Introduction

Cajetan Iheka and Jeanne-Marie Jackson

The African humanities have been powerfully shaped by attention to Africa's rendering from without. At least since the publication of V. Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* (1988) and *The Idea of Africa* (1994), the "constructedness" of the continent has haunted critical inquiry into its expressive strategies and traditions. To speak of "Africa" almost always now invites disclaimers and qualifications: Whose Africa? Which parts? What differences are effaced by its expression as a single entity? This caution has been hard-won. In his introduction to *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe affirms that it "is in [the] very discourses" of culture, authenticity, and tradition, as perceived from beyond their experiential dictates, "that African worlds have been established as realities for knowledge."[1] Taking their cues in part from Edward Said's 1978 classic *Orientalism*, even the titles of Mudimbe's books bespeak the legacies of poststructuralist thought. African self-representation, in this constructivist account, can never be fully disentangled from what others have projected onto a notional "Africa." The "dichotomizing system" that Mudimbe sees as having emerged from European colonialism, and which was then enforced also in the *African* literary domain as "paradigmatic oppositions" like "traditional versus modern" and "oral versus written and printed,"[2] had therefore to be dealt with and dispelled before it was possible to attend to more granular kinds of co-constitution.

But in some ways, at this point, focusing on the image or idea *of* Africa has become a critical diversion from thinking about ideas *in* and *from* it. Even as "Africa" remains a trenchant object through which to theorize and critique the discursive (mal)formation of continental self-understanding, a full account of Africa's intellectual situation as it enters and makes sense of postcolonial modernity must seek a finer grain of give and take between self and other, global image and local imagination. *Intellectual Traditions of African Literature, 1960–2015* aims to find such conceptual balance by chronicling African literature's development, between 1960 and 2015, as

a mode of critical thought in its own right, which works in symbiosis with "criticism" presented as such both within and beyond the university. Its unifying presupposition is that literature both generates intellectual frameworks and engages with those elaborated in and by other domains, but that such exchange does not map neatly onto a geographical inside (the unlucky "construct") versus outside (the empowered "constructor"). Literature is an active but not isolated participant in developing a vocabulary to help Africans make sense of the world, at the same time as it helps the world make sense of Africans *as* they figure things out. These operations are and must be difficult to prise apart. "Discourse is *both* later than, and prefigures – even predicts, wills, makes happen – actions, events, changes in society," Tejumola Olaniyan wrote in his essay "African Literature in the Post-Global Age: Provocations on Field Commonsense."[3] With Olaniyan's description as a jumping-off point, this volume can be viewed as a series of historical footholds in African literature's work as a discursive agent. In the Foucauldian sense of discourse, this means that African literature has made certain visions of Africa intelligible through persistent, shared engagement with select key terms. And it is these terms – or levers for moving between texts' generation of concepts and concepts' explanatory force turned back on texts – that this book catalogs.

At the same time, the contributors to *Intellectual Traditions of African Literature, 1960–2015* all retain an interest in African literature's attachment to specific historical events. If, as Peter Gordon writes, "intellectual history is the study of intellectuals, ideas, and intellectual patterns over time,"[4] then the volume may also be seen as a collective intellectual-historical intervention. Its remit is nonetheless "literary" in its chapters' attention to the relationship between texts' internal ways of making meaning and their worldly reception, and so the key terms it homes in on are those with particular salience to literary studies. *Intellectual Traditions of African Literature, 1960–2015* aims to add an explicitly conceptual, meta-methodological dimension to the field's larger stocktaking effort – captured in recent books including the *Routledge Handbook of African Literature* (2019), Blackwell's *Companion to African Literatures* (2020), and Bloomsbury's *African Literatures as World Literatures* (2022) – by organizing African literature's evolution from the independence era onward by frameworks or lenses whose explication entails different "layers" of textual production: periodicity bumps up against thematic recursion and historical movements are interwoven through individual case studies. This is a worthwhile mission not only in terms of advancing literary studies as such, but because the current swell of interest in the humanities' "decolonization" has helped

elevate African literature to a more central position in the discipline at large. Its significance to a profession-wide reckoning should not, however, be taken to mean that African literature's path has been straightforward; this project aims for balance between questions and clarity.

