

# SUSANNA L. SACKS

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## Faculty Appointments

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2022– Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, Department of English,  
Howard University  
2019–22 Assistant Professor, English Department, The College of Wooster.

## Education

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Ph. D., English, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, June 2019  
Graduate Certificate in African Studies.  
MA., English, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, January 2015  
BA., Sociology and English, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, May 2013

**Current Book Project:** *Networked Poetics: African Poetry's Digital Turn.*

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*Networked Poetics* analyzes contemporary poetry from southern Africa to present a history of emerging literary cultures in Africa. Poetry in the twenty-first century is produced across digital networks: shaped through local communities, evaluated on a global scale, contemporary poetry is simultaneously transnational and local. These changes progressed unevenly: in Africa, where state support for the arts is limited, and publishing focused on educational books, the continent's so-called "mobile revolution" has spawned a flourishing of digitally-connected poetry. Interweaving ethnographic observation and extensive literary analysis, *Networked Poetics* demonstrates that, as more artists in the global South reach wider audiences through online publication, poetic form has shifted to reflect social media's aesthetic norms: urgency, immediacy, and populism. These changes have, in turn, challenged elite processes of valuation, forcing literary institutions like prizes, festivals, and curricula to accommodate and thus reinforce those works that draw popular attention. The networked public sphere fosters new forms of literary production, blurring the line between elite and popular production. *Networked Poetics* argues that contemporary African poetry is shaped, from inception to canonization, by the influence of digital media publication.

## Publications

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### Peer Reviewed Articles

"The Promise of a Pan-African Poetics: The *Spoken Word Project*, IGO Funding, and the Curation of Contemporary Poetry." In *Expressive Networks*, ed. Matthew Kilbane. Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, forthcoming.

"From Plinth to Stage: Protest Theatre as Historiographic Activism in *The Fall* (2016)." *PMLA*, winter 2023.

“Forging a Poetics of Connection: African Poetry’s Remediation in Lockdown.” *Poetics from the Global South*, special issue of *Interventions*, edited by Nathan Suhr-Sytsma and Ryan Topper.

“Slam Poetry in Malawi: Digital Media Aesthetics and Translingual Poetic Forms.” In *Digital Technology and Languages in African Communities and Classrooms: Innovations and Opportunities*. Ed. Leketi Makelela and Goodith White. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters Press (2021)

“Digital Voices: Negotiating Global Forms & Local Identity in Performance Poetry from Cape Town.” *Digital Africas*, special issue of *Postcolonial Text*, edited by Shola Adenekan, Rhonda Cobham-Sander, Stephanie Bosch Santana, and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang, 15:3-4 (2020)

“Moving Forms: Individuals, Institutions, and the Production of Slam Poetry Networks in Southern Africa.” *ASAP/Journal*, 5:1 (2020)

“The Poetics of Dictatorship: Song and Sound in H. K. Banda’s ‘Tenth Republic Anniversary Tour.’” *Research in African Literatures*, 50:4 (2020)

“Evan Mawarire’s #ThisFlag as Tactical Lyric: The Role of Digital Speech in Imagining a Networked Zimbabwean Nation.” *African Studies Review*, 62:3 (2019)

### Review Articles

“Decolonizing Literary Time: Poetry, Print, and the Making of Postcolonial Literature, by Nathan Suhr-Sytsma.” *Postcolonial Text*, 15:1 (2020).

“Review of *The Only Magic We Know: Selected Modjaji Poems 2004 to 2019*.” *Africa in Words*, 5 June 2020. <https://africanwords.com/2020/06/05/a-thousand-tentative-tendrils-review-of-the-only-magic-we-know-selected-modjaji-poems-2004-to-2019/>

“Review of *Fool’s Gold: Selected Short Stories from Modjaji Books*.” *Africa in Words*, 29 May 2020. <https://africanwords.com/2020/05/29/but-words-grow-up-and-reverberate-arja-salafranca-review-of-fools-gold-selected-short-stories-from-modjaji-books/>

“Q&A: ‘honoring the writers’ – in conversation with Colleen Higgs, Modjaji Press.” *Africa in Words*. 23 May 2020. [africanwords.com/2020/05/22/qa-honoring-the-writers-in-conversation-with-colleen-higgs-of-modjaji-press/](https://africanwords.com/2020/05/22/qa-honoring-the-writers-in-conversation-with-colleen-higgs-of-modjaji-press/)

### Fellowships, Awards, and Honors

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2022-23 Faculty Research Leave, College of Wooster.

2021-22 Visiting Scholar in African Studies, Northwestern University.

2019-20 Faculty Fellow in Educational Technology, College of Wooster.

2018-19 Virgil Heltzel Fellowship, Department of English, Northwestern University.

2018 Best Graduate Student Essay Prize for “Digital Voices: Negotiating Global Forms and Local Identity in Cape Town Performance Poetry,” African Literature Association.

Honorable Mention, Best Graduate Student Essay Prize for “Poetry in Action: Evan Mawarire’s ‘This Flag,’ Networked Protest, and the Hashtag as Collective Poetry,” African Studies Association.

Digital Humanities Research Grant, The Graduate School, Northwestern University.

- 2017-18 Franke Graduate Fellow, Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities, Northwestern University.
- 2017-19 Graduate Writing Fellow, The Writing Place, Northwestern University.
- 2016, 2017 Travel Grant, Program of African Studies, Northwestern University.
- 2016 Dissertation Research Award, Buffett Institute for Global Studies, Northwestern University.
- Graduate Research Award, The Graduate School, Northwestern University.
- Hans E. Panofsky Pre-Dissertation Research Award, Program of African Studies, Northwestern University.
- Finalist, Wenner-Gren Foundation Dissertation Fieldwork Grant.
- 2015, 2016 Summer Language Grant, