosexuality, which is contrary to national norms and values’ of Kenya. Declared ‘one of the most triumphant and stunning films of the year’ by *The Huffington Post*, *Stories of Our Lives* propelled The Nest into a status of international recognition.



TV is a very owned space that often has more corporate agendas than prioritizing content - especially content that tends to be critical. We chose the online space in order to engage directly with our audiences, who have 24-hour access to our content as opposed to waiting for one weekly time slot. Also, considering recent studies showing that more Kenyan youth are moving away from legacy media outlets in favour of curating personalised, online viewing experiences, we felt that releasing *Tuko Macho* on Facebook would be best. (Opar n/p).

The production team noted that they “had purposely produced this series to be very interactive” and that “the developing relationships [they] are building with [their] audiences” on social media were very productive to artistic processes. Ligaga asserts that “one of the most remarkable aspect of Kenyan online usage is the vibrant and creative ways in which they have been able to engage with political and social goings-on” (“Virtual Expressions 13). The experiences of *Tuko Macho*’s producers support this assertion. Kenyan viewers, they noted “want to discuss the story, ask questions and talk about the characters – and reflect about issues like socioeconomic inequalities or capital punishment” and the collective was eager to engage on these issues with the audience (Opar n/p.). The series’ dissemination on Facebook drew substantial comment from critics who disparaged the social media network as an appropriate platform for film, and warned that a series so freely made available would not be eligible for film festivals. The Nest’s choice of platform, however, proved to be astute – the collaborative was able to have fruitful interactions with their audience, and the series’ dissemination on social media did not prevent it from being selected for TIFF. By using online and social media, The Nest Collective are able to connect more directly with their audiences on a platform that they already utilise. It is not only the audience who is intentionally participating. By going to a media platform that their consumers use, the producers are helping to develop participatory culture, and reaping the benefits in an enthusiastic audience.

*Tuko Macho*’s audience was eager to engage on issues of social, moral, and legislative justice. By including their audience in the narrative, the collective created what David Peck terms a “social experiment,” tapping into Kenyans’ opinions on various matters relevant to their country (14.25). Gachara observes that the Facebook comment sections of the videos became a space for interaction, as audience members debated with each other the morality of the character’s actions. In particular, the vigilantes’ capture of a reckless *matatu* or taxi driver was the subject of much discussion. Nairobi is infamous for its bad drivers, and disobeying the rules of the road is an everyday offence. Many viewers, therefore, could identify with the

character, which made it difficult to condemn him. By portraying their characters as complex, with both sympathetic and unsympathetic qualities, *The Nest* provoked much debate on moral issues. Even the character of Charlo, whom many voted to receive the death penalty, was in some ways a character with which many could commiserate. He tells Biko that his mother's job as a laundress had given his family hope that they would be able to progress out of poverty. "But no," he says bitterly, "We just kept surviving" (Ep 1, 7.46). It was Charlo's desperation for a better existence that drove his life of crime, and thus the implied question to the series' audience is whether the greater crime is theft or structural inequality. Viewers asked to vote on the characters' guilt were not spared the impact of their decisions – the individuals who are executed have their faces covered with a black piece of cloth, but the impact of their death is nevertheless effective, and the impact of a death sentence is brought home to the audience. David Peck noted that series is both "really cathartic" and "deeply troubling" (12.22) as death, and decisions about death, become the subject of entertainment. Viewers had examined their culpability in the deaths of the characters, as well as the fact that these deaths were the subject of a series meant to entertain.

It was not only narrative and philosophical matters that concerned the audience. The comment sections also became a way for the audience to voice their critiques of the show to the creators directly, and for the collective to respond. Chuchu remarks that his decision to limit camera movement in order to increase the voyeuristic sense of the series was questioned by many audience members, and the interactive nature of Facebook comments allowed him to have "an interesting conversation" with his audience about the artistic decision (Peck 19.20). The audience became invested not only in the story, but in the way it was created.

Murray argues that "[p]art of the early work in any medium is the exploration of the border between the representational world and the actual world" (103). *Tuko Macho* may not be 'early' in the greater genealogy of web series, but it is one of the early African web series, and its play with the line between the real and the mimetic is characteristic of the experimental use of a new medium. Gachara noted that the series blurs reality and fiction, because the incidents of the series are taken from real-world incidents within Nairobi. Peck, too, commented that the series "danc[es] between the real and the hyperreal (29.44). The video experience *Tuko Macho* is not completely immersive because at times the audience views not only the 'published' videos, but also narrative from the perspective of the vigilantes, the criminals, and the police, as well as video clips from various fictional news and television shows. The shift between the 'published' and 'non-published' narrative can detract from the narrative experience as a whole. The audiences' implication in the fates of

the criminals is undermined by the fact that the fictional world is not presented as reality. The narrative outside the ‘published’ videos, does, however, give insight into the characters’ motivations, which infers the necessity of civic engagement, a goal of the series. In a flashback to Biko’s days in the army a few years earlier, he and his friend stumble across evidence of vote rigging. “It’s not our problem” his friend Stevo attempts to convince him. “We don’t even vote! Why do you want to get us into this mess?” (Ep. 5, 15.32). The series connects Biko’s early experience of the failure of democratic processes to his later vigilantism. The ‘unpublished’ scenes of the series, therefore, still manage to support the narrative as a whole, despite their detraction from an immersive narrative experience.