Our starting point of 1960 nods to the era of African national independence as also that in which African literature is consolidated as a self-conscious field of discursive engagement. There were, of course, African texts produced long before this period. J. E. Casely Hayford's Gold Coast novel, *Ethiopia Unbound*, the first to be published in English nonserially by an African, was published in 1911, and Thomas Mofolo's Sotho-language novel *Chaka* was first published in 1925. Expanding the definition of "literature" beyond such heavily institutionalized "modern" forms as the novel invites a far longer chronology than that offered here, extending as far back as 3000 BCE in the northern part of the continent.[5] A more generically and chronologically expansive definition of African literature would also include proto-national histories rich with authorial commentary, such as Casely Hayford's *Gold Coast Native Institutions* from 1903 or Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* from 1916, to take only two major works written in English. The year 1960 nonetheless remains a watershed moment, due to the heated debates about African cultural legacies – and with it, textual agency – that decolonization brings to the fore. Robert July's summary of this intellectual epoch in his 1987 study, *An African Voice: The Role of the Humanities in African Independence*, is apt: he sees independence in and around 1960 as marking a turning point in African humanists' "[concern] with cultural independence through a renascent indigenous civilization."[6]

Whether or not he is the "father of African literature," a common and controversial appellation, Chinua Achebe's publication of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 also kicks off a new era of critical reckoning with African literature *as* literature along these lines. Rather than be received as an anthropological curiosity, it generated far-reaching discussion of what Simon Gikandi calls its "symbolic economy"[7] to invite contemplation of how different dimensions of human life connect. No one before this, to follow Gikandi, "had the effect Achebe had on the establishment and reconfiguration of an African literary tradition; none of them were able to enter and interrupt the institutions of exegesis and education the same way he did; none were able to establish the terms by which African literature was produced, circulated, and interpreted."[8] The publication of *Things Fall Apart* also coincides with an unprecedented vigor around African cultures' institutionalization, represented not least by the founding of Heinemann's famous African Writers Series, and that novel's republication under its

aegis, in 1962. And as Jonathon Earle notes helpfully, "the discipline of academic African intellectual history [also] traces its beginnings to the late 1950s and early 1960s," as historians, writers, and activists found common cause in "[reimagining] the possibilities of a postcolonial world."[9] For the purposes of a volume like this one, which charts the development of conceptual levers across a literary era, it does not matter so much that a perception of origins is failsafe, just that it has been definitive.

The 1960s, then, were a crucial turning point for African letters. The emergence of African intellectual history as a discipline, the establishment of the African Writers Series following the acclaimed publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and the dawn of the independence era: all of these happened on the cusp of a new decade. The period also witnessed several key institutionalizing events, including the epochal Conference of African Writers of English Expression, convened at Makerere University in Uganda in 1962. It was at Makerere that certain writers, now counted among the continent's most influential, met for the first time. As perhaps the most famous example of the conference's field-consolidating legacy, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has written effusively about his encounter there with Achebe. Indeed, no history of African literature or criticism would be complete without this historical reference point. This is owing especially to the fact that the two major questions discussed at the conference – the definition and scope of what constitutes African literature, and the language of its expression – remain pertinent to African literary studies even now.[10] It is in part for the disagreement around the latter concern that the conference has been canonized in the intellectual history of African literature, with "the language question" standing in for a larger debate about how best to position oneself vis-à-vis Africa's colonial inheritance.

By all accounts, while critics such as Obiajunwa Wali rejected literatures written in English and other European languages, arguing that such a move would result in a "dead end," others such as Achebe and Gabriel Okara contended that European languages could be adapted to convey African realities. It is within the context of this opposition that Achebe made his oft-repeated claim about English's flexibility for writing about the continent: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings."[11] Achebe's preference for an Igbo-inflected English speaks to the hybridity that marks his work; as Isidore Okpewho has written, in *Things Fall Apart* "the English language [is] forced to assume lexical and semantic burdens for which it was never designed."[12] This willingness to

adapt rather than reject a primary instrument of British colonization – or at least, to see English's ubiquity as a foregone conclusion – resonated with other writers insistent on shifting its contours to accommodate the cadences of their cultural milieus. Among those sympathetic to Wali's position, on the other hand, was Ngũgĩ, who went on to experiment with writing first in Kikuyu and subsequently translating into English. But theirs remains a minority position despite the topic's apparently evergreen salience, not least because of a failure, in Gikandi's words, to "propose a new program that would mediate the ambivalent relation between language and national identity," specifically "a program that would answer a question that continues to haunt cultural production in Africa: does the nation depend on a single unifying language to sustain its identity, or is the national space inherently polyglot?"[13] Most well-known African writers continue to produce work in the so-called European languages, albeit with the resulting poesis often inflected by a marked attentiveness to cultural difference.[14] Achebe, Okara, and Ken Saro-Wiwa may have consecrated Igbo-English, Ijaw-English, and pidgin, respectively, in their cultural texts, but their projects are invested in the appropriation of English to speak across a multilingual and multiethnic Nigeria, Africa, and world.

