

## An Intellectual History of African Literary Studies?

Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi

*Twenty-first-century African literary production has generated a number of conundrums for scholars invested in African literary studies as one recognizable field of study. Some of these conundrums drive Tejumola Olaniyan's declaration of a post-global condition in African literary studies in "African Literature in the Post-Global Age." Understanding that essay demands a detour through an intellectual history of African literary studies from about 1990 to 2010.*

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Criticism exists because critics practice it. It is neither an institution nor, strictly speaking, a discipline.

—Edward Said, "The Future of Criticism"

Scholarship is produced in waves of reaction and anticipation, sometimes prescient about that which has not yet entered the public domain, at other times struggling to keep up with seismic shifts and unanticipated events that render our observations belaboured and late.

—Ann Laura Stoler, "The Rot Remains": From Ruins to Ruination"

### Guises of Intellectual History in African Literary History

The scattered states of twenty-first-century African literary production have generated a number of conundrums for scholars invested in African literary studies as one recognizable field of study; some of these conundrums drive Tejumola Olaniyan's paradigmatic declaration of a post-global condition in African literary studies in "African Literature in the Post-Global Age," a paper that was first presented at the 2015 conference of the African Literature Association (ALA) in Bayreuth. Although the *post-global* has a genealogy rooted in dissent with the *global* and *globalization*, it offers some particular implications for Africanists who grapple with unequal access to academic resources as well as those whose work is thwarted by well-worn definitions

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of Africa and ideas of Africa. Together with Ato Quayson in 2007, Olaniyan makes an argument that motivates his post-global position:

African literature today enjoys a reputation far wider than its age and circumstances would ordinarily suggest, and continues to be a major propelling force in the growth of *more global studies* such as postcolonial literary and cultural studies. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of African literary criticism and theory, which has been very much invisible in the current expanding interest in African literature, especially in Europe and North America.<sup>1</sup> (My emphasis)

Whereas Olaniyan seems to aspire to “more global studies” in that introduction, he now rejects that goal. Instead, he suggests situated engagements with the different institutionalizations of African literary studies and practices of African literary scholarship.

The discrepancies between the global dissemination of African literatures and the production of appropriate African literary criticism have animated many of Olaniyan’s interventions over the years. We can read “African Literature in the Post-Global Age” as a return to this conundrum, and one in which he relinquishes the notion of one single field. This end of a *field commonsense* reflects the quandary of African scholars in the North American university system: the struggle to produce work committed to the needs of audiences in Africa while also fulfilling the demands of intellectual communities in the global north. The move to a post-global position decentralizes not only African literary studies (belatedly), but also admits the decentralization of Africa as an object of study in the broader field of African studies. It is this possibility of working through the scattered states of Africa and African literary studies that lends the post-global an allure.

Olaniyan’s “post-global” intervention redresses, in part, an elaboration in which Alfred López pegs the post-global age to 9/11 and thus ties its chronology to the putative end of the West’s dominant capitalist neoliberalism and its related unrelenting systematization and unification of forms of exchange.<sup>2</sup> An Africanist intellectual history of the term differs from López’s itinerary. As can be expected, Olaniyan redefines the post-global as a critique of the global’s emphasis on nation-states, endless interconnectedness, and its obliviousness to uneven development and inequality. His *post-global* does not discard the global; but, as it unhinges the global from its position of privilege, the post-global supplements the global with the ability to perceive the failures of the comprehension of the world produced through the global. Certainly, Olaniyan joins other critics, such as Sanjay Krishnan, who criticizes naive utilizations of *global* to produce the world as a “single, unified entity, articulated in space and developing over (common) time.”<sup>3</sup> But he proposes the post-global as more than a critique of the restrictive *global*: his manifesto is a space-clearing gesture that

1 Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson, “Introduction,” *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, eds. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 1–3, esp. 1.

2 Alfred J. López, “‘Everybody else just living their lives’: 9/11, Race and the New Postglobal Literature,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 42.4–5 (2008): 509–29.

