**DIGITAL AFRICAS SELF EVALUATION 2017**

Please use the criteria below to evaluate your performance in this class. I will match your self-evaluations with my records in order to assign you a grade for the course.

**Part I** of the evaluation asks you to evaluate your performance. Please underline the statement that best describes your performance in each section. The **highlighted point** in each section corresponds with what you need to earn a B+ for that aspect of the course. The category OTHER at the end of each question gives you the chance to draw my attention to any additional information you’d like me to take into consideration in assigning your grade for that section.

**Part II** of the evaluation asks you to comment on specific readings and on contributions to the course other than your own. Answers in this section can help boost your grade or someone else’s but they won’t hurt you.

Post your self-evaluations to the tab at the end of the weekly syllabus on MOODLE.

**NAME:** Mariah

**SCREEN NAME:** Bees

**Part I**

**ATTENDANCE B+**

I never missed a class

**I missed 1-3 classes because of illness or other excused absences**

I missed 3-5 classes for a mixture of reasons

I missed more than five classes

OTHER:

**PUNCTUALITY: B+**

I was always punctual getting to class

**I was late getting to class once or twice**

I was late getting too class 3 or more times

I was always late for class

OTHER:

**READINGS - FICTIONAL: A**

I completed all the fiction readings on time

**I completed most of the fiction readings on time**

I completed most of the assigned fiction readings but rarely finished them in time for class discussion

I rarely completed any of the fictional readings

OTHER:

**READINGS – CRITICAL/THEORETICAL B**

I completed all the critical readings on time

**I completed most of the critical readings on time**

I completed most of the critical readings but rarely finished them in time for class discussion

I rarely completed any of the critical readings

OTHER: The theoretical readings were hard to grasp for me, though I did read 2/3 to ¾ of them each time. In class, to participate meaningfully in our discussions, I dedicated my time to the fiction readings. Going through them together in class, especially in small groups, was really useful for me.

**PARTICIPATION -–ORAL A-**

I contributed frequently to class discussions

**I contributed occasionally to class discussions**

I seldom contributed to class discussions, and/or only when asked directly by the professor

I never contributed to class discussions

OTHER: I contributed mostly to class discussions about the blog and our fiction readings.

**PARTICPATION – WRITTEN A**

I read all that other students wrote and often commented in my blogposts on what they wrote or said

**I read most of what others wrote and commented occasionally on what they wrote or said**

I only occasionally read other people’s blogposts and seldom commented on what they wrote or said

I seldom read the blog and did not comment on what others said

OTHER: The blog was my favorite part of the class and I made sure I meaningfully interacted with it. I would comment on posts that spoke to me most rather than just liking them, even if it was to just say how much I liked their ideas. I think this counts for more participation than you’ve given yourself credit for!

**BLOGPOSTS -–ASSIGNMENTS A-**I completed and posted all assignments on time

**I completed all assignments and posted most of them before the next assignment was due**

I completed all assignments but posted most of them well after the due date

I did not complete all the assignments

OTHER: With the exception of two late blog posts, I posted all my assignments on time. The video was late because Mikayla and I had to find time in our schedules to write and shoot it, and the other was late because I had to get clarification on what was expected. The posts were due on Friday, but both were uploaded by Sunday. Again, I think you are being hard on yourself, considering the amount of work you put into creating that Open City video with Mikayla

**BLOGPOSTS – INFORMAL A+**

I completed more than three informal posts. Several of these were detailed and substantive

**I completed three informal posts, some of which were substantive**

I completed three informal posts, most of which were short comments

I completed less than three informal posts

OTHER: In addition to posting more than three informal posts, I live tweeted class, the symposium, and others complete their symposium speakers’ live notes.

**SYMPOSIUM (Please identify the panel to which you were assigned)**

**PREPARATION B+**

I contributed adequately to researching the speakers on the panel/ keynote to which I was assigned and I read what other groups uploaded about their panelists (please describe your contribution and what you liked that the other groups posted)

**I contributed adequately to researching the speakers on the panel/ keynote to which I was assigned (please describe your contribution)**

I contributed somewhat to researching the panel/keynote to which I was assigned (please describe your contribution)

I barely contributed to researching the panel/keynote to which I was assigned (please describe your contribution)

OTHER: My panelist was Shola Adenekan and through searching his academia page and Bremen University’s website, I found his academic interests and research projects. I found his online magazine, his LinkedIn page, and article he wrote for various news outlets. I compiled of this data so that everyone could have an understanding who he was as an academic and online persona. Further, I made the link between my group’s other panelists, Meg Arenberg and Kwame Dawes. These two panelists, I wrote, work around issues of access to African poetry—Arenberg through the tool of translation and Dawes through the tool of an online portal. Adenekan engages with the poetic world by studying the ways in which digital poetry shape Nigerian society. This loosely relates to Arenberg’s work around Swahili poetry—both she and Adenekan have to grapple with certain definitions of what poetry is and what it is not.

