Contemporary African Screen Worlds

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Foreword

JONATHAN HAYNES

This fresh and wonderful book manages to feel adequate to the epochal shifts in media technologies over the last decades and to the equally dramatic transformations in Africa's mediated relations to the world. It explores what has grown through those changes: a dazzling explosion of creative energies, a plethora of humming new channels of communication, an outpouring of stories giving voice to an unprecedented range of African experiences.

The introduction to the book is ambitious, intellectually precise, and compelling in laying out the "screen worlds" framework. People enter a new field, or a new conception of a field, because their thoughts and feelings have changed about what work matters and would be exciting to do. This whole volume is singularly compelling in its human interest, running as it does on empathy and curiosity, and so should be influential in winning adherents to the screen worlds paradigm.

The book is kaleidoscopic, even more so than other collections with similarly vast geographic coverage, because it takes as its key subject and theme the interfaces formed by various kinds of screens—many kinds of interfaces, among film platforms, filmmakers, performers, and audiences. Different kinds of work are required to get at these relationships, including interpretative readings of film texts. But at the book's center are African people watching screens and the interview as a key heuristic and symbolic practice. There is no one world of African cinema, only a collection of many scenes and practices rendered vividly by a team of researchers with intimate local knowledge.

In her chapter, Elizabeth Olayiwola observes that the old cinema houses in Nigeria often became Pentecostal churches when the days of celluloid ended, and now Pentecostal churches are built to resemble cinemas because film has become so central to religious experience. Pier Paolo Frassinelli, in the hallowed

precincts of screenings at the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), observes that the audience won't turn off their phones. Solomon Waliaula shows us Kenyan housemaids watching Nollywood films. They do so while alone in their employers' homes, the families having gone out to school or formal-sector jobs. The housemaids use Nollywood's narratives to make sense of their own lives, which with distressing uniformity involve catastrophic dislocations and no clear path to possessing the kind of home in which they are left alone with the television—symbol of middle-class success, the regular reward for long-suffering Nollywood heroines.

The introduction celebrates the ethos of the level view that comes with participant observation and interviewing—or, better, *conversation*, a term that reduces the implied power imbalance. In her chapter, Lindiwe Dovey writes that her methodology "is feminist, collaborative, and conversational," and that it is crucial "that we continue to put ourselves in conversation with the people involved in the industrial screen worlds that produce and circulate those texts so that we can develop a clearer picture of how gender plays out in the practices of film labor behind the scenes."

This emphasis on conversation, as indispensable for capturing lived experiences and discovering the unforeseen, feeds into the volume's remarkable sociality, which I find moving and deeply attractive. The contributors were clearly prompted to put themselves into their story. This sometimes takes the form of identifying their subject position by race and so on, in the conventional contemporary way, but it extends to Temitayo Olofinlua's and Estrella Sendra's warm, cheerful admissions of their own fandom as they study how broadcasts spill into social media and spill again, vibrantly, into their own academic work—something like Plato's theory of the chain of inspiration in the *Ion*, only with cell phones.

The COVID-19 pandemic prevented much of the project's generous budget for workshopping and networking from being spent, but that side of the project was kept alive virtually, and the book has many traces of workshopping, shared reading lists, and a sense of common purpose and community, a shared expansive and expandable horizon. The kaleidoscopic fragments are not meant to add up to a totalizing whole, but they intercommunicate rhizomatically, just as the hugely complex and variegated media landscape is interconnected as never before, in ways and to an extent that define our age. The whole is greater than the sum of the book's parts.

It's time to say something about Lindiwe Dovey's role, while bearing in mind the contributions of her fine coeditors and other collaborators and her rather excruciating self-consciousness about her positionality as a white

woman with an elite education occupying a position of relative power and therefore obliged to undo that power. Still: she had the vision, got the grant, established the community, provided intellectual and pedagogical leadership, and—ceaselessly driven and energetic—animated the whole with her magnificent generosity of spirit.

The project blasts open old divisions that have balkanized the study of various kinds of media, so we can see more. It's provincializing: suddenly a lot of previous (and current) work seems blinkered. And it's deprovincializing, urging (as some other scholars have been urging, notably Moradewun Adejunmobi and Carmela Garritano) that African film studies stop talking so much to itself and engage with what's going on around the world. The introduction sets a strenuous example of doing this. Alexander Bud's remarkable chapter is an example of importing a new kind of film studies that has been flourishing in the North—close attention to the materialities of film production—and marrying it with the volume's commitment to locality and to interviewing. He has talked to a staggering number of people working in Nollywood in roles no one thought to pay much attention to before: set designers, location scouts and agents, upholsterers, metalworkers, electricians, carpenters, and painters. His analytical categories are numerous and precise, but the objective finally is to blur the boundaries between the "real," material world and the filmed world of illusions. Bud drills down until the comedy of Nigerian life comes gushing out: wealthy women like the prestige that comes from having their homes used as film locations, but their husbands are willing to outbid the filmmakers to bribe their wives into maintaining the household's privacy; the builder of a new Lagos housing estate did such a good job of making it look like Atlanta or Houston that prospective Nigerian expatriate buyers suspected that the advertisements were a "419" fraud scam, so the builder was glad to have Nollywood films shot there to attest to its reality. This is research that swings.

As the editors point out in the acknowledgments, most of the contributors are based in Africa and are at early stages of their careers, and so are doubly deprived of academic resources and power. The project shows that excellent, original, inspiring work can be done with simple tools. The appropriate technology is their "firmly grounded, horizontal, eye-level positions," the "groundedness that allows many of our authors to approach their subjects with the deep knowledge, humility, ethical engagement, and empathy that—in our view—leads to rigorous, insightful, *rich* research."

The one explicit polemical target is the conception of "world cinema" that conceives of its subject as an ideal collection of masterpieces—feature films, needless to say—contemplated with gentlemanly connoisseurship from an

invisible but implicitly air-conditioned, ideal, frictionless perspective that seems to float above the planet. No fieldwork is required; nothing fieldwork could teach would seem to be relevant. The screen worlds framework, in contrast, is about lived relationships to all kinds of media. In their chapter, Robin Steedman and Rashida Resario return to this polemic, pointing out that the subjects of their research would be invisible to "world cinema," arguing with some asperity for the absolute necessity of fieldwork and invoking Lizelle Bisschoff's cautions about overenthusiastic assessments of the potentials of digital technologies. They continue: "Infrastructural constraints remain highly relevant, but so too do human capital, social position, and skills. In order to understand the differing trajectories of film businesses in Ghana, we must be aware of the link between offline inequality and the ability to seize opportunities in digital spaces." Digital technologies enable nearly all the phenomena this book studies, but the researchers are too grounded in specific realities to be utopian.