3 Sanjay Krishnan, *Reading the Global: Troubling Perspectives on Britain’s Empire in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1.

addresses the fault lines within twenty-first-century African literary studies. What fascinates me is the following:

After all, what the logic of historical sociology tells us is that our historical reality out there is really beyond our linguistic capability to render adequately, outside of a good mix of the useful discursive tools of evasions, equivocations, illusions, and truths backed up in large part by the persuasiveness of the utterance. The “post” has been one such tool—no more, no less. In addition to the problem of language, I have always suspected that many of us, Africans and non-Africans alike, have always had overly simplistic and transparent expectations of Africa, even if we many times hide them well. In this circumstance, there is probably still no more sharply prodding conceptual irritant out there than the “post.” So, let us use it.<sup>4</sup>

Inasmuch as Olaniyan deploys *post-global* to move beyond the certainties of the *global*, his intervention at the 2015 ALA conference does not so much target globalists, somewhere out there in the world, but scholars of African literary studies and any simple notions of Africa and its emplacement within schematic renditions of a global world. His essay addresses ongoing debates about the status of African literatures written outside the continent and their eligibility for Africa-based prizes, debates on the Africanness of emerging discursive terms, such as Afropolitanism, or even the relevance or ability of expatriate African writers to write about Africa. Beyond these scholarly concerns, I am convinced Olaniyan is also motivated by the need to table matters that are not simply linked to Africa’s economic plight. These especially include the treatment of minorities in African polities. Reflexive interrogations of Africa and African identities have emerged periodically. Nevertheless, on-the-ground forces in African terrains have also periodically propelled enunciations of *reactionary* definitions of Africa, African identities, or African communities. Olaniyan speaks to a moment: the sudden prominence of newer diasporic formations that began about thirty years ago with the massive migrations of Africans within and outside the continent. The post-global, turned to look at Africa, captures the variegated sense of Africa itself while acknowledging the forces that compel groups to seek interpellations under the term.

As I have suggested, Olaniyan’s post-global turn belongs within an intellectual history of African literary studies. He registers an important stage of that history in an article published in 2003 (“African Writers, Exile, and the Politics of a Global Diaspora”), in which he examines the promises of the then-ascendant term *global age*. Although clearly fascinated with the term *global*, he subtly suggests *global diaspora* better addresses the position of African intellectuals located outside the continent given that the idea of the global was premised on inequalities that privileged the global north. Even there, though, he acknowledges the problematic meanings of “exile,” which ignores the plight of those unable to leave the continent at a time when the continent seemed mired in political and economic chaos. In that essay written at the end of the tumultuous 1990s, Olaniyan cannot escape the dire economic situation

4 Tejumola Olaniyan, “African Literature in the Post-Global Age: Provocations on Field Common-sense,” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 3.3 (2016): 387–96.

and the spectre of recent dictatorships or violent conflicts. Consequently, even the term *global diaspora* can be embraced only cautiously. I quote him in detail:

Globality and the global diaspora seem to be an unequal and one-way traffic. I have pushed my exploration this way because of my suspicion that the ideas of a global age and a global diaspora, *attracted to them as I am*, may not be globally shared, and that my attention to them is simply due to my location in a “metropole” where the intensity of both legal and illegal immigration have contributed to a sense of the US as not a “nation” as such but a land of many diasporas. At instances such as this, I am reminded of the warning by Rey Chow . . . that “third world” intellectuals in the metropole guard against the “lure of diaspora,” that is, the tendency to forget the difference between one’s experience as a diasporic intellectual and that of those “stuck at home” (118). Her words, “stuck at home,” are sobering enough.<sup>5</sup> (My emphasis)

The post-global essay returns to the long-term problematic relationship between scholars/intellectuals “stuck at home” and those in Europe and America—for whom the global condition seems to possess an unmediated sense. It is for this reason I suggest that the post-global deserves a distinctly African historicization that pays attention to the intellectual histories of African literary studies.