By involving the audience in the narrative, *Tuko Macho*’s creators personalise questions of social justice and make viewers culpable for the futures of others. The audience is made to feel the implications of their decisions about the criminals’ fate by the way that Biko places the responsibility squarely at their feet. “It’s not me who will kill you,” Biko tells Charlo. “The people. The people will kill you” (Ep1, 6.30). And in a later episode which flashes back to his first conception of the plan, he tells a fellow vigilante that “It’s not me who will punish them.” The screen flashes the opening line from the Preamble to the Kenyan Constitution: “We, the people of Kenya...,” and Biko continues, “The citizens of Nairobi will. They will decide whether someone is guilty or innocent” (Ep. 10, 4.40). In the last episode, Biko defends himself to Detective Nick Salat:

“I didn’t murder anyone. The people were the jury. I was the executioner.”  
“No one gave you that authority,” retorts the officer.  
“The people did,” replies Biko (Epp.12, 13.42.).

In all these instances, the audience is made complicit in the deaths of the criminals that the vigilantes kill. Michael Lerman wrote for the TIFF that *Tuko Macho*’s involvement of its audience provoked discussion of social justice:

Jim Chuchu has created a truly interactive episodic experience, a compelling fictional tale that plays with reality-TV tropes in order to lend a platform to opinions unrepresented on the mass market. [...] *Tuko Macho*’s social media also gives viewers voice and provides them with a forum on which to discuss the issues at hand.

As the audience learns about the complexity of Biko’s life and the circumstances that made him believe in vigilante justice, the gravity of the narrative becomes apparent, and Kenya’s

socio-political issues are made evident. It is made clear that viewers have participated not only in the narrative, but in the sentencing of fictional offenders, which raises questions of culpability and justice.

*Tuko Macho* does not provide its viewers with a definite ending. This allows the audience, again, to participate in the narrative, and decide for themselves how it ends. “I don’t know how this ends,” Biko says to Nick when the detective finally manages to confront him. “You tell me” (Ep. 12, 13.21). The officer tells Biko to leave. The screen cuts to a shot of a cornfield, and the sound of a gunshot is heard. It is unclear whether the officer has shot Biko or not. The implication is that the creators of the show are saying “You tell me” to their audience, asking them to participate, for the last time, in the narrative of *Tuko Macho*.

The Next Collective made space for audience participation by inviting them to vote on the fates of the series characters, as well as encouraging viewers to interact with the shows creators on Facebook. *Tuko Macho* was created to be a collaborative narrative because the collective wished to engage with their fellow Kenyans, but the participatory culture of the narrative also supported the series’ themes of social justice and culpability by implicating viewers in the characters’ fates. *Tuko Macho* experiments with involving their audience in the development of their narrative, and in the process, brings up question of justice and responsibility. “Can episodic media interact with social change?” asks Lerman of the TIFF audience. “The choice,” he concludes, “is yours.”

## Conclusion

Participatory culture is not a new concept. If ‘sociability is one our core capabilities,’ then humanity has always been drawn to collaborative effort. Storytelling is no different. Oral literatures depend on audiences for their existence, meaning, and importance. Even novels, which allow us to experience narratives in a singularly self-contained way, require the reader to bring social experience to their consumption of the text. The listener, reader, and watcher cannot, and never have been, entirely passive. Digital media, however, has provided them with new tools which enable participation in, and even authorship of, the stories they love. *Musekweya* encourages identification with its story in order to promote healing and reconciliation in a post-genocidal country. *Love Radio* allows its audience to choose how deep into the context of *Musekweya* they want to go. *Tuko Macho* asks its viewers to implicate themselves in vigilante justice. The creators of these texts recognise the power of the audience, and request that they participate in their new media narratives. This

contributory construction of online stories is not problematic because “online culture is inherently participatory and collaborative” (Gillmor xvii). The sociable impulses that made orature’s audience participants in the process of narrative have been given a new outlet in new media. The collaborative efforts at storytelling that happened in a predigital world now have “exponentially greater [...] scope, thanks to the affordances of online social tools” (Jenkins, Ford and Green 12). Our increasingly networked culture and growing digital literacy means we have ways of collaboratively producing that we did not have before. The texts of digital media, emerging in a networked world, are reinvigorating the participatory culture of our storytelling.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### Producers and Exporters of Indigenous Narrative

[D]igitization has the potential to make Africans producers and exporters of indigenous information, rather than merely passive consumers of imported knowledge.  
(Lizelle Bisschoff “The Future is Digital: An Introduction to African Digital Arts”)

In this thesis I have set out to examine the ways in which digitisation has enabled new forms for telling and disseminating African stories. Achebe claims that “new ways to write about Africa have appeared, reinvesting the continent and its people with humanity” (49), and it is these new ways which with I have engaged. The process of colonialization profoundly impacted many countries in Africa, inducing change in cultures, politics, economies, ecosystems, populations and, of course, texts and narratives. The decolonial project, aiming to free the continent from the cultural and social effects of colonisation, has recognised the importance of taking control of narratives of Africa. Achebe’s “new ways of telling” refers to narratives which tell complex and nuanced stories of the continent, as opposed to the “domineering monologue” (83) of the West which perpetuated stilted and prejudiced discourses of Africa and its peoples. In this thesis, I have also used the idea of “new ways of telling” to refer to stories told via new media – texts disseminated on digital platforms, web series distributed on social media, and a transmedia documentary collated on a website. The new ways of telling with which this thesis has been concerned, I argue, are forms of narrative which suit a digital, globalised world and at the same time, communicate indigenous accounts of African experience. African storytellers are creating narratives that convey lived realities, and the digital manner of their dissemination is enabling those stories to reach an audience that might otherwise be exposed only to deficient representations of Africa. I have focussed on texts from South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya that make use of digital tools and spaces to tell African stories. *Love Radio*, produced in the Netherlands for an international audience, is the sole text included in this thesis that does not have African creators. It nevertheless creatively uses digital platforms to tell a Rwandan story from a Rwandan perspective, making an African narrative available to a global audience. These new forms have allowed new narratives, challenging truncated and inaccurate representations of African lives.