Only a few chapters address the shapes of African film as they have been conceived in African film studies. Frassinelli's chapter about the FESPACO film festival's fiftieth birthday pays tribute to a noble tradition but notices the old unresolved tensions, including FESPACO's hostility toward the video revolution. The mood of anxious disquiet about the future that seemed to pervade the festival is strikingly different from the exuberant precarity of Lagos. The conflict between FESPACO and Nollywood parallels in some ways that between world cinema and screen worlds: the former has similar investments that are liable to be diminished, in practice, in the wider horizon; the role anthropologists played in establishing Nollywood studies gives it a family relationship with screen worlds.

But Femi Eromosele sees Nollywood and Nollywood studies as a problem, a hulking blockage that occludes other media forms such as music videos. To which I have two responses, one being that Nollywood was a genuine world-historical revolution and the stakes of the present and immediate future are enormous and require urgent attention. My other response is, yes of course: Nollywood certainly didn't come out of nowhere; in its classic form it has already begun to seem to belong to the historical past and shouldn't fill the whole horizon. One lesson this volume teaches, if we needed to learn it, is that things are changing so quickly that everything must be described as existing in a specific historical moment. I am struck by the fact that three of the leading American midcareer Nollywood scholars—Connor Ryan, Matthew Brown, and Noah Tsika—have written recent books that deal with Nollywood's prehistory on celluloid and television.

Moradewun Adejunmobi (2016) has pointed out that few of the most-cited Nollywood scholars have backgrounds in film studies—the plurality comes from literature and language departments and/or operates in an African studies framework. In Nigerian universities, film studies continues to be largely blocked by entrenched theater studies faculties—small-minded territorialism with enormous consequences. If one looks around or looks back, such disciplinary issues are formidable obstacles to doing the work of, or making a career in, screen worlds. But if one looks forward, things are perhaps not so grim. A number of the book's contributors are also filmmakers, or festival organizers, or something else. Joe Jackson, the author of the concluding chapter, works as a "media disseminator" for the African Screen Worlds project—a kind of job that didn't exist when I was a PhD student. This working across platforms will only increase as neoliberalism makes conventional academic careers rarer and harder.

African Screen Worlds is a vision of a disciplinary reconfiguration more than a new discipline; it's a plane of analysis of a new field of objects or, better, of a vast array of relationships. It's not a theory of how power works through media. On that score there is nothing like a party line among the contributors, and in fact perhaps there is a principled resistance to totalization: we're in a post-Foucauldian world where meaning, the making of meanings, is dispersed, though local struggles are linked. But this project comes with an ethics, and its perspective is democratic and democratizing, with a strong inclination to privilege the agency of ordinary people.

A few chapters focus on dramatic intrusions of transnational corporate power into the world of African media. Añulika Agina's chapter on Netflix and Elastus Mambwe's on M-Net's Zambezi Magic channel are both deeply ambivalent, appreciative of the resources the corporations provide but uneasy about other effects. In Zambia as elsewhere, M-Net seems pretty good on the score of supporting local languages, but I find its class politics chilling. According to Mambwe, "'The Zambezi Magic Commissioning Brief' (MultiChoice Africa 2015, 4) . . . states that the channel primarily targets the eighteen to forty-eight age-group, which it calls the 'upgrade generation,' a group of ambitious and aspirational people, from different socioeconomic backgrounds, who are trying to achieve economic success." Those not in this category wouldn't be able to afford the channel's subscription, so this is a rational business decision, but it excludes most of the population. Neoliberalism is widening class divisions in Africa, and the corporate media are thoroughly implicated.

A third parallel study—though it perhaps does not appear as such—is Temitayo Olofinlua's chapter about the television series *MTV Shuga Naija*.

The American MTV entertainment juggernaut mounted an NGO-type public health campaign across the continent to raise awareness of AIDS and in general to educate and empower young people about sexual matters. This chapter is emblematic of the volume in its account of the seamless integration of a television serial with a social media dimension and various real-life extensions. Olofinlua's fandom is infectious, and my values accord completely with the program's purposes. But—on reflection—is there anything to worry about here? *MTV Shuga Naija* seems to have been extremely skillful and effective in mobilizing African youth to reject crucial swaths of their parents' cultures and to seek to install northern standards of sexual behavior—a remarkable feat of social engineering. The faces, the agents, and the agency seem entirely African, but what is the American role, and who was actually running the show?

I don't mean to be paranoid, or protective of a reactionary African "authenticity," or to be anything but clear-sighted about political possibilities. During the "Arab Spring" of 2010–11, social media famously played a key role in organizing uprisings, and a powerful motive force was the desire of Arab young people to live in "a normal country," meaning the kind of society they saw on foreign television programs. Both these factors were also important in the "Occupy Nigeria" movement (2012) and the Nigerian #EndSARS (2020) movement. In none of these cases was either element enough to effect the desired revolutionary change, but we must keep hope alive, and the last dreadful decade has given many of us a renewed appreciation for the value of liberal democracy, even as filtered through capitalist media.

The dispersed, localized perspectives of this book cushion it from lurching between hope and fear on the macro level. But the Africa that emerges is marvelously lively and dynamic, the vast continent extending its life into the digital dimension. Olofinlua's term *mobile screens* acquires symbolic resonances as the book goes on: it names the little screens on our phones but also the ubiquity that defines the contemporary screen media era, and it suggests a mediated world in constant flux and motion. This whole project shows the way to a more mobile screen studies, one that goes everywhere we go, nimble and adaptable, adventurous and humane, capable of taking stock of a burgeoning world.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, the editors would like to thank the European Research Council and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program for the generous grant (grant agreement No. 819236—AFRISCREEN WORLDS) that funded the African Screen Worlds: Decolonising Film and Screen Studies project, through which this edited volume was created. The volume brings together the work of a new generation of African screen media researchers; many of the authors are early career scholars without the privilege of deep institutional power in higher education; many are based within African contexts where there are fewer financial resources for research than in the so-called Global North. And yet it is precisely this groundedness that allows many of our authors to approach their subjects with the deep knowledge, humility, ethical engagement, and empathy that—in our view—lead to rigorous, insightful, *rich* research. Using the word *poor* provocatively to describe the wealth that emerges from this kind of scholarly pursuit that has to work with the energy and creativity of *not* having access to many resources, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes: "Without the luxury of excess, the poor do the most with the least. Poor theory and its practice imply maximizing the possibilities inherent in the minimum. Poor theory may also provide an antidote to the tendency of theory becoming like a kite that, having lost its mooring, remains floating in space with no possibility of returning to earth" (2012, 2). Many of the authors unfurl multiple worlds from the contexts in which they live and work every day, meaning that they do not address them from vertical perspectives above the earth (might we use the more apposite analogy of the drone?) but rather from firmly grounded, horizontal, eye-level positions. After all, as Ngũgĩ continues, "Even in social life, *poor* means being extremely creative and experimental in order to survive" (3), and this is also in evidence across many of the