Nevertheless, the issue of language continues to resonate in African literary studies, as evidenced by a 2018 *Journal of African Cultural Studies* forum on the language of African literature (wherein Biodun Jeyifo affirmed English as an African language), as well as by books like Tobias Warner's 2019 *The Tongue-Tied Imagination*, which pries open the question from the standpoint of Senegal's literary culture.[15] This is no doubt because of lingering and unresolved – and probably irresoluble – uneasiness around African cultures' porosity. Even beyond the language question as such, the 1962 conference set the stage for the many ways in which a broad set of tensions between cosmopolitanism/difference and traditionalism/collectivity have shaped intellectual traditions of African letters. A number of related arguments can also be traced back to Makerere: the charge of obscurantism leveled there against African writers deemed to be enthralled by modernism, for one, and for another, disputes about the place of "theory" in African literary criticism. Wali emerged as the African literary rascal of the 1960s, with his Makerere paper critiquing African writing in European languages (later published as "The Dead End of African Literature?").[16] But Chinweizu, we might say, quickly overtook him as the *enfant terrible* of the 1970s. In an essay cowritten with Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike that was later included in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, Chinweizu and his collaborators take

aim at a number of revered Nigerian poets, including Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka, for their obscurantism.[17] As Gikandi summarizes the controversy, Chinweizu and his cowriters "attacked what [they] considered to be the elitism of African literature, especially poetry, and its concern with abstract themes and images at the expense of real experiences."[18] At issue here is clearly an anxiety over the imprint of modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound on the work of African writers and whether such influence results in an escapist literature that circumvents the challenges of a continent emerging from the throes of colonialism. Put simply, Chinweizu betrays a preference for realism over the modernist inclination of a poet such as Soyinka, thereby aligning himself, nonetheless, with a transcontinental intellectual tradition that long predates him.

Realism and modernism, as they manifest in African literature, receive considerable treatment in this collection; it is worth stating outright that these conceptual categories galvanized conversations about social commitment in African letters, the possibilities and demerits of art for art's sake, and the political implications of African literary aesthetics. Recent books by Monica Popescu and Peter Kalliney clarify that with the mobilization of modernism and realism as alternatives to one another, African writing was drawn into the orbit of Cold War cultural politics.[19] As Popescu argues in *At Penpoint*, we ought to take "a look at African cultural production as simultaneously a gauge of, material trace of, and contributor to the formation of Cold War narratives, both taking from and giving form to this global discourse."[20] We now know that CIA covert funding sponsored *Transition Magazine* (founded in Uganda in 1961) and *Black Orpheus* (founded in Nigeria in 1957), as well as the Makerere Conference itself. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, sought ideological influence by funding *Lotus Magazine* (founded in Tashkent in 1958) and meetings of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association. At the same time, it is important to heed Kalliney's warning in *The Aesthetic Cold War*, against assuming that African writers fell in line with such efforts to enlist them in an aesthetic regime. Even as both liberal "West" and communist "East" sought to sway African writers' negotiation of modernism and realism to accord with their respective ideologies, "many writers, including Achebe, were happy to receive accolades and tangible support from both sides."[21] By focusing on intellectual lenses *as such* as they evolve around and through literary texts, instead of casting them merely as epiphenomena of historical or political developments, this volume can attend to such both/and or neither/nor positions.

A story of African literature built through intellectual frameworks also permits useful toggling between the real and the ideal. Even amid its

staunchest commitments to continental issues and struggles, African literature and its criticism have been resolutely worldly. Critics did not just take up the question of whether African writers ignored social responsibility with obscure prose and modernist techniques; they also queried the relevance of "foreign" critical theory to the interpretation of African literature. Chidi Amuta calls this phenomenon the "quaint domestications of theoretical paradigms and models from the bourgeois West" in his *Theory of African Literature*, where he lays out an Africa-derived approach to the field.[22] But even Amuta, like Ngũgĩ before him, finds Marxism appealing and so looks to a critical school developed outside Africa in his continental rallying cry. Given the anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic disposition of the African literatures and criticism of the 1960s and 1970s, it is not surprising that Marxism found favor among many critics; Amuta, for example, argued for its adaptation to apprehend the conditions of South African apartheid and of neocolonialism in newly independent African nations. On the other hand, theoretical frameworks like feminism received ample pushback and were often dismissed as Western impositions. Even women writers and critics who were sympathetic to feminism's fundamental critique of patriarchal exploitation, and its assertion of female subjectivity, often avoided the term, or chose alternative concepts like "womanism" in order to avoid its racialized Western baggage.[23] By "worldly," then, we mean a self-conscious engagement with concepts' origins, boundaries, and implications. To adapt Edward Said's well-worn description of the term from *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, African writers' postcolonial situation demands acute attention to delimiting "the culture to which critics are bound filiatively (by birth, nationality, profession)" as considered against "a method or system acquired affiliatively (by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation)."[24]