Chapter One reviewed the theory behind popular culture and digital culture, linking Williams’ concept of culture being created by ordinary people to the ways in which digital

media has the potential to blur the boundaries between audience and creator, professional and amateur. I argued that the democratic possibilities of the web reinforce the idea that cultural texts are productions of the people, and that cultural hierarchies create unserviceable distinctions. While acclaiming the internet's potential to be an open democratic space, I noted that it is important not to idealise the spaces of new media, as they are not free of commercialism and disinformation. Additionally, the ways in which the web sanctions both anonymity and observation allows the spread of hate-speech and makes possible the reality of a surveillance state. Although I am enthusiastic about the means for the dissemination of African stories that new media has allowed, I tried to make clear that there are dangers as well as advantages to a more digitised society. Thereafter, I observed that access and use of ICTs happens among a very small percentage of the population of Africa, and that this exacerbates social and economic inequalities. ICT access gaps in Africa remain troubling, but the more developed countries have eagerly seized the opportunity for new narrative forms and wider distribution that digitisation provides. While recognising that digital ways of telling are new ways of telling, I used an integrative approach to new media, representing it as a descendant of oral and print texts. In other words, new media is part of a continuum in the history of the tools of narrative. Digitisation is reshaping the spectrum of narrative expression, not by replacing the novel or the film, but by continuing their work within another framework.

In Chapter Two, I focussed on the ways in which digitisation is aiding in the dissemination of literature to a broader African audience. I claimed that the distribution of relevant and appropriate literature is improving literacy and revealing a need for representative narratives in South Africa. The African Storybook Reader makes accessing appropriate reading material for children an easier process, while the FunDza Literacy Project provides relevant texts for South African teenagers, encouraging them to read. Contrasting these platforms with Dube's project Long Story SHORT, I showed that form is as important as content when distributing literature to a demographic that primarily accesses the internet with cellphone data. The success of *Hlomu the Wife* proves that South Africa has more potential for a reading culture than it is given credit for, and that the country is in need of representative and relevant literature. I argued that the success of African Storybook Reader, the FunDza Literacy Project, and Busani-Dube's is illustrative of the possibilities inherent in the alternative publishing processes of the web. Providing these examples of South African creators using websites, mobisites, smartphone applications, and blogs to reach an increasingly connected country, I contended that the digital age has made publishing a more

distinct possibility for African writers, and digital platforms have made dissemination of African narratives an easier process. These projects are evidence, therefore, that digital media has a major role to play in Africa's education, literacy development, and reading culture.

In the third chapter, I briefly explored the history of black women in urban Africa and the stigmatisation that single women have had to face in cities, and then looked at the ways in which *An African City* and *The Foxy Five* reclaim urban space for the black African woman. I observed that the video platform of YouTube has enabled creators to tell localised narratives of Africa and disseminate them to a global audience. Amarteifio's *An African City* counters narratives of African women as uneducated, underprivileged, and unfashionable, revealing a demographic of sophisticated African woman who make city spaces their own. I evidenced the series' concerns with Western exceptionalism, the patriarchal nature of traditional Ghanaian society, and stereotypes of sexuality. I also noted that the show displays a sensibility that affirms the transnational nature of post-feminism. I claimed and demonstrated that Newman's *The Foxy Five* is concerned with intersectional feminism in an urban South African space, challenging patriarchy, racism and class. I asserted that Newman's and Amarteifio's use of new media for personal expression and for challenging conventional narrative is expressive of both the postmodern turn to localised narratives and the way in which growing digitisation is enabling ordinary people express themselves to a global audience.

In Chapter Four, I linked Jenkin's concept of participatory culture with contributory nature of orature, arguing that the two are fundamentally similar. I showed that internet has opened up new possibilities for including audiences in the construction of narrative, but that this inclusion is an ancient human tradition. Claiming that *Love Radio* illustrated the possibilities for engagement inherent in participatory culture, I demonstrated the way in which *Love Radio* includes records of the *Musekeweya*'s audience participation in its own narrative. The documentary indicates a recognition of the importance of fan engagement not only in its inclusion of the soap's listeners, but also in the way it places responsibility for engagement in the hands of its own consumers, requiring its audience to be participatory in that they choose what parts of the narrative to watch, view, read, or share. I illustrated the ways in which *Tuko Macho* uses participatory culture to create consciousness and feelings of accountability for issues such as distribution of wealth, social privilege, and processes of justice. By asking viewers to decide the fate of its character, and to engage with the series' creators on social media, the creators implicate the audience in the retribution process and



make them part of the story. These two narratives demonstrate the possibilities of participatory culture in the digital age.