If we heed Olaniyan, the post-global eschews the pretensions of the global, that subtend even debates on Afropolitanism, diversifies definitions of African literatures, and recognizes the multiplicity of its repertoires of criticism in the context of uneven development. It is a mark of twenty-first-century African literary production that the multiplicity of the locations, genealogies, and institutions of its criticism no longer permits any simple overview. Whereas it might be easy to summon the early trajectories of African literary studies as the field took off in the 1960s and 1970s, the twenty-first century is characterized by a series of critical regionalisms that foster dialogue while recognizing distinct spheres of influence. Olaniyan does not bemoan the loss of a field commonsense, but registers the consolidation of distinct fissures in what for him—and scholars of his generation—was historically constituted as a recognizable field. The post-global intervention crystallizes his desire for exchanges across these now heterogeneous fields.

### **Institutional Sites of African Literary Studies**

It is highly instructive to interpret Olaniyan’s post-global proposition within the parameters of the institutional debate in which it was first presented at the 2015 ALA conference.<sup>6</sup> It is in that context that Olaniyan’s critique of the aversion to theory gains its salience. Although he has frequently inveighed against this aversion to theory in African literary studies, and I cannot rehearse its history, there is more at stake here than something called theory. Rather, when read across his essays, his aversion to *the aversion to theory* narrates the split between generations of Africanists and between

5 Tejumola Olaniyan, “African Writers, Exile, and the Politics of a Global Diaspora,” *West Africa Review* 4.1 (2003): 1–8, esp. 5–6.

6 This was in response to Kwaku Korang’s demands for new “expansive and transitive” definitions of African literature. See Olaniyan, “African Literature in the Post-Global Age,” 387.

scholar collectives with divergent interpretational affiliations. Again, in the introduction to their co-edited anthology of African literary theory and criticism, Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson declare the relation between African literary criticism and literary theory:

First, we conceive of literary “criticism” as the systematic explication, analysis, and interpretation of literary works. Literary “theory,” on the other hand, is a second or meta-level reflection on literature and literary criticism; the philosophy of the emergence and evolution, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of literature and criticism. Both practices are united by certain levels of rigor, abstraction and extrapolation, even if in different degrees.<sup>7</sup>

On one hand, Olaniyan’s plea for theory grows organically out of this passage: The heterogeneous locations of African literary production and the diversity of its aesthetic forms demand meta-critical languages. But Olaniyan insinuates a larger issue beyond theory per se: Why is there such a disparity among forms of criticism, and what can be done about it? Although he shies away from such bluntness, it seems to me that Olaniyan grieves the perceived absence of a certain rigor of abstraction and finesse in criticism at the conventions of the ALA, which stands in for the larger field. This unspoken assumption has long circulated among Africanists versus literary scholars who also do African literature but eschew ALA conventions for the MLA (Modern Language Association) or the ACLA (American Comparative Literature Association), where one might find more “sophisticated” discussions of African literary texts.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from the perennial theory question, the bulk of Olaniyan’s intervention focuses on resurgent interrogations about the African status or use-value of some narratives. Hence, he proposes a series of tests that, ostensibly, examine and adjudicate the Africanness of literatures. These, however, are not so much tests as perorations detailing precisely those elements that hew to old debates about nativism that should be jettisoned: the language test, the geographical test, and the corporeal test. In sum: African literature can be written in any language, and because languages serve as tools of social mobility, even indigenous African languages that do not fulfil such a purpose may disappear. The geographical test decries the utility of any geographical specifications to the recognition of African literature—it can be produced in China or on the continent. The ideological test represents the last and most important test for Olaniyan. Amid the uncertainty and shifting terrains of the post-global, he suggests that critics ask for and do what is best for Africa. Yet, how do we determine what is best for Africa, and what does this ideological test promise for literary studies? Given the splits and inequalities in the configuration that Olaniyan outlines, it is impossible to speak of one definitive perception of Africa or one overriding African sensibility. In fact, it seems Olaniyan wants to acknowledge the inequalities of nonresident Africans

7 Olaniyan and Quayson, “Introduction,” 3.

8 The debate on literary sophistication is a thorny issue, which Olaniyan addresses elsewhere. I think Olaniyan is much more direct in his recollections of the thirtieth ALA convention in Wisconsin-Madison at which he organized a seminar titled “On Theory.” See Tejumola Olaniyan, “Introductory Comments: Ato Quayson’s *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*,” *Research in African Literatures* 36.2 (Summer 2005): 95–96.

and Africans on the continent while insisting that all Africans adopt a consolidated ethical sense toward the continent they experience differentially. This is a lofty ideal, but it can be articulated only as a hope and an ethical responsibility. It is on the level of this ethical responsibility and a pragmatics of hope that Olaniyan identifies the interstitial position of African scholars and intellectuals who either reside outside the continent, are plugged into outer-continental networks of support, or are located in the continent's resource-rich enclaves. He does not say so in the post-global essay, but his quandary really is the difficulty of extending an interstitial sensibility to scholars on the continent. The history of this ethical interstitial imperative needs revisiting.