Through the late 1990s and early 2000s, and approaching the present volume's stopping point of 2015, this nexus of postcolonial concerns gave way to an emphasis on global exchange that in most accounts restored appreciation of multidirectional traffic between Africa and elsewhere. In that spirit, the twenty-first-century literary field turned the page from European empires to consider different "elsewheres" that throw up fresh challenges to longstanding projects of African cultural consolidation. China was (and is) everywhere. And so even if colonialism retains its explanatory hold on the African literary landscape (as the post-2015 surge of interest in "decolonization" attests), new intellectual priorities have entered the field. The most influential and contentious of these have been crystallized by terms like "Afropolitanism" and "Africa Rising," both of

which have frequently been accused of catering to a transnationally mobile and economically privileged African class. Whatever the social valence or (mis)interpretations surrounding such frameworks, the relevant point here is that their priorities and reception were put forth mainly through African literature. Taiye Selasi, the progenitor of Afropolitanism's most popular iteration in what is now a canonical 2005 essay called "Bye-Bye Babar," is first and foremost a novelist.[25] Books like her own *Ghana Must Go*, alongside Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* – all from 2013 – were at the center of heated public conversations about precisely *which* intellectual lenses were best suited to twenty-first-century African concerns. Meanwhile, literary kinds of "close reading" gained traction in adjacent African humanities like urban studies.[26] Much as writing generates analytic concepts and concepts inform writing, reductive ideas *of* Africa have sometimes been advanced, through literature and criticism, by ideas *from* it.

The foregoing demonstrates that African literature and criticism have been sharpened by and contributed to the largest intellectual currents of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In other words, African writers appropriated, adapted, expanded, and refined theoretical and conceptual terms such as Marxism, nationalism, feminism, and queer theory via their confrontation of particular African realities. As the continent grappled with late colonialism, and as newly independent African countries struggled with managing sovereignty beginning in the 1960s, discourses of nationalism, Third Worldism, and Pan-Africanism provided conceptual vocabularies and critical templates for writers and critics of African literature. Part I, "Decolonization Currents," considers the impact of decolonization on African letters and literary imprints on African decolonization. Its chapters query how the language and praxis of nationalism furnish the infrastructure of African letters, the impact of negritude, and the role of Pan-Africanism in the formation of African literature as well as its legacies today. Further, the section appraises African literature within the context of the Cold War, examining the role of the geopolitical rivalry in shaping the contours of African literature. Other topics include how the cultural apparatuses of the broader Third World movements affect the institutions and institutionalization of African literature and to what use African writers – many of them self-professed nationalists and decolonizers – put intellectual concepts such as modernism and nationalism. How did these writers grapple with the European provenance of these terms and what compromises and adaptations did they make to Africanize these concepts?

Part II accounts for the significance of the "Theoretical Turn" in African letters and how African literature and criticism in turn contributed to the theoretical landscape. With the failures of independence in Africa and the neocolonial tethering of the continent to the World Bank and donor countries, an aesthetics of disillusionment, marked by intense scrutiny of the nation, crept into African letters. As decolonization receded, the theoretical turn in the humanities and humanistic social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s provided fresh language and vision for African writers and critics to reconceptualize their craft. Postmodernism, for example, offered a theoretical language for deconstructing the grand narrative of the nation, just as feminism offered a vehicle for toppling the edifice of patriarchy. Chapters in this unit examine the contributions of theoretical formulations such as postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and feminism to the development of African literature, with questions including how African writers and critics used theory in deepening the systemization of the field, how they have grappled with the provenance of literary theories in their works, and how the African context of enunciation has extended or challenged these theories.

If the 1960s marked the peak of decolonization, and a theoretical turn took root in the 1970s and 1980s, the contemporary moment, beginning in the 1990s, is characterized by an intense attunement to matter and materialism in the face of global inequalities and the climate crisis. Chapters in Part III, "Contemporary Reconfigurations or Shifting Globalities and Positionalities," probe how African letters and the criticism thereof have responded to intellectual reconfigurations in the twenty-first century, attending to the writerly and readerly protocols of African literature as they respond to digital humanities, new materialisms, ecocriticism and the environmental humanities, and the proliferation of nonhuman epistemologies attuned to African ways of knowing. If Part I is undergirded by anti-colonialism, and postcolonialism is a critical anchor of the second, the inclusion of world literature as an organizing rubric in Part III testifies to the transformations in the broad field of literary studies and evidences African literature's imbrication within a more "decentered" profession.

In short, the materialist disposition of the 1960s critique of colonialism and neocolonialism in nationalist terms, the theoretical repositioning of African literature in the 1970s and 80s, and the transnational turn of the field since the 1990s have corresponded with the anti-colonial/Third Worldist, postcolonial, and world literature/global anglophone frames of the field. Whereas early African writers struggled to find publishing outlets for their work outside their country of origin (at least until the founding

of the African Writers Series, which could publish only so many titles), contemporary African writers now frequently enjoy hefty advances from major publishers, feature prominently on bestseller lists, and achieve the status of cultural icons and influencers, with their texts receiving attention from major literary critics and becoming mainstays of world literature and global anglophone syllabi. African literature is indeed world literature, as a recent volume argues.[27] This "mainstreaming," so to speak, of African literature and other literatures from the Global South is often lauded as a sign of progress and global aspirations fulfilled, but many critics have also worried that newly consecrated texts and authors betray the political commitment of their predecessors. Critics of world literature have remarked that these texts are "born translated," for easy consumption, and risk the exoticism and commodification of the Other to court a global audience.[28] But African literature's implication in the market economy is as inevitable as its imbrication with the global intellectual concerns that the contributors to this volume explicate in the chapters that follow.