In this thesis I set out to explore and review the ways in which new media, digitisation, and connective technologies have empowered African storytellers to create and distribute narratives which communicate indigenous accounts of African experience. To return to the epigraph at the beginning of this thesis, the age of ICTs has forced a re-evaluation of what is known about Africa, as African creators present “alternative and much more diverse stories and representations of this large and diverse continent” (Bisschoff 261). I have studied examples of online platforms which circulate African literature for all ages, localised narratives of urban women distributed on the web, and stories which used the participatory culture of the internet to include their consumers in the creation of meaning, rendering these stories significant to both local and global audiences. These examples of new ways of telling prove that digitisation and the global nature of the internet has created an opportunity for Africans to tell their own stories, present their own perspectives, and craft their own narratives in a way that the global North cannot ignore. New media has opened possibilities for new ways of telling that reach a wider audience, telling original stories and advancing a global conversation.

## Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. "Today, the Balance of Stories." *Home and Exile*. Canongate, 2003. 73-105.
- Adejunmobi, Moradewun. "Native Books and the "English Book" *PMLA* 132.1 (2017): 135-141.
- African City, An* season 1. Dir. Nicole Amarteifio. *AnAfricanCity.com*. 2 March 2014 – 27 April 2014.
- Annual Report 2017*. FunDza Literacy Trust, 2017. <<http://www.fundza.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Annual-Report-2017-Electronic-Version.pdf>>
- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Cambridge UP, 1960.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. "Rabelais' Images and His Time." *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Jacques LeClercq. Indiana UP, 1984. 437-474.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis." *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. U of Texas P, 1986. 103-131.
- Barber, Karin. "Popular Arts in Africa." *African Studies Review* 30.3 (1987): 1–78.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Readings in African Popular Culture*. International African Institute, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Audiences and Publics." *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics*. Cambridge UP, 2007. 137-174.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics*. Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. SAGE, 2012.
- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. Fontana, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Bascom, William R. "Four Functions of Folklore." *The Journal of American Folklore* 67.266 (1954): 333–349.
- Bell, Alice, Astrid Ensslin, and Hans Rustad. *Analyzing Digital Fiction*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.
- Bennett, W. Lance. "New Media Power." *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*. Ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran. Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. 17-37.
- Bisschoff, Lizelle. "The Future is Digital: An Introduction to African Digital Arts." *Critical African Studies* 9.3 (2017): 261-267.
- Cassim, Yusef. "Data for All is a fight we are taking to the ANC government." *DA.org*. 9 October 2017. <<https://www.da.org.za/2017/10/data-fight-taking-anc-government/>>
- Cayley, John. "Screen Writing: A Practice-Based, Eurorelative Introduction to Digital Literature and Poetics." *Literary Art in Digital Performance: Case Studies in New Media Art and Criticism*. Ed. Francisco J. Ricardo. Continuum (2009): 178-90.
- Chiénin, Chayet. "The Foxy Five, the South African Web Series on Intersectional Feminism." *NothingButTheWax.com*. 24 March 2017. <[nothingbutthewax.com/en/tbuilder-layout-part/the-foxy-five-the-south-african-web-series-on-intersectional-feminism/](http://nothingbutthewax.com/en/tbuilder-layout-part/the-foxy-five-the-south-african-web-series-on-intersectional-feminism/)>
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the margins: Identity politics, intersectionality, and violence against women." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299.

- Coplan, David B. “‘Hyenas Do Not Sleep Together’: The Interpretation of Basotho Migrants’ Auriature.” *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa’s Basotho Migrants*. U of Chicago P, 1994. 1-29.
- Dahir, Abdi Latif. “This Gotham City-Style Web Video Thriller is Set in Kenya and Scripted by Viewers.” *Quartz Africa*. 8 September 2016. <[qz.com/775139/kenyan-web-series-and-crime-thriller-tuko-macho-point-to-the-challenges-and-future-of-filmmaking-in-the-country/](http://qz.com/775139/kenyan-web-series-and-crime-thriller-tuko-macho-point-to-the-challenges-and-future-of-filmmaking-in-the-country/)>
- Daily Vox team. “5 Reasons Why You Need to Be Watching the Foxy Five.” *The Daily Vox*. 15 November 2016. <[www.thedailyvox.co.za/5-reasons-need-watching-foxy-five](http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/5-reasons-need-watching-foxy-five)>
- Deresiewicz, William. “How the Novel Made the Modern World.” *The Atlantic.com*. June 2014 issue. <[www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/how-the-novel-made-the-modern-world/361611/?utm\\_source=atlib](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/how-the-novel-made-the-modern-world/361611/?utm_source=atlib)>
- Dietz, Steve. “Telling Stories: Procedural Authorship and Extracting Meanings from Museum Databases.” *Museums and the Web.com*. Archives and Museum Informatics, 1999. <[www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw99/papers/dietz/dietz.html](http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw99/papers/dietz/dietz.html)>
- Dila, Dilman. “Dilman Dila on Digital Publishing in Uganda.” *Commonwealth Writers.org*. 25 March 2015. <[www.commonwealthwriters.org/digital-publishing-uganda](http://www.commonwealthwriters.org/digital-publishing-uganda)>
- Dlamini, Zimbili. *Abangane*. Illustrated by Catherine Groenewald. African Storybook Initiative and Molteno Institute, 2015.
- Donner, Jonathan. *After Access: Inclusion, Development, and a More Mobile Internet*. MIT P, 2015.
- Dorson, Richard M. “Introduction: Concepts of Folklore and Folklife Studies.” *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*. Ed. Richard M. Dorson. U of Chicago P, 1982. 1-50.
- Dosekun, Simidele. “For Western Girls Only? Post-Feminism as Transnational Culture.” *Feminist Media Studies* 15.6 (2015): 960-975.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Indiana UP, 1979.
- Egya, Sule E. “Dialogism, African Poetics, and Contemporary Nigerian Poetry in English.” *The Critical Imagination in African Literature: Essays in Honor of Michael JC Echeruo*. Ed. Maik Nwosu and Obiwu. Syracuse UP, 2014. 187-207.
- Ekwensi, Cyprian. *Jagua Nana*. Heinemann, 1975
- Eliot, Thomas Stearns. “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation.” *Selected Essays*, 2nd Ed. Faber & Faber, 1934: 65-105.
- Final Report: National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans 2016*. South African Book Development Council, 2017. <[sabookcouncil.co.za/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-NRS-2016.pdf](http://sabookcouncil.co.za/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-NRS-2016.pdf)>
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral literature in Africa*. 1970. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. Cambridge: CUP, 1977.
- Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. Methuen, 1987.
- Foucault, Michel. “What is an Author?” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 2. Ed. James D. Faubion. Trans. Robert Hurley. New P, 1998.
- Foxy Five, The*. Dir. Jabu Nadia Newman. *YouTube.com*. 19 June 2016 – 19 June 2017.