### Interstices of Criticism: A Partial Genealogy

The importance of Olaniyan's position as an academic in the "metropole" is already clear in the 2003 essay, but readers who wonder why he does not work within the rubrics of *postcolonial literary studies* or the resurgent *world literature* should know that his work covers African diaspora/Africana studies, African literary studies, and African cultural studies: it can be characterized as comparative Africana and African literary studies. Reading him within those overlapping contexts lends his post-global position genealogical affiliations with debates in different camps of literary studies in American universities. Three developments related to the migration of African scholars thicken the history of this post-global stance: 1) the gulf between African literary studies and Africana studies; 2) the rapid transformations in the production of African literature since the 1990s; and 3) the absence of infrastructure to support research cultures in African universities outside South Africa. Thinking through the contours of Olaniyan's intellectual migrations illuminates the hidden and undeclared genealogy of his post-global stance.

Two particular essays explain the course to Olaniyan's post-global turn. In "Thinking Afro-Futures," published in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Olaniyan mourns the collapse of collaborative politics among populations of the African diaspora:

From an earlier emphasis on "political culture" or the culture of politics, we entered an age of "cultural politics," or the politics of culture. This shift in imagining *global Africa in the world* deserves a detailed, critical attention. . . . It appeared that "suddenly," more than ever before in history, culture became more real, more accessible, and far more achievable than politics. Culture began to look like an alternative to politics. The various nativisms, traditionalisms, and Afrocentrisms took their powerful justifications from this perception.<sup>9</sup> (My emphasis)

Olaniyan's invocation of a global Africa, in this passage, is a relic from another age. Although the *South Atlantic Quarterly* essay bears the subtitle "A Preamble to an Epistemic History," that epistemic history was never written. Readers can apprehend instead the beginning of a truncated intellectual history, in part, in a volume such as David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity*, in which he registers the end or

9 Tejumola Olaniyan, "Thinking Afro-Futures: A Preamble to an Epistemic History," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108.3 (2009): 449–57, esp. 456.

transformations of the Bandung era dreams and demands a rethinking of postcolonial futures.<sup>10</sup> Arguably, Olaniyan not only enjoins his readers to imagine a post-global Africa, he also demands a re-appraisal of the enmeshments of politics and culture. The implication is clear: as much as academics must recognize the crucial relevance of political action in the liberation projects of the global south, all engagements with cultural artifacts cannot be subsumed into the realm of grand political gestures. It follows then that in a second essay, also published in 2009, “Political Critique and Resistance in African Fiction,” Olaniyan decries the dominance of macro-politically inclined criticism in African literary studies:

Over the years, the criticism of African literature has mostly mirrored the literature’s preoccupation with political criticism and resistance. For a while, that mirroring, by its dominance, hampered investigations of issues in the text that were considered political at all or not related to the macropolitical domain of the nation. It is partly for this reason that African literary criticism today is not richer, in both quantity and quality, *in the exploration of issues about women, sexuality, age, disability, and environment*—to name just a few of the many exciting strands that may be found in literary texts.<sup>11</sup> (My emphasis)

A contrapuntal reading of both essays intimates a search for new reading protocols after the demise of the Bandung era politics. Alternatively, by repatriating insights from what he calls the global African diaspora to Africa and African literary studies—within and beyond the ALA—Olaniyan’s post-global turn insinuates an attention to micropolitical reading practices, new alliances, and a re-imagination and dehomogenization of liberation dreams. Afro-futures must be pluralized and regionalized because black transnationalism has increasingly diverged from African transnationalisms.