**SYMPOSIUM ATTENDANCE A**

I attended the panel/keynote to which I was assigned as well as other symposium sessions (please list)

* Aesthetic Judgment in the Era of the Digital” - Keynote by Ato Quayson
* 1 p.m. "When Poetry Goes Public" - Panel discussion with Meg Arenberg, Shola Adenekan and Kwame Dawes, facilitated by Katwiwa Mule
* 5 p.m. "Shifting Margins: Digital Media and New African Textual Practices" - Keynote by Akin Adesokan
* Stephanie Bosch Santana—“The Digital Worlding of African Literatures”
* James Yeku—“The Text of African literature in a Digital Age”

**I attended the panel/keynote to which I was assigned (please list)**

I did not attend any of the symposium events

OTHER

**PART TWO**

**Write a short paragraph describing your most memorable interaction with one of the symposium participants**

Akin Adesokan approached me and Professor Vaughan before his keynote and asked if I was his daughter and we both laughed and said no. During the dinner, though, he approached me again and asked where I was from. I told him Texas but he asked about my parents, to which I replied Texas. He then asked about my grandparents, and I again told him Texas. He had thought that I was Nigerian and told me that I looked like his cousins. Conversations like these happened all the time when I was Paris, I told him—everyone thinks that I look like their cousins. When they would learn that I was African American, they’d tell me that I’m probably from their country. He laughed and our conversation turned to black Francophone cinema. We talked about *Girlhood.* I asked him what films I should absolutely see and he suggested Black Girl by Ousmane Sembène. It was a warm interaction and it was nice to see how quickly the conversation turned to his research interests.

**Identify and describe one important insight you took away from one of the symposium presentations**

Meg Arenberg’s “Swahili Poetry’s Digital Geographies” exposed me to a unique artistic community. I learned about the ways in which Kenyan writers talk and think about Swahili poetry. Hearing about the various rules of WhatsApp group and the debates that arose around tradition versus innovation was intriguing, and Arenberg showed the importance of capturing these conversations. Her talk made me think not only about digital literary creation in Africa, but also how people talk about the phenomenon.

**Write a paragraph about what you liked most about your favorite fictional reading**

My favorite reading was *Americanah.* As I shared in a blog post, Ifemelu’s character reminded me of a younger version of myself. I identified with quite a few parts of her story—her self-destructiveness, dating the seemingly perfect guy but not feeling a spark, and making people mad from blogging about it. The strongest point I came to identify with was when she describes how the blog made her look out for instances of racism in every interaction. Having the class blog had a similar effect on me. When I shared this with Evan, he mentioned that this may just be a side effect of writing. Our discussion of such feelings in class made me realize some of the emotional and ethical implications of being a writer. If I hadn’t had the experience of reading *Americanah,* I don’t know if I would have been able to articulate why these feelings made me uncomfortable.

I also really enjoyed Chris Abani’s *Face.* The themes reminded me of the work Yrsa’s Daley-Ward’s, a young British-Nigerian poet. The way Abani writes about his family reminded me of how Daley-Ward writes about hers.

**Write a paragraph about what you found most provocative about your favorite critical/theoretical reading**

My favorite critical reading was the piece we read from Ato Quayson’s *Oxford Street, Accra.* Language fascinates me, and to read about the complex ways that people reassemble it to fit their needs and reflect their experiences was exciting. This was a fantastic first reading—it opened me the creative, multifaceted world that a distinctly African context awakens. I talked about the tro-tro signs with Quayson after the symposium and told me about Ghana’s diversity and the kinds of people who live in that world.

**Identify and describe the three posts you generated that received the most feedback from your classmates in or outside of the classroom**

My three most popular posts were “Who’s Gonna Pass This Class?”. “We Can’t All be Yukonboi,” and “Open Campus.”