Each contribution works through a theoretical construct that has been influentially applied to and derived from a strategically selected archive of African texts, embracing rather than backing away from the sorts of controversies and forked critical paths we have outlined earlier in this Introduction. Their topics span both historical movements whose extraliterary origins find meaningful expression in literary works (e.g., negritude) and distinctively literary categories by which African writers negotiate broader commitments (e.g., magical realism). In this way, the book charts a loose historical trajectory without hewing to clear lines of development. Some chapters have overlap, providing complementary angles for viewing contentious and multifaceted moments in African literatures' self-definition. The chapter on Pan-Africanism, for example, shares some references with those on modernism and Third Worldism, much as the chapters on Afropolitanism and digital Africas intersect. At the same time, each chapter showcases a distinctive means of negotiating between literary and extraliterary concerns, as well as introduces a unique point of geographical and historical departure. The end result is a prismatic and yet more than usually systematic representation of how African literature in aggregate is shaped by its chosen terms of engagement at specific junctures.

Jill Jarvis' opening chapter, "Unfinished Communities: African Novels, African Nationalisms," reassesses, from an Algerian standpoint, the nation-building project of African literature as it coalesces in the 1960s. Beginning with North Africa is significant as the region has often been marginalized in the continent's literary histories. In prioritizing Algeria, the site

of a contested war of independence that has become emblematic of anti-colonial revolution in the Global South, Jarvis contends that African literature both power and disrupt nationalist discourse and Western-centered hermeneutic tools. Drawing on Kateb Yacine's novel *Nedjma*, read in relation to Fanon's work and poetry, Jarvis shows the affordance of close reading and contextual exegesis for scripting the intimacies of nationalist and novelistic projects in Africa. The chapter complicates the understanding of African literatures as national allegories and points to the limit of the field's allegorical commonsense, while demonstrating that African letters do also disrupt nationalist projects.

One enabler *and* disruptor of the nationalist project in Africa is the project of Pan-Africanism, which Tsitsi Jaji describes in Chapter 2 as an affective network and a collaborative project between African countries and between the continent and the diaspora. In this chapter, titled "Pan-Africanism," Jaji traces the term's currency since the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London through its subsequent iterations, as well as the literary assemblages exemplifying the term's collaborative and connective raison d'être. Focusing primarily on the literary dimensions of the concept and its place in the evolution of an African literary tradition, Jaji produces a wide-ranging essay, examining events such as the Makerere Conference, movements such as negritude (which resulted from the interactions of African and Caribbean intellectuals in France), and publications such as Langston Hughes' anthologies that connected African writers within the continent and linked them to their counterparts in the diaspora.

Negritude doesn't only serve as a lever of Pan-Africanism; Doyle Calhoun argues in "Negritude and the Promise of African Literature" that the concept is also fundamental to the past and future of African literature. Calhoun foregrounds the term's proliferative meanings, multiplied by sympathizers and critics alike, as he discusses the term's contested origins and relevance for African literature between the 1930s and 1960s and the recent resurgence of scholarship on the subject. Refusing negritude's death knell as he proposes an original, alternative source of the coinage, Calhoun stresses the imaginative, futuristic, and emancipatory power of negritude, qualities that render it relevant for the project of African letters for a long time.

Duncan Yoon's chapter, "Third Worldism in African Literature: China as a Trope in Dongala's Fiction," is concerned with the expression of Third Worldism as a crucial vector for African literature in the twentieth century. Yoon focuses on Emmanuel Boundzéki Dongala's fiction, particularly his short stories, to understand the workings of the tropes

of Maoist China in African literature. With Dongala's fiction, set in the Congo (Brazzaville), as case study, Yoon exposes the paradoxes of Third Worldism as it concerns the figure of Mao and the idea of revolution. Whereas Maoism appeared in certain African writing as inspiration against colonialism and apartheid on the continent, Yoon shows its ironic deployment in Dongala's fiction, where the revolution produces a one-party rule and its associated repressive excess. Yoon characterizes Third Worldism as both generating idealism and disillusionment in African literature.

If the anti-colonial solidarities of Third Worldism link African literature to the Bandung Conference and to China, modernism purportedly offers a route to the West. Nathan Suhr-Sytsma takes up the problematic of modernism in African literature in "Modernism and the Chimera of Modernity in African Letters." Weighing in on the modernism question vis-à-vis Africa, and the controversy surrounding its place in the continent's literary expressions, Suhr-Sytsma argues that modernism is primarily a technology for activating freedom in African literature. Demonstrating the latitude that he detects in the work of the writers that he discusses, Suhr-Sytsma's argument on modernism's decolonizing impulse in Africa emerges from a discussion of literary modernism in relation to modernism in African visual art and to nonmodernist literary modes such as realism.