fascinating screen media practices explored in this volume. It is to be found, for example, in what has been achieved by entrepreneurial Ghanaian film students, evangelical film movements in Nigeria, the craftspeople of Nollywood, filmmakers in Uganda and Senegal using YouTube to connect their films with the world, and "housemaids" in Eldoret using films for self-therapy. It is also apparent in the passionate labor of some of our non-African contributors, such as Stefanie Van de Peer, whose activist work to restore feminist North African films is exemplary.

Our methodology for developing this volume could also be described in relation to such inventiveness, somewhat paradoxically, since it emerged from a well-funded project. After circulating a global, open call and selecting in January 2020 drafts of the chapters that appear here, we had intended to bring all our contributors together for an in-person workshop in London in September 2020. The world had other plans, however, with the COVID-19 pandemic compelling us to shift our workshopping online, through four, intensive Zoom sessions and ongoing conversations with one another. Suddenly, the significant resources we had to run an in-person workshop were rendered useless, and although we of course regret not having had that chance to come together in embodied form, we have also been surprised at how being forced to work online and at a distance from one another—through the screen interfaces of our computers and phones—has introduced other benefits and insights. First, there was a certain sense of synchronicity created given that we were researching screen worlds and the relationships between people and screens. Furthermore, on realizing how easy it was to connect online (everyone managed to join the workshops despite the digital inequalities that divide the world), it made us wonder why we had not been connecting with one another more frequently in the past. Too often the rush and excitement of in-person events trumps the value of continuous, ordinary, regular conversation. The methodology behind this book has thus been slow, collegial, and conversational; working against the conventional process of putting an edited volume together, where one often does not meet the other contributors, let alone have an opportunity to read and discuss their chapters before the volume is published, we have attempted to put ourselves in dialogue with one another—even going as far as to think of ourselves as a choir.

We are extremely grateful to our publications partner, Carli Coetzee, whose own ethical work and collaborative values as the editor of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* over many years have been a major inspiration for us. We are also indebted to our "keynotes" (Moradewun Adejunmobi, Alessandro Jedlowski, and Jonathan Haynes) for the special role they have played in helping

us, as editors, to conduct our choir. Carli has been a constant support throughout the process, while the keynotes, especially Jonathan Haynes, devoted a great deal of time to reading this book in draft form and providing vital, critical feedback to help us improve it. We are also extremely grateful to the whole team at Duke University Press, in particular Elizabeth Ault for her constant engagement with and belief in us since the beginning of the project, and to Benjamin Kossak and Lisa Lawley for all their hard work and support. Swetal Agrawal, Georgia Thomas-Parr, and Susan Ecklund have provided meticulous copyediting help for which we are extremely grateful.

Tragically, during the process of creating this volume we lost one of our dear participants—Pier Paolo Frassinelli. However, his voice remains firmly in our choir, and we will always remember with great appreciation and affection his generous, spirited personality, his sparkling intelligence, and his enthusiastic contributions to our workshops. His passing is yet another reminder of how fragile human life is and that academia should not be seen as a competitive space divorced from the rest of our lives; we need to work with one another in solidarity and support, care, and collaboration.

We hope that you enjoy our songs in what follows.

Introduction

Exploring Screen Worlds

LINDIWE DOVEY, AÑULIKA AGINA,
AND MICHAEL W. THOMAS

In the past decade, digitalization and expanding internet usage have created an unprecedented form of global media synchronicity and convergence in which Africa and Africans are firmly embedded.[1] Despite ongoing digital divides and issues across Africa with internet connectivity and bandwidth, the high cost of data, and lack of online payment options, internet penetration throughout the continent has increased exponentially, and millions of people—and, in particular, the youth, who make up the majority of Africa's population—are engaged with digital platforms and applications used across the globe, such as YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Twitter (now known as X). Much of this engagement involves consuming, circulating, and communicating about audiovisual content through supersmall phone screens, and the ubiquity and everyday nature of such activity makes the days when Africans had to rely only on daily terrestrial broadcast television, rare film festivals, or even Nollywood films on VCDs to access screen narratives feel like a distant memory.

Indeed, it is this new global context of audiovisual narrative media practices that inspired us to propose the concept of "screen worlds" as a heuristic to encourage fresh avenues of reflection in our field of film and screen studies. Many scholars have argued that, in our digital and internet age, we need to move beyond consideration of cinema to embrace, think through, and explore screens in their entirety (Bruno 2014; Cunningham and Silver 2013). Cinema certainly is an element within screen worlds, but the latter also allows us to embrace a whole range of other practices and processes within screen production, circulation, and spectatorship that go beyond the purely cinematic. In this volume, the feature-length fiction film takes a back seat as it jostles and vies with a rich array of other audiovisual screen worlds for people's attention: episodic narrative series created and circulated both by large companies and

by entrepreneurial individuals, and which are evidence of Africa's full participation in the global "televisual turn" (Adejunmobi 2015; Lotz 2017); short films and film skits that are uploaded to YouTube or distributed via WhatsApp; and the music videos of a new generation of Black creatives experimenting with visual and sonic registers in radical ways, and which are appreciated throughout the world and not only by Black fans. These screen worlds are dynamic, fragmented, interactive, and transnational; they sometimes make appearances at film festivals, but they are certainly not exclusive to festivals.