- Fredericks, George H., and Zolile Mvunelo. "Publication of Books in Indigenous South African Languages and their Availability and Use in Public Libraries." *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 69.2 (2003): 133-139.
- Gahigi, Moses. "Musekweya Marks 5 Years on Airwaves." *New Times*. 24 May 2009. <[www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/45538](http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/45538)>
- Giles, Jim. "Internet Encyclopaedias Go Head to Head." *Nature* 438. 2005. 900-1.
- Gillmor, Dan. *Mediactive*. Creative Commons, 2010.
- Gultig, John. *African Storybook Initiative External 'Accountability' Evaluation: 2013 – 2016*. South African Institute for Distance Education, 2017. <[www.saide.org.za/documents/2017\\_03\\_29\\_ASb\\_accountability\\_evaluation.pdf](http://www.saide.org.za/documents/2017_03_29_ASb_accountability_evaluation.pdf)>
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger. MIT P, 1991.
- Harrington, C. Lee, and Denise D. Bielby. "Constructing the Popular: Cultural Production and Consumption." *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*. Ed. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001. 1-16.
- Hauser, Brook. "Welcome to An African City." *LennyLetter.com*. 18 May 2016. <[www.lennyletter.com/story/welcome-to-an-african-city](http://www.lennyletter.com/story/welcome-to-an-african-city)>
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. U of Notre Dame P., 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Intermediation: The Pursuit of a Vision." *Between Page and Screen: Remaking Literature through Cinema and Cyberspace*. Ed. Kiene Brillenburg Wurth. Fordham UP, 2012. 101-126.
- Howie, Sarah, Celeste Combrinck, Karen Roux, Mishack Tshele, Gabriel Mokoena, and Nelladee McLeod Palane. *PIRLS Literacy 2016: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2016: South African children's reading literacy achievement*. Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA), Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, 2017.
- Hui, Stephen. "African Storybook Project brings digital books to kids." *Straight.com*. 24 June 2014. <[www.straight.com/life/671861/african-storybook-project-brings-digital-books-kids](http://www.straight.com/life/671861/african-storybook-project-brings-digital-books-kids)>
- "hypertext." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 15 March 2016. <[www.britannica.com/technology/hypertext](http://www.britannica.com/technology/hypertext)>
- "Internet Penetration in Africa." *Internet World Stats.com*. Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2018. <[www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm)>
- Janks, Hilary. *Literacy and Power*. Routledge, 2009.
- Jansen, Candice. "The Work of Love Radio." *Another Africa.net*. 18 July 2015. <[www.anotherafrica.net/interviews/the-work-of-love-radio](http://www.anotherafrica.net/interviews/the-work-of-love-radio)>
- Jenkins, Henry (P.I.), with Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice J. Robison. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. MIT P, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York UP, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York UP, 2006.