Behind the aspiration for calibrated criticism and collaborative deliberations on politics is a desire for reflexive examinations of the commons, for the recognition of difference, and for communication across lines of such difference. Although “the exploration of issues about women, sexuality, age, disability, and environment” is increasingly recognized in African literary studies, reading Olaniyan showcases how such ideas characteristically—but in no way only—associated with literary and cultural studies influenced by postcolonial and ethnic studies in the United States cross over into African scholar collectives. Thus, if in 2003, he appears reluctant to critique scholarship and intellectual habits at home, in 2009, he is comfortable enough to express dissatisfaction with both the end of liberation politics and the overly politicized state of African literary scholarship.

Part of the history of the African literary post-global turn occurred during an erstwhile moment when exchanges across the interconnected fields of postcolonial, Africana, and African studies were commonplace in the United States. The January

10 David Scott, “Prologue,” *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1–22.

11 Tejumola Olaniyan, “Political Critique and Resistance in African Fiction,” *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. Gaurav Desai (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 70–86, esp. 84.

1990 special issue of the *PMLA* on “African and African American Literature,” edited by Henry Louis Gates, marks such a confluence.<sup>12</sup> A generation of academics recollect James Baldwin’s conversation with Chinua Achebe at the 1980 convention of the ALA or the presence of Henry Louis Gates and Gayatri Spivak<sup>13</sup> at the 1986 convention.<sup>14</sup> Those appearances illuminate the historical horizon of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* essay. The problem, obviously, is not the absence of new critical work across Africana and African literary studies. Rather, the field of Africana studies has never taken hold in African institutions, and in the twenty-first century, programs of African American studies, black studies, and Africana studies have experienced remarkable transformations as they responded directly to events immediately in the United States or in the Americas.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these transformations, a number of crucial predecessor terms to the post-global terminology come out of Olaniyan’s work in the in-between spaces of Africana thought and comparative post-colonialisms. Increasingly, he invoked the *interstice* and *interstitiality* as locations for academic and intellectual work.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, he deploys the concept *antinomies* of late or postcolonial modernity. His use of *interstitiality* and *antinomies* foreshadow the post-global. Indubitably, some instigating factors in the body of Olaniyan’s work are his migration to, education in, and professional life in the United States. Olaniyan’s insistence on the “exploration of issues about women, sexuality, age, disability, and environment” bears the imprint of these debates in the United States.

Olaniyan explores the interstice most evocatively in an essay on his experience as an African graduate student and, later, assistant professor becoming *black* in the United States.<sup>17</sup> As a liminal space, the interstice is a place of torment. Yet because it is a product of concrete historical processes, it is a space from which to “imagine possibilities” or to “envision and act for” positions beyond interstitiality.

12 For an elaboration of the now historical affiliations between African and African American literary studies, see the introduction by Gates. Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Introduction: ‘Tell Me, Sir, . . . What Is ‘Black’ Literature?’” *PLMA* 105.1 (1990): 11–22.

13 For a very different account of an encounter between Gayatri Spivak and a scholar of African literary studies, see Tejumola Olaniyan, “African Cultural Studies: Of Travels, Accents, and Epistemologies,” *Rethinking African Cultural Production*, eds. Kenneth W. Harrow and Frieda Ekotto (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 94–108, esp. 95.

14 See Anne V. Adams and Janis Alene Mayes, eds., *Mapping Intersections: African Literature and Africa’s Development*, Vol. 2 (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 212. See also Dorothy Randall-Tsuruta, “In Dialogue to Define Aesthetics: James Baldwin and Chinua Achebe,” *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989): 210–21;

Bill Schwarz, “After Decolonization, After Civil Rights: Chinua Achebe and James Baldwin,” *James Baldwin Review* 1 (2015): 41–66; Chinua Achebe, “The Day I Finally Met Baldwin,” *Callaloo* 25.2 (2002): 502–04.

15 See Michael George Hanchard, “Black Transnationalism, Africana Studies, and the 21st Century,” *Journal of Black Studies* 35.2 (2004): 139–53.