Whereas modernism and realism are considered to be concepts appropriated from elsewhere, Christopher Warnes considers "magical realism" as a product of the naturalization of supernatural elements in local myths, folktales, fables, and other African oral genres. Warnes' "Magical Realism in African Literatures" rejects the influence model that traces magical realism's origin to Latin America, favoring instead a polygenesis approach. The latter model allows Warnes to argue that magical realism emerges from the naturalization of African supernatural elements that would otherwise be rejected in the realm of a "real" characterized by a Weberian disenchantment of the world. With examples drawn from a range of African writers including Amos Tutuola, Daniel O. Fagunwa, Ben Okri, and Ngũgĩ, Warnes posits magical realism as a quintessential African form that is not only grounded in local culture but also serves as a conduit for a global project of decolonial cultural affirmation in the face of colonial denigration.

Orality underpins magical realism and an African literature, more generally, that continues to negotiate an oral heritage. In "Orality and Modern African Writing," Isidore Diala assesses the experimentations enabled by Africa's rich oral heritage in its literature. Diala focuses on the stories and songs that formed the initial instantiation of literature on the continent and their transmutation and transformation in African writing. Orality

remains a shaping force of modern African letters in Diala's estimation; he posits that the oral serves as a counter-hegemonic device for African writers committed to espousing an African vision and as an experimental, formal strategy for literary creativity. Diala's chapter includes copious examples of literary texts and critical interlocutors who have shaped the deployment and perceptions of orality in African literature.

Part II begins with Stefan Helgesson's "The African Location of Postcolonialism." While this term is often critiqued for being the product of Third World intellectuals based in elite Western institutions, Helgesson offers a reappraisal of the term from an African context, dating its inauguration on the continent to a 1993 special issue of the Durban-based journal, *Current Writing*. In Helgesson's reading, postcolonialism allowed for local inflections that gain legibility from the concept's international power and authority. In locating postcolonialism in Africa as a theoretical enunciation deriving from contextual factors, rather than a top-down imposition from outside the continent, Helgesson recuperates understudied postcolonial materials mainly from South Africa, Angola, and Mozambique, works in which postcolonial preoccupations, including national imaginary, hybridity, and creolization, are recalibrated by the demands of specific intellectual contexts.

In "Descartes in His Pith Helmet: Afrofuturism and Genre Theory," Ranka Primorac takes up the question of genre in African literature. Chapter 9 instantiates the capacity of African cultural logics to radically remake established genre, exemplified in this case by the pressure that Afrofuturism exerts on the genres of science fiction (SF) and fantasy. Primorac argues that the Africanist intervention in generic reconstitution produces a new genre – Afrofuturism – that is a distinct intellectual tradition organizing creative projects and revitalizing critical dispositions on generic and narrative theories. Braiding a discussion of theoretical positions with readings of exemplary primary texts, Primorac outlines an African literary project that is transforming the outlook of future-oriented world literature.

Whereas Chapter 9 extrapolates Africa's contribution to genre theory, Michael Syrotinski's "Poststructuralism" investigates the workings of the concept in African literature. Syrotinski's turn to francophone and North Africa productively positions poststructuralist thought as an organic development from a multilingual and heterogeneous continent. Pointing to Jacques Derrida's Maghrebian roots, the formative force of deconstruction on postcolonialism, and the deconstructive thrust of African letters in a reading of writings by Achille Mbembe, Sony Lab'ou Tansi, and

Abdelkebir Khatibi, Syrotinski validates the pluralist underpinnings of both poststructuralism and African literature. Syrotinski attends to the centrality of Africa to theorizing poststructuralism's truth claims as he demonstrates how the theoretical construct allowed for boundless originality and stylistic heterogeneity in the continent's literature.

Asante Mtenje, in "Feminisms in African Literature: Conceptualizations and Epistemic Shifts in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries," argues that African women's writing has contributed substantially to broader African theorizations of feminism. Borrowing Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi's idea of "theorized fiction" or "fictionalized theory," the chapter considers how African women writers have grappled with questions of gender identity and definition, motherhood, and embodied sexuality. Mtenje also attends to the epistemic shifts and decolonial trajectories of African feminist thought, exploring their specifically literary enunciations. In moving from foundational African feminist texts to more contemporary fiction, she shows how literature has evolved to play an integral role in African conceptions of gender.

In the chapter that follows, on queer theory, Edgar Nabutanyi extends this effort to unearth the worldly force of literary works. He aims to historicize the subgenre of African queer literature by disaggregating formal and thematic shifts across its long and varied contestation of heteronormativity's dominance in African public discourses. His reading looks to Marc Epprecht's four philosophies of African queer fiction – shaped by pathology, Western corruption, imperial hypocrisy, and the humanization achieved by "coming out" narratives – to engage with the production, circulation, and criticism of the subgenre since the 1960s. Finally, Nabutanyi foregrounds contemporary Ugandan queer literature to demonstrate the significance of regional idiosyncrasy to any theorization of this larger African literary tradition.