- \_\_\_\_\_. Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York, New York UP, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Updated 20th anniversary ed. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Jensen, Klaus Bruhn. "Media Institutions: Between Agency and Structure." *Media Convergence: The Three Degrees of Network, Mass and Interpersonal Communication*. Routledge, 2010. 81-102.
- Kabalt, Sanne. "Heleen Peeters: A World of Visions." *Urban Autica.com*. Date unavailable. <[www.urbanautica.com/post/109191900359/phototalk-with-heleen-peeters](http://www.urbanautica.com/post/109191900359/phototalk-with-heleen-peeters)>
- Karimi, Faith. "'An African City' Web series generates buzz, dismantles stereotypes." *CNN.com*. 25 August 2016. <[edition.cnn.com/2014/04/18/world/africa/ghana-african-city/](http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/18/world/africa/ghana-african-city/)>
- Kaschula, Russell. "Technauriture as an Educational Tool in South Africa." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 25.3&4 (2016): 349-363.
- Kattwinkel, Susan. "Introduction." *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*. Praeger Publishers, 2003.
- Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford UP, 1999.
- Lafraniere, Sharon. "Court Finds Rwanda Media Executives Guilty of Genocide." *NYTimes.com*. 3 December 2003. <[www.nytimes.com/2003/12/03/international/africa/court-finds-rwanda-media-executives-guilty-of-genocide.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/03/international/africa/court-finds-rwanda-media-executives-guilty-of-genocide.html)>
- Landlow, George P. *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006.
- Lerman, Michael. "Tuko Macho." *TIFF.net*. <[www.tiff.net/films/tuko-macho/](http://www.tiff.net/films/tuko-macho/)>
- Lever, Carla. "'I wrote it for all women of colour who have felt silenced': Interview with Buhle Ngaba." *BooksLive*. 22 August 2017. <[bookslive.co.za/blog/2017/08/22/i-wrote-it-for-all-women-of-colour-who-have-felt-silenced-a-qa-with-author-activist-storyteller-and-actress-buhle-ngaba/](http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2017/08/22/i-wrote-it-for-all-women-of-colour-who-have-felt-silenced-a-qa-with-author-activist-storyteller-and-actress-buhle-ngaba/)>
- Levy, Mike, and Rowan Michael. "Analyzing Students' Multimodal Texts: The Product and the Process." *Deconstructing Digital Natives*. Routledge, 2011. 95-110.
- Levy, Rachael. "Young Children, Digital Technology and Interaction with Text." *Deconstructing Digital Natives*. Routledge, 2011: 151-166.
- Ligaga, Dina. "'Virtual expressions': Alternative online spaces and the staging of Kenyan popular cultures." *Research in African Literatures* 43.4 (2012): 1-16.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Popular culture, new femininities and subjectivities: reading Nairobi Diaries." *Media and the Global South: Narrative Territorialities, Cross-cultural Flow*. Routledge, forthcoming publication. Page numbers unavailable.
- Linington, Jess. "Transmedia Storytelling: An Interview with the Makers of Love Radio." *I-docs.org*. 1 May 2014. <[i-docs.org/2014/05/01/transmedia-storytelling-an-interview-with-the-makers-love-radio/](http://i-docs.org/2014/05/01/transmedia-storytelling-an-interview-with-the-makers-love-radio/)>
- Little, Kenneth Lindsay. *African Women in Towns: An Aspect of Africa's Social Revolution*. Cambridge UP, 1973.
- Liu, Alan. "Imagining the New Media Encounter." *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*. Ed. Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. 3-25.

- Love Radio: Episodes of Love and Hate*. Dir. Anoeck Steketee and Eefje Blankevoort. Transmedia documentary. *LoveRadio-Rwanda.org*. 7 April 2014 – 16 June 2014.<sup>50</sup>
- Love, Allison. "Soap Opera Helping Rwandans Heal." *CNN.com*. 21 November 2014. <[edition.cnn.com/2014/11/20/world/cnnphotos-rwanda-radio-show/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/20/world/cnnphotos-rwanda-radio-show/index.html)>
- Magano, Thato. "[REVIEW] Long Story SHORT: Renate spellbinds as she reads Zukiswa Wanner's 'The F-Word.'" *Vanguard*. 22 September 2015. <[vanguardmagazine.co.za/review-renate-spellbinds-reading-zukiswa-wanners-the-f-word-as-they-take-african-literature-digital/](http://vanguardmagazine.co.za/review-renate-spellbinds-reading-zukiswa-wanners-the-f-word-as-they-take-african-literature-digital/)>
- Mager, Astrid. "Algorithmic ideology: How capitalist society shapes search engines." *Information, Communication & Society* 15.5 (2012): 769-787.
- Malec, Jennifer. "'We can't complain about people not buying our books when we aren't writing for them': Jennifer Malec chats to bestselling author Dudu Busani-Dube." *Johannesburg Review of Books*. 7 May 2017. <[johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2018/05/07/we-cant-complain-about-people-not-buying-our-books-when-we-arent-writing-for-them-jennifer-malec-chats-to-bestselling-author-dudu-busani-dube/](http://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2018/05/07/we-cant-complain-about-people-not-buying-our-books-when-we-arent-writing-for-them-jennifer-malec-chats-to-bestselling-author-dudu-busani-dube/)>
- Manieson, Gladys Agyeiwaa and Patricia Beatrice Mireku-Gyimah. "The Changing Audience of Oral Performance in Africa: The Ghanaian Experience." *Journal of Communication and Culture*. International perspective, Nigeria. 3.3 (2012): 1-11.
- Margini, Matt. "Hamlet on the Holodeck: Twenty Years Later." *The New Yorker.com*. 30 August 2017. <[www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/hamlet-on-the-holodeck-twenty-years-later](http://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/hamlet-on-the-holodeck-twenty-years-later)>
- Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*. Ed. Thomas Burton Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel. London: Pelican, 1961.
- Masilela, Johnny. "The Long and Short Project: Getting South Africans to read." *Mail & Guardian*. 27 March 2015. <[mg.co.za/article/2015-03-26-long-and-short-of-it](http://mg.co.za/article/2015-03-26-long-and-short-of-it)>
- Matakala, Chaze. "The Foxy Five: The Young, Black & Female Web Series South Africa Needs." *Okay Africa.com*. 22 June 2016. <[www.okayafrika.com/the-foxy-five-web-series-south-africa/](http://www.okayafrika.com/the-foxy-five-web-series-south-africa/)>
- Meraji, Shereen Marisol. "Sex And 'An African City': A Steamy Ghanaian Show You Don't Want to Miss." *NPR*. 29 March 2016. <[www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/03/29/471478897/sex-and-an-african-city-a-steamy-ghanaian-show-you-dont-want-to-miss](http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/03/29/471478897/sex-and-an-african-city-a-steamy-ghanaian-show-you-dont-want-to-miss)>
- Mitchell, William J. "Originals and Copies." *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*. MIT P, 1992. 49-85.
- Moore, Richard K. "Democracy and Cyberspace." *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age*. Ed. Barry N. Hague and Brian D Loader. Routledge, 1999. 39-59.
- Mowatt, Rasul A., Bryana H. French & Dominique A. Malebranche. "Black/female/body hypervisibility and invisibility: a black feminist augmentation of feminist leisure research." *Journal of Leisure research* 45 (2013): 644-660.