The concept of screen worlds asks us to pay attention to the screen as a material object (Wasson 2012) and to people's physical and emotional relations with screens—whether as filmmakers or film spectators. In the opening chapter of this volume, Temitayo Olofinlua helps us to theorize screens in these multiple dimensions through putting forward a key concept—"mobile screens"—which she explains as follows: "The term *mobile screens* encompasses the idea of screen as infrastructure and virtual environment in our contemporary world, but it specifically emphasizes the role of audiences in this mobility. In this sense, I am interested in how films and television shows 'move' their audiences and how they respond through social media. How does this engagement take spectators beyond being a 'viewing audience' to being a 'doing audience'?" In this way, Olofinlua suggests that mobility refers not only, quite literally, to newly mobile film viewers who carry their screens around with them in their laptop bags and pockets to watch films while on the move but also, more abstractly, to the mobility of people's emotions and the worlds that are created in the screen interfaces between audiovisual narratives and viewers—viewers who do not simply watch but who engage deeply with these stories and with other viewers of them in all the ways their screens allow them to. There is something undeniably liberating about this mobility when one considers that when Olofinlua was growing up "the media landscape . . . was one that existed largely within the home" and that "access to these [media] spaces was controlled" (Olofinlua, chapter 1). For many people mobile devices have freed screen worlds from more regulated spaces, such as the domestic arena or the cinema theater, where parents or exhibitors act as gatekeepers (for better or worse). They have also taken us beyond theories of a rather passive notion of the "haptic" in relation to the film medium and film spectatorship (Marks 2000) toward more active, and often communal, engagement.

Rather than screens existing as inert, rectangular surfaces that beam audiovisual narratives at us, they are increasingly becoming portals or prosthetic devices that almost seem to be an extension of our own bodies due to their ubiquity and mundanity. In this volume we dwell on moments in which screens

seem to break because of the binge-watching demands of fans (Olofinlua, Eromosele) or in which audiovisual material seems to spill out of the screen or be sucked into the screen because of the viscerality of the screens themselves (Moonsamy, Grieve). Alexander Bud's chapter provides uncanny examples of real and screen worlds overlapping and intermingling, with a particularly hilarious moment in which a screen world of a film set / housing development is used as evidence to justify its actual existence to skeptical potential buyers. We thus concur with performance theorist Philip Auslander that "the idea of liveness is a moving target, a historically contingent concept whose meaning changes over time and is keyed to technological development . . . liveness describes a historical, rather than ontological, condition" (2008, xii–xiii). Far from being able to neatly separate out online and offline experiences, in today's environment (particularly given the widespread impacts of COVID-19), our screens live with us daily, and we treat them less like inanimate objects than as portals for live interaction with others. For many people today, losing one's phone thus feels like losing one's voice, one's connection to the larger world.

While we use the concept of screen worlds and not cinema here, we retain a focus on the cinematic insofar as our interest resides in the contexts and experiences of audiovisual narrative storytelling, and—while documentary is also of course a form of narrative-making—it is notable that all our authors focus on the production and circulation of fictional screen worlds of various kinds. In our neoliberal era of big data, algorithms, filter bubbles, casualized labor, and growing inequalities, human creativity and imagination as expressed through fiction and storytelling often exist against the odds, and there is thus political potency in focusing on this ingenuity and what threatens or sustains it. We are therefore collectively interested in the agency of contemporary Africans who contribute in diverse ways to audiovisual fictional storytelling—filmmakers, exhibitors, entrepreneurs, audiences, film restorers, and craftspeople. It is these African authors who bring to life the imaginative storyworlds that constitute African screen worlds.

As storyworlds have been defined by contemporary media scholars around the world, they are far more expansive, dynamic, and malleable than how "texts" have been conceived of through close analytic methodologies in the past. Warren Buckland, for example, emphasizes the diegetic worlds created through storytelling, through the interfacing of both storyteller and audience: "Narratives create worlds, not just a sequence of divisible events; each narrative text therefore implies a larger fictional world beyond the boundaries of (or distinct from) the manifest text. . . . Furthermore, a storyworld is not autonomous but depends on the audience's affective and emotional response—a

type of aesthetic engagement that determines whether or not they can imaginatively inhabit that storyworld" (2020, 20). We are concerned with how Africans (as both makers and viewers) engage in such storyworld building through screens—where these worlds often end up exceeding the contained, bounded text, leading to a sense of spatial and temporal portals opening up beyond everyday life and allowing audiences to engage with, reimagine, or even escape their own lives. As Marta Boni notes, "Worlds—as imaginary territories and perennial, collectively built, semiotic realms—are necessary for the understanding of media creation and for the interpretive processes it stimulates" (2017, 9). We would like to add to this, from a decolonial perspective, that alternative world-making, where worlds become imaginary territories, have also long been a mode of survival for those who have been excluded from what Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018) call the "North Atlantic fictions" that have tended to assume the prerogative to define the world in universal terms, despite the provinciality of these same fictions. This is what has led indigenous decolonial thinkers and activists to call for "proposals for a world of many worlds" (Blaser and de la Cadena 2018) in which people have the agency and the freedom to build their own worlds and not have to define themselves through the colonial matrix of power that has structured our planet for centuries (Mignolo and Walsh 2018).

A People-Oriented Approach

The focus of this volume is the passionate people who dream up, bring into being, contribute to, circulate, watch, fall in love with, share, comment on and discuss, and reuse and repurpose screen worlds. While being attentive to the effects and impacts of changing technologies on screen media production, circulation, and spectatorship, we adopt what we call a "people-oriented" approach and remain assertively anthropocentric in our attempts to understand what people *do* with films in their desire to create social meaning. It has taken engagement with diverse scholarly fields and theoretical and conceptual frameworks (not just film and screen studies), as well as a commitment to fieldwork, interviews, focus groups, and conversations, to bring the diversity of these contemporary African screen worlds and the people who create them into view. Foundational to us has been the vital work conducted by African popular culture scholars—all the way from Karin Barber's field-defining article "Popular Arts in Africa" (1987) to Grace Musila's edited collection, the *Routledge Handbook of African Popular Culture* (2022)—and the work of African media scholars, from many of the articles in the *Journal of African Media Studies* founded by Winston Mano in

2007 to Gilbert Motsaathebe and Sarah H. Chiumbu's groundbreaking book *Television in Africa in the Digital Age* (2021). We also want to pay tribute to the work of all the Nollywood and African video film scholars (such as Moradewun Adejunmobi, Carmela Garritano, Jonathan Haynes, Alessandro Jedlowski, and Onokoome Okome), who courageously challenged African cinema scholars to question their own hierarchies and understanding of quality and value, thereby revolutionizing our field. In addition, we want to acknowledge a key conference organized by Mahir Saul and Ralph Austen in 2007 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the first to bring together African cinema and Nollywood scholars and thereby paving the way for our convergence.