Kirk Sides opens Part III of the volume, on "Contemporary Reconfigurations or Shifting Globalities and Positionalities," with his timely chapter on "The African Ecological Imaginary." The chapter examines some of the ways in which African literatures have interacted with and related to trends and turns in ecocriticism specifically and the environmental humanities more broadly. Reading a long history of environmental writing from the continent, the chapter aims to complicate some of the ways in which ecological thinking in African literatures – and by extension postcolonial literatures, more generally – has often become conflated with narratives of decolonization. Rather than start at the mid twentieth century, Sides returns to authors from the beginning of the twentieth century,

such as Sol T. Plaatje, for the ways in which earlier forms of anti-colonial politics can be seen to be articulated through an ecological imaginary that predates formal decolonization by almost half a century.

Sides' emphasis on reperiodizing African literary frameworks finds ready conversation with James Yékú's contribution on Afropolitanism. Although Afropolitanism is often taken to exhibit affinities with Pan-Africanism from decades before, what Yékú describes as its ontological poetics connect more closely with digital cosmopolitanism, or the condition of digital connectivity that centers the multiple roots and routes of global subjects entangled with the quotidian use of digital social networks. His chapter tracks the aesthetic contours of a recognizable Afropolitan literature and interrogates how its genealogies inform the so-called digital turn in African literary and cultural production. Yékú reads the Afropolitan moment in African literature as coterminous with a digital cosmopolitanism whose limitations intersect with and reify the commodifying logic that undermines Afropolitan forms.

Chapter 15, Mohammad Shabangu's chapter on world literature, also tracks African literary criticism's transition from a postcolonial paradigm to a more contemporary "global" one, albeit via a careful return to and reanimation of early works by Chinua Achebe and Assia Djebar. It reflects on a few crucial terms, such as locality and exteriority, that drive African literature's changing ideas of worldliness. Shabangu argues that what might seem like a recent turn to "world literature" vis-à-vis African letters allows us to see a longer tradition anchored in how African writers have interrogated "world-making." For whom and by whom, they ask, is the world made? The chapter argues that grand theories of world literature too often proceed as if the stakes of the debate are self-evident. But African writing, from the postcolonial through to more recent periods, entrenches a version of worldliness that destabilizes the centrality of "circulation" to literary world-making.

If digital culture is one of the key variables in claims about an African literary renaissance, including its reimagining as world literature, Ainehi Edoro-Glines, in Chapter 16, "Digital Africas," asks where its effects play out in African literary texts. She points to the impact of social media on making African writing globally legible and the impact of web-based publishing platforms on expanding the context for literary expression. Social media, Edoro-Glines argues, is a wholly new context for re-redefining literature in relation to the book, which is to say as a category carried over from a print-centered culture. Literary form now registers and contends with the formation of new kinds of media publics and intellectual practices,

making social media a key agent in the development of a new global literary economy founded on the redistribution of literary influence. Focusing on Instagram's culture of curation, the chapter explores how readers, writers, and publishers constitute African literature as a globally legible cultural object.

Ama Bemma Adwetewa-Badu's "The Black Diaspora's African Imagination" moves toward consideration of how relationships between geography and form help shape "diaspora" as a broad intellectual lens. The chapter reflects on the role of literary prizes and awards in how the category of African poetry is imagined and, in particular, how certain prizes facilitate diasporic writers' inclusion within it. Adwetewa-Badu focuses on the African Poetry Book Fund's Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poetry and the Brunel International African Poetry Prize (now known as the Evaristo African Poetry Prize) as forces for broadening the contemporary canon of African poetry. By studying these awards through the frame of *African* (rather than Afro-diasporic) literary and cultural production, she portrays both Africanity and diaspora as not just matters of a poet's location, but of the textual materials of the poem itself.

Moving between and among locales under shared conceptual rubrics nonetheless remains a fraught exercise, as Thando Njovane's chapter, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial African Fiction," demonstrates. Postcolonial literature scholarship, Njovane notes, in Chapter 18, has historically found resonance with Holocaust studies through a shared orientation to contested remembrances of the past as they inspire deep contemplation of both the human and the humane. She surveys how the theoretical lens of trauma theory, a key tool for making sense of the Holocaust and its legacies in the late 1980s, eventually extended to interrogate African literatures and cultures in the mid-2000s. But even as it has proved useful in providing new ways to remember and articulate atrocity and subjection in the African context, this interdisciplinary movement has yet to fully account for the problematic relationship between psychoanalysis and colonization.