---

<sup>50</sup> *Love Radio*'s tap stories are only available by accessing the website via smartphone.

- Mukerji, Chandra, and Michael Schudson. "Introduction." *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*. U of California P., 1991. 1-61.
- Mupotsa, Danai S. "Feeling backwards: temporal ambivalence in An African City." *Feminist Theory* 20.2 (2019): 1-14.
- Murray, Janet H. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. MIT P, 1997.
- Nesbitt-Ahmed, Zahrah. "Reclaiming African Literature in the Digital Age: An Exploration of Online Literary Platforms" *Critical African Studies* 9:3 (2017): 377-390.
- Newell, Stephanie, and Onookome Okome. "Introduction." *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*. London: Routledge, 2014. 1-46.
- Ngubane, Veli. "Young, Gifted & Killing It: Jabu Nadia Newman." Mark Lives.com. 31 August 2017. <[www.marklives.com/2017/08/young-gifted-killing-it-jabu-nadia-newman/](http://www.marklives.com/2017/08/young-gifted-killing-it-jabu-nadia-newman/)>
- Obbo, Christine. *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*. Zed Books, 1980.
- Ochieng, Akinyi. "Is 'An African City' a True Portrayal of the Urban African Woman?" *Okay Africa.com*. 29 March 2016. <[www.okayafrica.com/an-african-city-urban-african-woman/](http://www.okayafrica.com/an-african-city-urban-african-woman/)>
- Ogola, George. "Re-reading the 'Popular' in African Popular Culture." *Popular Media in Kenyan history: Fiction and Newspapers as Political Actors*. Springer, 2017.
- "On the Move: Aniek Steketee & Eefje Blankevoort." *Art Tube*. Date unavailable. <[www.arttube.nl/en/videos/on-the-move-anoek-steketee-eefje-blankevoort](http://www.arttube.nl/en/videos/on-the-move-anoek-steketee-eefje-blankevoort)>
- Opar, Josephine. "'Tuko Macho': The Slick Kenyan Crime Series You Need to be Watching." *OkayAfrica.com*. 29 August 2016. <[www.okayafrica.com/tuko-macho-kenyan-crime-series-watch/](http://www.okayafrica.com/tuko-macho-kenyan-crime-series-watch/)>
- Otiye, Fredrick Wawire. "Reading Culture, Cultivation and its Promotion Among Pupils: A Kenyan Perspective." *International Research Journal of Library, Information and Archival Studies* 1.1 (2011): 1-5.
- Paine, Ayanda-Allie. "Meet the author of the 'Hlomu' love stories." Interview. *ENCA.com*. 2 July 2017. <[www.enca.com/life/meet-the-author-of-the-hlomu-love-stories](http://www.enca.com/life/meet-the-author-of-the-hlomu-love-stories)>
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Author of 'Hlomu The Wife' - Part 2." Interview. *ENCA.com*. 2 July 2017. <[www.enca.com/media/video/author-of-hlomu-the-wife-part-2](http://www.enca.com/media/video/author-of-hlomu-the-wife-part-2)>
- Palfrey, John Gorham, and Urs Gasser. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*. Basic Books, 2008.
- Papacharissi, Zizi. "The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere." *New Media & Society* 4.1 (2002): 9-27.
- Peck, David. "Tuka Macho - TIFF 2016 - Interview with the Nest Collective (Episode 231)." *YouTube.com*. 20 October 2016.
- "Picture Story: Love Radio Rwanda." *Photo District News*. 5 November 2014. <[www.pdnonline.com/gear/techniques/video-filmmaking/picture-story-love-radio-rwanda/](http://www.pdnonline.com/gear/techniques/video-filmmaking/picture-story-love-radio-rwanda/)>
- Pype, Katrien. "Blackberry Girls and Jesus's Brides." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 46.4 (2016): 390-416.
- Rand Daily Mail*. 26 Jan. 1927: 12. *Readex.com*. Accessed 13 Nov. 2018.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 31 Jan. 1930: 12. *Readex.com*. Accessed 13 Nov. 2018.
- Rucht, Dieter. "The Quadruple 'A': Media Strategies of Protest Movements Since the 1960s." *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements*. Ed. Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, and Dieter Rucht. Routledge, 2004: 25-48.
- Salo, Elaine, Mario Ribas, Pedro Lopes and Márcio Zamboni. "Living our lives on the edge: Power, space and sexual orientation in Cape Town townships, South Africa." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 7.4 (2010): 298-309.
- Scott, Jacqui. "Books and digital publishing in Africa: what does the future hold?." *Africa Bibliography* 2011 (2012): vii-xvii.
- Shapstack, Toby. "South Africa has 21 Million Internet Users, Mostly on Mobile." *Forbes*. 19 July 2017. <[www.forbes.com/sites/tobyshapshak/2017/07/19/south-africa-has-21m-internet-users-mostly-on-mobile/#4a309a841b2d](http://www.forbes.com/sites/tobyshapshak/2017/07/19/south-africa-has-21m-internet-users-mostly-on-mobile/#4a309a841b2d)>
- Shirky, Clay. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York: Penguin, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Forward." *Mediactive*. Author Dan Gillmore. Creative Commons, 2010. ix-xi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "How Social Media Can Make History." *Ted.com*. June 2009. <[www.ted.com/talks/clay\\_shirky\\_how\\_cellphones\\_twitter\\_facebook\\_can\\_make\\_history](http://www.ted.com/talks/clay_shirky_how_cellphones_twitter_facebook_can_make_history)>
- Siskin, Clifford. *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830*. John Hopkins UP, 1999.
- Smith, Jada F. "A 'Sex and the City' for African Viewers." *New York Times.com*. 13 August 2016. <[www.nytimes.com/2016/08/14/fashion/an-african-city-sex-and-the-city.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/14/fashion/an-african-city-sex-and-the-city.html)>
- Sondiyazi, Asandele. "The Foxy Five: Issue-driven, thinly written but rich with potential." *Mail & Guardian*. 10 May 2017. <[mg.co.za/article/2017-05-09-the-foxy-five-issue-driven-thinly-written-but-rich-with-potential](http://mg.co.za/article/2017-05-09-the-foxy-five-issue-driven-thinly-written-but-rich-with-potential)>
- Sosibo, Kwanele. "Thando Mgqolozana on how can we decolonise SA literature." *Mail & Guardian*. 14 Mar 2016. <[mg.co.za/article/2016-03-14-author-mgqolozana-how-can-we-decolonise-sa-literature](http://mg.co.za/article/2016-03-14-author-mgqolozana-how-can-we-decolonise-sa-literature)>
- Soudien, Amie. "Jabu Nadia Newman casts a new gaze." *Mail & Guardian*. 5 May 2017. <[mg.co.za/article/2017-05-05-00-jabu-nadia-newman-casts-a-new-gaze](http://mg.co.za/article/2017-05-05-00-jabu-nadia-newman-casts-a-new-gaze)>
- Staub, Ervin. "Reconciliation after Genocide, Mass Killing, or Intractable Conflict: Understanding the Roots of Violence, Psychological Recovery, and Steps toward a General Theory." *Political Psychology* 27.6 (2006): 867-894.
- Stratton, Florence. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. Taylor & Francis, 1994.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. OUP, 1986.
- Tuko Macho. Dir. Jim Chuchu. *ThisistheNest.com*. 16 June 2016 – 13 October 2016.
- Vadde, Aarthi. "Amateur Creativity: Contemporary Literature and the Digital Publishing Scene." *New Literary History* 48.1 (2017): 27-51.
- Van de Wetering, Geert. "The Creators of 'Love Radio.'" *SubmarineChannel.com*. Date unavailable. <[submarinechannel.com/profiles/profiles-love-radio/](http://submarinechannel.com/profiles/profiles-love-radio/)>
- Van Dijk, Jan AGM. *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. Thousand Sage Publications, 2005.