Global creative industries scholarship that explores the difficulty and precarity of sustaining a living through creative work (McRobbie 2015), and the kinds of work involved in film production (Curtin and Sanson 2016) and spectatorship (Jenkins 2012), has also been crucial to our ability to bring to light the creative and affective labor that exists through and around screen worlds. While many of the pioneering African filmmakers had to make their capital-intensive celluloid feature films through irregular subsidies from Europe (often from France and its Bureau of African Cinema [Andrade-Watkins 1996]), many of the contemporary African filmmakers discussed here have to rely on diversified business strategies and creative "hustling" (Steedman 2023) to sustain their creative filmmaking work in today's competitive, capitalist, saturated, digital environment. Both environments—past and present—were/are difficult for creatives, and some of our authors are optimistic about the ways that digitalization has opened opportunities to African filmmakers who were previously marginalized, and particularly women (see Sendra; Steedman and Resario, both in this volume). However, as Robin Steedman and Rashida Resario show in their comparative analysis of two female filmmakers working in different parts of Ghana, the ability to access and benefit from digital opportunities is often dependent on one's location, social class, and connections as well as educational background. It is worth mentioning here that many of the early Nollywood filmmakers and distributors who worked with analog formats (VHS tapes, VCDs, and DVDs) in the 1990s were a rare example of those from the so-called lower social classes asserting themselves within the film industry; film scholars such as Ezinne Ezepue (2020) and Tejaswini Ganti (2012) are thus rightly concerned about the effects of gentrification on the ability of people with fewer resources to participate in film industries throughout the world, despite the democratization and affordances occasioned by the digital revolution.

Indeed, it would be irresponsible to engage in techno-optimistic discourses that lionize new mobile technologies without considering how, just as they

liberate some, they exclude others. As Añulika Agina notes in her chapter in this volume about the impact of Netflix on the Nigerian screen media scene: "Inevitably, in every disruptive game, there are winners, losers, and those who maintain the status quo." The technology itself is neutral, but who has access to it and the benefits produced through and around it are subject to the same intersectional privileges or oppressions that affect human beings' lives. The effects of gender and class on the ways people participate in or are excluded from these new mobile screen environments are fully evident in the discussions across this volume. Just as we are excited about some of the ways that increased access to the internet in Africa has allowed for the circulation of new kinds of narratives and images about women and women's sexuality in particular (see Sendra, this volume), we are also deeply aware of how certain communities can become victims to digital inequalities. As Steedman and Resario note in their chapter, it often takes looking beyond feature fiction filmmaking to even *see* the work and labor of many African women screen practitioners, since women have mostly not had access to the resources to make capital-intensive films. Most (African) women have traditionally worked in film administration (for example, running film festivals) or have made television series, documentaries, and short films (see Ellerson 2000, 2002). By expanding our *objects* of analysis in this volume through our conceptualization of capacious screen worlds, we have thus also been able to expand our *subjects* of analysis, making African women's contributions to screen media-making, circulation, and spectatorship far more visible, exploring their work as entrepreneurs, leaders, mentors, spectators, and film restorers across this volume rather than in only one discrete part (see Olofinlua; Sendra; Agina; Dovey; Steedman and Resario; Waliaula; Van de Peer). In this way we are building on and extending the excellent work that has been done to date to document, celebrate, and analyze the work of African women filmmakers (for example, Bisschoff and Van de Peer 2020; Dipio 2014; Ellerson 2000, 2002; Garritano 2013; Kassahun 2018; Mistry and Schuhmann 2015; Steedman 2017, 2023; Tsika 2015).

While emphasizing human agency and a people-oriented approach, it is also our constant foregrounding of the role that technology plays in the ways that filmmakers, exhibitors, and audiences shape and experience screen worlds that distinguishes our work from an important edited collection that we see as a predecessor to ours, *A Companion to African Cinema* (2019). Although many of the chapters in that volume also engage with how technology is transforming African audiovisual storytelling (for example, in chapters by Moradewun Adejunmobi, Alessandro Jedlowski, and Robin Steedman—all of whom have also participated in this volume), this previous volume foregrounds "theoretical

work on time, sound, genre, queering, and biopolitics" (11). The editors of *A Companion to African Cinema*, Kenneth Harrow and Carmela Garritano, position these "New Critical Approaches" to "African cinema" within a genealogy of African film criticism originating with Marxist revolutionary analysis in the 1960s and 1970s (1); then developing into postcolonial and cultural studies approaches in the 1980s and 1990s (8); and then broadening out, in our current era, into a "multiplicity of approaches" of "new poetics and new theoretical engagements" (11). Our volume contributes to this contemporary "multiplicity of approaches," but where many of the authors in *A Companion to African Cinema* analyze film texts and film directors, we tend to foreground the complex relationships among mediums, platforms, audiences, and the craft and entrepreneurship of different people who contribute to film (for example, set builders, video-on-demand platform founders, film producers, and film restorers). We are grateful that *A Companion to African Cinema* and the large body of previous scholarship on African film have enabled us to adopt a different approach here—one in which we do not feel that we need to rehearse histories of African filmmaking and the theories that have been applied to it; instead, this previous work has freed us to focus on the present moment and on specific case studies.

While the power and affect of screen worlds demand that we continue to analyze audiovisual narratives through the lens of representation (in other words, what is contained within their diegetic worlds), in this volume we are more interested in exploring how these narratives are made and circulated in ways that create interfaces between filmmakers, audiences, and others involved in the creation, curation, and consumption of screen worlds. We find David Trotter's distinction here between representational and connective media useful to our attempt to keep both of these dimensions within the purview of our analyses while privileging the latter:

> There is a useful though by no means absolute distinction to be made, where media are concerned, between the representational and the connective. . . . The axiom of representational media might be: two places at two times. . . . The principle or value articulated by media used to represent arises out of that double removal in time and space. Representational media, it could be said, enable us to reflect upon a reflection of our world. The axiom of connective (or "tele-") media, by contrast, is two places at one time. Their primary emphasis has always been on instantaneous, real-time, and preferably interactive one-to-one communication at a distance. (2013, 8)

Many of the chapters in this volume are more interested in analyzing the connective rather than the representational nature of narrative screen worlds in

contemporary Africa, although we still see close film analysis as a vital tool, and a few of our authors use this mode as their main methodology in their analyses of diegetic screen worlds (for example, Moonsamy, Grieve, and Jackson). However, the majority of our authors situate diegetic screen worlds within the broader dynamics of industrial screen worlds—at the nexus of production, curation, circulation, consumption, and connection. Indeed, as Karin Barber says, "Connection . . . is the other side of the coin of access. No point in having access to internet space if you don't connect with users" (2022, xviii). But Barber goes on to lament, "We could do with more empirical investigation of what it is that audiences like, why they like it, how they get involved, how they discuss, remember and interpret it. 'Reception' (really the wrong term, considering what an active role many participants play in the constitution of popular expressive forms launched by others) is still largely uncharted territory in African popular culture studies" (xviii).