The first two grew out of a collaborative post with Evan and Brandon. I wanted to create a post that experimented with form while discussing anxieties I was having around writing for the class blog. I wanted to mirror the conversations I saw happening in the comment sections in “Diary of a Zulu Girl” and “Diary of a Single Mum.” As we were drafting the Facebook post, I thought that opening our discussions to the class would be nice way to take our conversation to another level. The Facebook conversation started at around midnight, but because you had suggested that we make a group chat to wake each other up, Evan, Brandon, and I were able to reach out to everyone. The resulting conversations were fun and engaging. We discovered that we all had similar anxieties and wanted to overcome them. Our conversations were different from those we would have on the class blog—they seemed easier and more genuine because the stakes the lower. It was a group of students joining together to discuss a class that they cared about.

“Open Campus” was a collaborative post between me and Mika. We had both taken classes of yours before and so were familiar with the exercise where we had to write like the author. We decided to rewrite a couple of passages from *Open City* using this same idea. Then we went around and filmed each other as “flâneurs” of the Amherst campus. It was a fun project to do—our music was from the Mahler symphony that Julius attends at the end of the novel.

**Identify and describe the three posts generated by your classmates that you found most helpful or thought provoking**

“6 Reasons: Why Digital Africas?” by Amber (amber34) and JD (mammath2018) was an imaginative exploration of their journey through the course. Crafting a listicle, they discuss how themes like inequality within the digital world, the power of postcolonial and anticolonial African artistic production, and the implications of online social worlds. They provide examples for everything that they list. These examples range from readings from the beginning of the course to comments from the symposium to other students’ blog posts. Their post connects the major themes present throughout our course.

“>>Open City:” by Kate (mkk20) was also one of my favorites. This post, like JD and Amber’s experimented with form. Through a pretend online chat box, Kate talks to inner-self as way to talk about *Open City.* She describes that the novel was a form of escape for her and that she could identify with some of Julius’s thoughts even though she didn’t like him. My favorite part of the post was when her “everyday self” learns that Julius assaulted someone—it mirrored the confusion and slight betrayal I felt upon reading that too. She insightfully says since that we’re forced remain in perspective for the entire book, we place part of ourselves in him. We have to struggle with that break of trust, but how do we do that? Instead of answering this question, Kate hilariously logs off the chat, reflecting the way that I too checked out.

Anita’s (attemptinghybridity) post “Nien Numb.” also spoke to me. From Tumblr, I was familiar with critiques of science-fiction that the genre reflects colonialist and racist worldviews and Anita’s post provided a concrete example of such. She describes Nien Numb, an alien from the *Star Wars* franchise. He was an arms dealer who spoke a mix of alien gibberish. Anita reveals, however, that this alien language is actually a mixture of two of her native languages—Kelinjin and Kikuyu. She describes the shock she first felt at hearing her languages spoken by an alien criminal and the resulting distance she placed between herself and science-fiction. She then moves to discuss the way science-fiction constructs “the African” and blackness and the ways in which these constructs enter into the public consciousness. Most compelling was Anita’s reflection on the power of science fiction. It reminds me of Burrell’s *Invisible Users*, and her conversation about who gets to shed identity and create new personas in the online space. Science-fiction has the possibilities of creating new worlds, technologies, social relations. The genre, as written by white, western authors, others and “uncreates” nonwhite populations. Nnedi Okorafor has emerged as a voice against such epistemological violence. Her work creates worlds and imagines new possibilities of existence.

**Identify and describe three readings hyperlinked through your classmates’ blogposts that you clicked on, read, and found useful. (Make sure to include the screen names of your classmates as well as the links to these readings in your description)**