- Walker, Cheryl. "Introduction." *Women and resistance in South Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New Africa Books, 1991. 1-8.
- Wanner, Zukiswa. "Writing's on the wall for parochial SA publishers." *Mail & Guardian*. 27 Sep 2017. <[mg.co.za/article/2017-09-27-00-writings-on-the-wall-for-parochial-sa-publishers](http://mg.co.za/article/2017-09-27-00-writings-on-the-wall-for-parochial-sa-publishers)>
- Warner, Kristen J. "They Gon' Think You Loud Regardless: Ratchetness, Reality Television, and Black Womanhood." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 30.1 (88) (2015): 129-153.
- Wasserman, Herman. "African Histories of the Internet." *Internet Histories* 1.1-2 (2017): 129-137.
- White, Gareth. *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture*. Glasgow: Collins, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Culture is Ordinary." *The Everyday Life Reader*. Ed. Ben Highmore. London: Routledge, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Long Revolution*. London: Penguin, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Wurth, Kiene Brillenburg, ed. *Between Page and Screen: Remaking Literature Through Cinema and Cyberspace*. New York: Fordham UP, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Sara Rosa Espi, and Inge Van De Ven. "Visual Text and Media Divergence: Analogue Literary Writing in a Digital Age." *European Journal of English Studies* 17.1 (2013): 92-108.
- Young, Dennis John. "Book hunger and the political economy of the South African booktrade: structural and policy constraints on the production and distribution of academic books." Diss. U of Natal, 1994.
- Zell, Hans M. "Print vs. Electronic, and the 'Digital Revolution' in Africa." *The African Book Publishing Record* 39.1 (2013): 1-19.