The spectators our authors describe or conjure in this volume are not always in the same space—often they are on the move—but they engage frequently with screen narratives and with one another through social media. The fervor with which some of the spectators studied here extend these screen worlds into new directions and dimensions means that, rather than seeing them as mere spectators, they can be viewed as fans, a term that is invoked across several of the chapters. These fans are indispensable to the imaginative construction of screen worlds, and it is through them that what is real and ideal, filmic and extrafilmic, frequently becomes blurred. Many of our authors (such as Waliaula, Olofinlua, and Sendra) even confess to coming to their own creative scholarly work via fandom and in their chapters describe in detail the ways in which fandom becomes a "labour of love" (Lothian 2015, 138; Sobande 2020, 9) that significantly contributes to "industrial production" itself (Lothian 2015).

Decolonizing Film and Screen Studies: Moving beyond Binaries

What insights do the chapters in this volume bring to the question of the decolonizing of film and screen studies, and the decolonizing of higher education in general, in line with the aims of the broader project within which it sits? One of the things that has become clear through the process of conversing with one another to create this volume is that, as much as decolonizing work involves challenging the status quo through antiracist and antisexist scholarship and activism, it is unhelpful to engage in binary thinking. In her chapter, Alexandra Grieve draws on Achille Mbembe's well-known concept

of "entanglement," reminding us that Mbembe argues that "the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another: *an entanglement*" (Mbembe 2001, 14, cited in Grieve, this volume). The Kenyan popular culture scholar Joyce Nyairo has consistently asked scholars to avoid the temptation to downplay what Isabel Hofmeyr calls the "chaotic plurality of the post-colony" (cited in Nyairo 2015, 70), and in an especially radical moment in her book *Kenya@50*, Nyairo compares the popular songs of Joseph Kamaru, which she refers to as "a melting pot of practices" (65), with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's arguments in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) as follows: "While Ngugi's decision to write in Kikuyu was projected as a return, Kamaru demonstrates the difficulties of projecting contemporary experiences as if the colonial encounter never took place—without any traces of the grammar and practices of the colonizer's world. As Simon Gikandi posited, the epistemological shift Ngugi attempted was untenable because you cannot go back to something that is no longer sitting where you left it" (65).

Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò makes parallel arguments in his book *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (2022), in which he says his aim is to "point to ways in which the ex-colonised, at least in some parts of Africa, have domesticated (and not merely by mimicry) many ideas, processes, institutions and practices that are routinely attributed to colonialism, but are in fact traceable to modernity and other causes" (7). Many of the Africa-based, African authors in this volume are similarly uninterested in binary thinking—which is too often a result of distance, of a drone's rather than a grounded view—and dwell instead on the complexities and entanglements of what it means to live, work, and engage with screen worlds on an everyday basis in Africa and as an African. Temitayo Olofinlua, Añulika Agina, and Elastus Mambwe, for example, are all concerned with the potential contributions (and not only problems) that "foreign" players such as MTV, Netflix, and M-Net bring to specific screen media environments in Africa. Their work takes us beyond the simplistic dichotomies drawn in some of the scholarship concerned with media imperialism—and, indeed, in some contemporary decolonizing discourses—and into the daily realities and lived experiences of African film creatives.

However, unlike Táíwò, we do not feel that "taking African agency seriously" and *all* the work that takes place under the rubric of "decolonizing" need to be mutually exclusive. Rather than throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, we are instead interested in the extent to which—whether people like it or not—"decolonizing" has become a phenomenon so widespread (particularly within higher education institutions globally) that it

merits deeper analysis. We feel that homogenizing "the decolonizers" in the abstract language of analytical philosophy, as Táíwò does throughout his book, does not help us to analyze the complexities and contradictions of work that calls itself "decolonizing." Instead, we are more concerned with empirical, grounded approaches that allow for both scrutiny of *and* engagement with "decolonizing" projects and initiatives, thereby recognizing failures *and* successes. To us, it is undeniable that the movements initiated at universities around the world in the wake of the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa have brought about some significant changes. At SOAS University of London, where our African Screen Worlds: Decolonising Film and Screen Studies project has been based, for example, this movement led to a collaboratively authored decolonizing learning and teaching toolkit that has had an impact on curricula and pedagogy around the world.

Empirical, grounded approaches to analyzing what it means to "decolonize" are profoundly concerned with *who* is doing the work, *from where*, and *how*—questions that have been crucial for us to grapple with in a project like ours, based as it is *not* in Africa, but in the United Kingdom. "Decolonizing" activism gave us the tools and mandate to analyze the demographics of many Africa-focused projects run from Europe and North America and to decide that, in contrast, we wanted our volume to foreground as much as possible the work of African, Africa-based, early career researchers. Furthermore, we asked all our authors to reflect on their own positionality and lived experiences in relation to the research they were producing for this volume so that we would all be conscious about how our subjectivity inevitably influences our research and interpretations. Then there is also the question of research methods, particularly if one is not from or located in the place one studies. As Steedman and Resario note in their chapter, "While one can study world cinema without ever traveling to those regions whose filmmaking cultures are under examination (cf. White 2015), African film scholars have long argued for the absolute necessity of fieldwork in film studies to understand cultures of both production and consumption."[2] Rather than confine ourselves to textual approaches (although we see the deep value in those), many of us have drawn on conversational methodologies that include interviews, focus groups, and discussions, which have also allowed our research participants to speak back to us and challenge our ideas—another necessity of research that claims to "decolonize."