1. Markel (mkthomas21)—Warsan Shire: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-writing-life-of-a-young-prolific-poet-warsan-shire>
   1. I love all things Beyoncé, so Markel’s post about her use of Warsan Shire’s poetry was exciting to read. While I had run across some of work on Tumblr, Lemonade was my first meaningful encounter with Shire. The hyperlink to her name brought me to a *New Yorker* article titled “The Writing Life of Warsan Shire, A Young, Prolific Poet.” The article opens with a description on the ways the writing world has changed and reflects some of conversations we had in class and at the symposium. The author, Alexis Okeowo, states that a lot of poetry is now produced online through Twitter and Tumblr. Warsan Shire is among this new genre of poets and is actually the 2014 Young Poet Laureate of London. The article traces some of the themes that Shire writes about in her work, such as the immigrant experience, home, and family. Okeowo writes that Shire seeks to tell the stories of those whose stories are untold or told incorrectly. She discusses Shire’s book of poems, “Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth.”
2. Kate (mkk20)—Escape Literature: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-writing-life-of-a-young-prolific-poet-warsan-shire>
   1. Kate’s post about *Open City* led me to this article about escapist literature. It reminds me of some of the first conversations we had in the course about “Diary of a Zulu Girl” and “Diary of a Single Mum.” The article discusses the value we place in some literary genres over others and claims that many literary genres can be labeled escapist. The author, Esther Lombardi, in addition to describing why escape literature is popular, details differences between “lowbrow” escapist literature like *Twilight* and real escapist literature like *The Lord of the Rings*. The article made me question the characteristics of “lowbrow” escapist. As we said in class about the early novel and these new blog-style narratives, these genres generally appeal to young women. It was fascinating to consider that young women flocked to these genres because these were some of the only places that they saw their experiences reflected.
3. Sedem (saba)—Sembène! - Official Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=16&v=wSpIvrfUMac>
   1. My third hyperlink is a video that Sedem included in her post “Father of African Cinema: Ousmane Sembène. I read this post because of my conversation with Adesokan about African cinema. I’ve recently become really interested in the ways that cinema helps me understand worlds that aren’t my own, and this trailer to a documentary about Sembène emphasized the importance of the late filmmaker’s world-building. I’ve not seen any of Sembène’s films, and I wasn’t aware that he was considered the father of African cinema, and this trailer made me want to correct that. It speaks about Sembène using his camera as a tool for activism, creation and education. It also speaks about the importance of telling Sembène story. It reminds me of Anita’s post about the role of movies in society. Keeping Sembène’s story in the national memory is important, and this documentary will help achieve this.

**Describe briefly the three most important conversations OUTSIDE of the classroom that this course generated for you.**

Over Thanksgiving break, I went to a party in Brooklyn to celebrate Zimbabwe’s regime change where everyone there, except me and my Trinidadian friend, was African. A met a man who lived in London and when he asked what I studied, I told him about Digital Africas. I launched into all the new things I learned in the course, from writing novels on Facebook to the technological innovations that arise from scarcity. I excitedly told the man how cool I thought the technological innovations were and he responded that they weren’t necessarily cool, but ways to survive. My conversation with him made me realize that while I’d been learning all of these new things about Africa, I did not seek out the voices of Africans. While working to overcome my ignorance about the continent’s many countries, I realized that I was reading the class materials as pure theory, as if they had no social implications. My conversation with this man helped give me another perspective on Digital Africas, one I wouldn’t have gotten without this interaction. My realization reminded me of the symposium tweet that asked why it was always western spaces that talked about African creation. I don’t remember where the tweeter was from, but I realized the importance of hearing everyone’s voices when studying a given subject.

My second conversation was with my German friend that I met in Paris. He big technology nerd—he codes for fun, builds machines, and is always trying to tell me about confusing things like cryptocurrencies. In fact, it was cryptocurrencies that started our conversations about Digital Africas. Before I left Paris, I had forgotten to close my bank account and cancel my cell phone carrier. When I learned that they were still deducting money for my bill, I asked my friend if he could deposit money into my account since it’d cost be too much to transfer. Figuring out a way to pay him back was difficult, and I told him that if we were in Africa we’d be able to send money by text. He told me that he’d heard that cryptocurrencies were a big there, and our conversation turned to the continent’s technological innovations. I felt bad for being surprised that he knew about these developments. I thought that not many people knew about these things since I was reading about them for the first time, but my conversation with my friend showed me that those passionate about technology follows its news.

My last conversation is one I wrote about above. The Facebook post was my favorite “out of class conversation” because we all talked about our fears as writers and bloggers outside of the “academic gaze.” It felt unpretentious and honest. We realized that we had similar anxieties, which made writing for the blog easier. My favorite conversation was when discussed what it means to engage with social media in an academic space. Why did we all feel safer talking over Facebook than over Wordpress? We all knew that ultimately our comments would be posted on the blog, so what made these conversations feel more organic? These questions made me think about how Parham and you talk about the constraints of social media platforms and the ways in which they influence content produced. I became curious as to why typing on Facebook felt better than typing on Wordpress. I wondered what “better” even meant. It was at this moment that I started to understand the various ways in which different digital spaces functioned. It helped me more deeply understand Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s “The Pleasure of the Blog,” and sparked a curiosity to explore the digital humanities.