16 See especially Tejumola Olaniyan, “Economies of the Interstice,” *Problematizing Blackness: Self-Ethnographies by Black Immigrants to the United States* (2003): 53–64. See also

Tejúmólá Oláńíyán, “Contingencies of Performance: The Gap as Venue,” *Theatre Survey* 50.01 (2009): 23–34; Tejumola Olaniyan, “African Cultural Studies: Of Travels, Accents, and Epistemologies,” *Rethinking African Cultural Production*, eds. Kenneth W. Harrow and Frieda Ekotto (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 94–108.

17 See Tejumola Olaniyan, “Economies of the Interstice,” 53–64.



Synthesizing a version of interstitiality out of Afrocentrist and postmodernist positions, he defines the interstice as a space of “critical consciousness” that promises “a potentially more democratic and egalitarian politics” and “potent desires, psychic as well as political, that can be harnessed and channelled to recreate what dissatisfies us in the existing arrangement.”<sup>18</sup> This pragmatic, utilitarian grasp of the interstice informs the post-global, which rehearses gestures around the interstice. But it also brings the distribution of interstitial forces and insight together into a mutually co-implicated relation:

Let me be clear that post-global is not wholly about centrifugal forces breaking closed spaces and boundaries to move outward. It is also non-ironically about the rise of muscular centripetal forces in defense of existing enclaves and old solutions. ... Post-global then describes particular and peculiar exacerbations of certain social processes and experiences.<sup>19</sup>

The breach in the vocabularies of social experience returns in multiple forms. And the post-global signifies greater attention to unevenness, unseating any singular unallocated perspective.

Readers can look at the essay “African Cultural Studies: Of Travels, Accents, Epistemologies” for the history of the centripetal and centrifugal forces that destabilized and reshaped African literary studies. Olaniyan describes the essay as “a cultural history of a scholarly method, partly an institutional history of cross-continental discourse formation, and partly an intellectual biography of a generation.”<sup>20</sup> It is in that history of African literary studies from about 1980 to 2010 that he finally illuminates the developments and impasses running through his previous essays that culminate in the post-global stance. As a label for the scholarly stance of scholars of African literatures, the post-global permits the present multiplicity of institutional histories, the disparities in intellectual formations, and schisms among generations of scholars. When Olaniyan explains why Africanists must dispense with singular institutional histories or epistemologies, it seems he speaks to the historical moment when Africa-based institutions played a vital role in the study of African cultural production. The key message in the essay is African scholars carry different accents—a metaphor for intellectual positions—based on their access to infrastructure and resources and their affiliations with different scholar collectives. As Olaniyan explains, starting in the 1980s the hitherto unified field of African literary or cultural studies developed two major orientations depending on the location of the critics. Those who had studied in the United States and Europe and stayed there or traveled often to European and North American universities became theoretically inclined and adhered to an interstitial stance. Scholars who remained on the continent were largely affirmative—that is, more quasi-nationalist—in character. In spite of some contradictions in this geographical division, the interstitial mode dominates in Europe and North America.

18 Olaniyan, “Economies of the Interstice,” 62–63.

19 Olaniyan, “African Literature in the Post-Global Age,” 391.

20 Olaniyan, “African Cultural Studies,” 95.

“African Cultural Studies: Of Travels, Accents, Epistemologies” also clarifies the economic impetus behind the post-global. As the fortunes of African countries declined over the last three decades and universities and publishing infrastructures suffered, scholars in Africa have found themselves in a difficult position from which to map or make connections across the world or embrace the interrogatory positions of interstitiality. Such positions of radical openness and constant interrogation of identities *appear*, however, to be more possible in the global north with its stable infrastructure. Thus, the affirmative stance emphasizes economic inequalities, while the interstitial stance appears incapable of responding to it. And, unfortunately, the interstitial accent dominates in Europe and America. Indeed, notions of the *global* and *world* invariably bear accents borne out of interstitial modes.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the post-global, I suggest, dismantles the unquestioned enunciation of the global that does not acknowledge the idea of the global as a perspective with a specific history that potentially neglects the material experiences of that which it does not see:

There ought and should be different accents, in response to differences of the contexts of intellectual production. The problem comes when accents unequally cross borders. This is more so where there is an in-border lack of access to adequate intraregional scholarly research and publishing opportunities—through which a region can critically nurture its own views of the world in vigorous interaction with other accents. Were there long-standing and flourishing African publishing outlets that Africanists all over the world could interact with routinely, there would not be the current orphan mentality that structures the relationship of scholarship in and on Africa [in relation] to Euro-America.<sup>22</sup>

Here is the nub of the post-global argument for African literary studies. Certainly, some scholars in South Africa possess the interstitial accents, but Olaniyan does not wish for scholars on the continent to adopt the interstitial positioning unless it can do critical work for their situated experience. As he has stated, however, the interstitial position is useful for new work on marginalized subjects: disability, the environment, and sexuality to name a few. Thus, the post-global resolves the conundrum and impasse that Olaniyan registers in that essay: “Equality is the indispensable first condition for the productive mutual abrasion of accents. I am sure we can and will get to that point; I just don’t know when.”<sup>23</sup> It is at this juncture that his post-global intervention becomes a challenge. The Africans, who were “stuck at home,” did not stagnate: they went through profound definitive experiences that include the acceleration of internal African mobilities and the emergence of new claims by marginalized groups. Thus, Africans are not waiting for accents from the global north: rather, there are on-site accents and epistemologies responding to local claims. The question is: How can scholar collectives of African literary studies speak to one another across the fissures within their fields and their respective constitutions of the world?

21 Olaniyan, “African Cultural Studies,” 104.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 105.

### The Friction of Common Senses

The post-global offers advantages to African literary studies. It calibrates the proliferating *global* as a view from an infrastructural apparatus that denies any abrasion or resistance to its representational projects. More specifically, the post-global solicits an appraisal of the divides within the fields of African literary and cultural studies, and demands an acknowledgment of the effects of uneven infrastructure on scholarship. It also allows scholars a framework for active appropriation and incorporation of theory from the North even as scholars produce theory from the South. What is at stake in this conversation on the unequal circulation of accents is a determination of how certain accents might be critically deployed in African terrains without the accusation of cheap, derivative flashiness. How can we think of disability studies and the study of sexual minorities—for example—without acknowledging the provenance of some of those discourses from the North? In this sense, a post-global African literary studies offers a greater facility for strategic situational alliances across spaces and groups with conflictual institutional differences and histories.

Scholars are responding to the sea change Olaniyan identifies. An expansive sense and practice of African literary scholarship exists, but Olaniyan's intervention reveals the need for a sense of new scholarship emerging across platforms from within Africa—outside of South Africa—as much as outer-continental scholarship. The most prestigious research journals, such as *Research in African Literatures* and *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, remain in Europe and North America. However, a sense of the change appears, for example, in the October 2016 issue of the *PMLA*, "Literature in the World," in which several scholars of African literatures register the changes in the field, its methodologies and theories. Mixing a range of anecdotal, auto-ethnographic, and critical material, they comment precisely on the problems Olaniyan identifies.<sup>24</sup> The specific ways in which African literatures and African literary criticism emerge through friction surface distinctly in the titles emerging from presses.<sup>25</sup> Having said that, institutions, such as the ALA, which solicited Olaniyan's post-global address, must offer concrete action. To return to the comparison to the United States, perhaps the ALA needs to start a tradition of making reports on the state of the field like ACLA does. Such a web-based, open access report would include contributions from scholars from a range of institutional sites. They could suggest their keywords, current debates, and emergent theoretical visions. In response to Olaniyan's worries about criticism: perhaps the ALA needs to periodically focus its conference themes on questions of literary history and aesthetics. With such measures, the debate on the post-global would be repatriated. In other words, the ALA could begin the infrastructure for the interchanges of accents.

24 I cite the *PMLA* because of my reference to the 1990 special issue. See especially the essays by Akin Adesokan, Grace Musila, Susan Kiguli, Terri Ochiaga, Meg Samuelson, and Godwin Siundu.

25 As examples, see Doreen Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and Participation* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013); Madhu Krishan, *Contemporary African Literature in English: Global Locations, Postcolonial Identifications* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2014); Dustin Crowley, *Africa's Narrative Geographies: Charting the Intersections of Geocriticism and Postcolonial Studies* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2015).