Decolonizing work, for us, also involves an end to Africa and Africans being viewed and treated as part of a separate planet, a different world (Dovey 2015b). In this sense, in his chapter, Femi Eromosele offers one of the best examples of decolonizing that we have, which is of the Nigerian musician Falz's

music videos' exceptional global mobility *not* because of affinitive transnationalism (in other words, their popularity with diasporic Nigerians or Africans) but because of their attractiveness to audiences everywhere regardless of the music videos' Nigerian provenance. The diversification and mainstreaming of Nigerian screen worlds evidenced in this example raise questions about whether Nigerian filmmaking can continue to be seen as a "minor transnational practice," as Moradewun Adejunmobi argued in her influential article in *Postcolonial Text* in 2007. Whereas it took a long time for many African film scholars to acknowledge the energy and ingenuity of early Nollywood, Nigerian screen worlds are now so popular and dominant across many parts of the continent and beyond (Krings and Okome 2013) that it makes their general exclusion from much mainstream film and screen studies scholarship and teaching even more perplexing, and the case for decolonizing our academic field even stronger. Many contributors to this volume are Nigerian and/or focus on Nigerian screen worlds (Haynes, Olofinlua, Agina, Bud, Waliaula, Olayiwola, Eromosele, Adejunmobi, Jedlowski); what their scholarship collectively reveals is that Nigerian filmmaking practices have diversified to such an extent that any casual reference to "Nollywood" now requires qualification and specification. As our authors show, Nigerian screen worlds now embrace multiplatform television shows, commissions from Netflix, complex craft considerations for set building, fans in rural communities throughout Africa, evangelical film movements, and music videos circulating around the world. In this sense, this volume can be read as a call to scholars everywhere to acknowledge *heterogeneous* Nigerian and African screen worlds that are *at once* local, national, regional, and global.

We ask you to read this volume not only as a collection of grounded, African case studies but also as contributing to contemporary global debates and theorization around screen media, industries, makers, and fans. A vast amount of media studies scholarship has been produced in and about the so-called Global North and Asia in relation to changing audiovisual storytelling experiences and formations over the past decade—characterized variously through phrases such as "transmedia storytelling" (Boni 2017; Jenkins 2006; Khiun and Lee 2020), "media mixing" (Steinberg 2012), "intensified media swirl" (Vernallis, Rogers, and Perrott 2020), and "media crossroads" (Massood, Matos, and Wojcik 2021). However, the majority of this work continues to ignore the African continent, even as it may engage with issues of race and intersectionality. The African Screen Worlds project was designed to bring African and other regional screen media contexts and theorizing into conversation so we can chart and describe these dramatic global changes with greater accuracy and nuance. The

indispensability of such dialogue and interaction has been extolled by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o as follows: "At the International Center for Writing and Translation, we took our motto of 'culture contact as oxygen' from Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, where he writes 'that whatever its own particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen'" (2012, 2). While our preoccupation here is with African screen worlds, the conversations that resulted in this volume were informed by global theorizing, and we hope, in turn, that our theorizing here is seen to have value globally, not only for Africa. In *Global Screen Worlds*, a companion to this volume, we were also inspired by Eileen Julien's proposal that scholars should put "literary, film, and visual arts by Africans in dialogue with the work of artists from Asia, Europe and the Americas" so as to "recognize both African specificities and Africa's presence in the world" (2015, 26). That volume has thus explicitly brought into conversation African and other (mostly Asian) films and film scholars, thereby responding to calls by Paul Willemen (2005) and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (2013) for a comparative and collaborative approach to film and screen studies.

Structure of the Volume

This volume has been organized thematically, so that we can respect but also move beyond the national perspective that has been the framework for much previous rich (African) film scholarship. It has emerged out of many of our contributors' grounding in and deep knowledge of very specific (often subnational) local contexts in Africa but has also been inspired by our collective search for similar—as well as distinct—experiences across diverse African contexts (including diasporic contexts, as explored by Joe Jackson and by Michael W. Thomas and Asteway M. Woldemichael in their contributions) and by our desire to bring these experiences into pan-African conversation to transcend the dominance of the state or the nation as the only way of understanding and interpreting (African) screen media.

The first part of the volume contributes to global screen media research that explores the erosion between the categories of film and television in our contemporary era (Lotz 2017). Temitayo Olofinlua's chapter sets the tone for the whole volume by theorizing the concept of the mobile screen and moves deftly between analysis of the makers, marketers, performers, and fans of *MTV Shuga Naija*, a transmedia television series that also screens on YouTube. While the series has a social development goal—to improve sexual health—its audience engagement methods encourage agency rather than the kinds of unidirectional,

patronizing messaging typical of how foreign nongovernmental organizations (used to) operate in African contexts. Estrella Sendra explores the women-led, Senegalese internet television series *Maîtresse d'un homme marié* (*Mistress of a Married Man*), showing how this screen world is brought alive by its avid fans all over the world (the show has had more than four million viewers per episode) who have actively engaged with and remixed it in fascinating ways. Añulika Agina's chapter explores the ways in which Netflix is shaping Nollywood's exhibition ecosystem by simultaneously disrupting existing industry operations and enabling newer modes of storytelling to emerge. Elastus Mambwe's chapter moves us from West Africa to an underexplored part of the continent where screen media is concerned. Here the "foreign" entrant under scrutiny is the South African satellite, pay-television platform DStv, and Mambwe balances critique of this company's dominance in Zambia with a tempered optimism that DStv's recently founded Zambezi Magic channel has had a positive impact on the film industry in Zambia.

In the second part of the volume we consider local stakeholder entrepreneurialism more broadly in the production and circulation of African screen worlds. Alexander Bud offers a fieldwork-informed study of house casting and crafting in Nollywood that is the first of its kind in our field and is inspiring in its expansion of which people are deemed worthy of study in film and screen studies. Dennis-Brook Prince Lotsu's case study focuses on entrepreneurial and enterprising Ghanaian film students whose work to get their own films distributed and viewed has seen them using social media platforms such as WhatsApp in creative and innovative ways that have even enabled them to transition into mainstream cinema. Lindiwe Dovey's chapter focuses on the South African film producer Bongiwe Selane and her "Female Only Filmmakers" slate, through which Selane produced twenty-six short fiction films led by female teams, thereby helping to rectify gender imbalances in the South African film industry both on and off the screen. Robin Steedman and Rashida Resario's chapter puts the spotlight on two entrepreneurial women filmmakers working in very different contexts in Ghana: the celebrated filmmaker Shirley Frimpong-Manso, who not only directs films and commercials but also runs her own video-on-demand platform (Sparrow Station); and Evelyn Asampana, an aspiring filmmaker who makes films in the Frafra language in Bolgatanga, in the rural Upper East Region.