Finally, Madhu Krishnan's "The Materialisms of African Literature" explores the varied facets through which conceptions of materialism manifest across the larger ecologies of textual production bundled under the rubric "African literature." The chapter treats both of these terms – materialism and literature – in deliberately broad and multiple meanings. Krishnan reads materialism variously in terms of critique (in its Marxist/socialist guise), aesthetics (formal elements), and context (material worlds and worldings). In each case, her goal is less to provide an authoritative understanding of

materialism as a unitary field of knowledge and more to consider the diverse kinds of expression through which the term is articulated in African writing. Through a series of close readings of texts both more and less canonical, Chapter 19 foregrounds the multiplicity of ways in which the African novel can be seen as an archive of materialist thought in all of its facets, even as it may elude easy affiliation with these materialist traditions.

Together, the chapters in the volume present African literature as an infrastructure that is both built by and conducive to the articulation of theoretical ideas and other epistemological forms. If the twin specters of theory and "Western" frameworks drove most of the field's anxieties during its institutional emergence in the 1960s, our 2015 cutoff point registers its theoretical-cum-conceptual consolidation. Rising and established African literary and critical leaders are now firmly entrenched in universities across the world, with African letters enjoying all kinds of mainstream prominence and remuneration. African systems of ideas that may once have been seen as "primitive" – animism, for example, or ancestral cosmologies – and that motivated a more baldly anthropological view of African literary production in the twentieth century are now pivotal to the generic reconfiguring of SF, fantasy, and indeed, the realist novel.[29] Taken as a whole, this book monumentalizes the multidirectional traffic between African literature and the larger intellectual constellations through and toward which it evolves. It presents the continental armature of African writing and criticism as a distinctive contribution to a global history of literature and ideas.

Notes

1. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana University Press, 1988), xi.
2. Ibid., 4.
3. T. Olaniyan, "African Literature in the Post-Global Age: Provocations on Field Commonsense," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 3.3 (2016), 387–396, 389.
4. P. E. Gordon, "What is Intellectual History? A Frankly Partisan Introduction to a Frequently Misunderstood Field," Spring 2012, https://ces.fas.harvard.edu/uploads/files/Reports-Articles/What-is-Intellectual-History-Essay-by-Peter-Gordon.pdf.
5. W. L. Belcher, "Early African Literature: An Anthology of Written Texts from 3000 BCE to 1900 CE," https://wendybelcher.com/african-literature/early-african-literature-anthology/.
6. R. W. July, *An African Voice: The Role of the Humanities in African Independence* (Duke University Press, 1987), x.

7. S. Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture," *Research in African Literatures*, 32.3 (2001), 3–8.
8. Ibid., 5.
9. J. L. Earle, "African Intellectual History and Historiography," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, November 20, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.305.
10. Tobias Warner describes the language question that unfolded at the June 1962 Makerere Conference and the francophone version in Dakar in 1963 as "a complicated intervention into the unfolding institutionalization of the category of African literature" (16). For a thorough examination of the language question in African literature and the two conferences, see Warner, *The Tongue-Tied Imagination: Decolonizing Literary Modernity in Senegal* (Fordham University Press, 2019).
11. C. Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (Anchor Books, 1975), 74–84.
12. I. Okpewho, "Introduction," in I. Okpewho (ed.), *Chinua Achebe's* Things Fall Apart*: A Casebook* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–54, 28.
13. S. Gikandi, "Ngũgĩ's Conversion: Writing and the Politics of Language," *Research in African Literatures*, 23.1 (1992), 131–144, 139.
14. Echoing Obi Wali, Ngũgĩ contends that "writers who should have been mapping paths out of that linguistic encirclement of their continent also came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of imperial imposition" (5). For his account of the Makerere Conference and take on the language question, see N. wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey, 1981).
15. B. Jeyifo, "English is an African Language – Ka Dupe! (For and Against Ngũgĩ)," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 30.2 (2018), 133–147; Warner, *The Tongue-Tied Imagination*.
16. O. Wali, "The Dead End of African Literature?" *Transition*, 10 (1963), 13–15.
17. O. J. Chinweizu, O. Jemie, & I. Madubuike, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (Howard University Press, 1983).
18. S. Gikandi, "Chinweizu," *Encyclopedia of African Literature* (Routledge, 2002), 146–147.
19. M. Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Duke University Press, 2020); P. Kalliney, *The Aesthetic Cold War: Decolonization and Global Literature* (Princeton University Press, 2022).
20. Popescu, *At Penpoint*, 4.
21. Kalliney, *Aesthetic Cold War*, 8.
22. C. Amuta, *Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism* (Zed Books, 1989), xv.
23. F. Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (Routledge, 1994), 13.
24. E. W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 25.
25. T. Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," *The LIP Magazine*, March 3, 2005, https://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/2005/03/03/bye-bye-barbar/.

26. A. Mbembe & S. Nuttall (eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Duke University Press, 2008).
27. A. Fyfe & M. Krishnan (eds.), *African Literatures as World Literature* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).
28. R. L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (Columbia University Press, 2015); G. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (Routledge, 2001).
29. J.-M. Jackson, *The African Novel of Ideas: Philosophy and Individualism in the Age of Global Writing* (Princeton University Press, 2021).