The third part of the book continues the focus on gender found in the first two parts, but this time in terms of close textual analysis of on-screen representations of women, fieldwork-informed research on female film viewers, and the restoration of women's films. In their chapters, Nedine Moonsamy and

Alexandra Grieve analyze the work of male filmmakers, but their attention is on the complex gendered screen worlds crafted and fashioned by these men. These chapters explore the tensions among mobility, domesticity, affective labor, and worlds of work and love in African women's lives; static experiences of domestic labor connect Grieve's analysis of the fictional "housemaid" Diouana in *La noire de . . .* (an African cinematic classic from 1966 by Ousmane Sembène) with the "horror" of homes experienced by the female characters in the Ugandan filmmaker Dilman Dila's subversive contemporary rom-coms (which he uploads to YouTube). Solomon Waliaula's chapter complements Moonsamy's and Grieve's textual analysis of representations of women in domestic spaces by providing a particularly poignant case study of fandom, one in which the only type of mobility is the one created through the fantasies elicited through the relationships that "housemaids" in Eldoret, Kenya, form with the audiovisual narratives of Nollywood films playing on the television screens of their employers, and which they have to view secretly while working. Labor and leisure collapse into one another in this example, where film "becomes a medium that helps them transcend the limits of their situation and aspire to another, much more desirable world," thereby offering a form of therapy and self-help. The final chapter of this part suggests that, like the Sankofa bird in Akan mythology, we need to look back to be able to understand our contemporary moment and the future. In her self-reflexive work, Stefanie Van de Peer describes and analyzes her hands-on experiences of collaborating with others to restore particular North African films by women filmmakers. She encourages us to remember that the boundaries between what we consider old and new are porous and that superficial engagement with the "contemporary" might blind us to the hard work, solidarity, and collaboration of committed individuals who try to make rare (African) films accessible to us.

While cinema has increasingly moved onto the (super)small screens of televisions, computers, and phones, it continues to play on large "theatrical" screens as well—and, in fact, piracy of VCDs and DVDs has compelled many filmmakers in Africa to prioritize such theatrical screening as a way of both sharing their work with in-person audiences and achieving much-needed financial returns. However, as the chapters in the fourth part of the volume collectively show, the traditional "theatrical" modes of cinema exhibition and distribution—through cinema chains and film festivals—are in flux. The use of "theatrical" screenings is far more strategic these days, as Elizabeth Olayiwola reveals in her fascinating study of how evangelical filmmakers in Nigeria use church halls—and other means—to spread their films and their worldviews. How Africans approach "cinema" remains deeply embedded within other as-

pects of culture, as Michael W. Thomas and Asteway M. Woldemichael show in their study of the relationship among theater, performance, and cinema in an Ethiopian film screening for Ethiopian diaspora audiences in London. In their chapters, Alison MacAulay and Pier Paolo Frassinelli in turn explore how film festivals in different African contexts—Rwanda and Burkina Faso, respectively—are only one space among many diverse venues, platforms, and modes for exhibiting audiovisual narratives.

The fifth part of the book challenges us to rethink our fetishization of the visual in film and screen studies and to take account of hybrid audiovisual forms, and especially music videos, which have been particularly prevalent in the creative work of former generations of Black artists around the world as well as millennials. Femi Eromosele takes Falz's music video "This Is Nigeria" (2018) as his case study to explore "the place of technology in shaping filmic forms in the country as well as their insertion or otherwise into global networks of circulation." Joe Jackson also focuses on a music video as a case study—US-based filmmaker Kahlil Joseph's "Cheeba" (2010), which he argues creates a "crossroads" between continental Africa and its diverse diasporas, situated as it is within the broader work of Afrodiasporic filmmakers, musicians, and music video directors. Both authors attend to Carol Vernallis, Holly Rogers, and Lisa Perrott's call for a focus on "new audiovisual aesthetics" and even a new field of "audiovisual studies," which chimes with our expansive conceptualization of screen worlds: "Our project (and it can be yours) is to develop a field of audiovisual studies that's engaged with all media, and that's political. . . . The media swirl, audiovisuality and the digital turn—and the ways these interrelate and overlap—help describe today's aesthetics. The digital turn, for example, blurs the boundaries between sound and image, for both now share an ontological ground of being code. An adjustment in one medium can spur a modification in the other, and then back and forth again, nearly effortlessly" (2020, 7). But where the book by Vernallis and colleagues mostly analyzes the work of white, wealthy, male artists, ours is invested in a decolonial feminist framework and believes in the need to explore and parse the creative, often resistant, work of Black African artists who embrace different expressive forms but whose work is often overlooked in scholarship and curricula.

The volume concludes with two short afterwords on our work from two leading scholars in African screen media studies—Alessandro Jedlowski and Moradewun Adejunmobi. These reflections point to what is unique about our volume but also to areas that we have not been able to cover adequately. We recognize, for example, that studies of screen worlds must expand to encompass more diverse objects of study, and we hope Eromosele's and Jackson's

chapters serve as a springboard for future scholars to explore more fully the relationship between the visual and the aural. Most important, echoing Adejunmobi, we hope that new generations of African screen media scholars will pay attention to how African audiovisual storytellers and audiences can continue to secure their creative autonomy and independence in the growing, often discriminatory, algorithmic environment of digitization.

NOTES

1 To take two countries of focus from this volume as examples: according to the *Digital 2020 Global Overview Report*, in 2023, internet penetration in Senegal stood at 58.1 percent, 17.4 percent of the population uses social media, and there are 20.13 million cellular mobile connections; in Nigeria, internet penetration is at 55.4 percent, with 14.3 percent of the population using social media and with 193.9 million cellular mobile connections.

2 Indeed, we wish to signal our strong preference for the word *fieldwork* here and to question the word *ethnography*, which—through the retention of the prefix *ethno*—carries with it the full weight of the racialized history of a unidirectional, white gaze in much academic research. If we are to liberate ourselves from these violent histories with their painful practices, we need to reconsider not only our methods but also the language that we use. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) reminds us, even the word *research* has negative connotations for indigenous peoples who have been subject to brutal abuses.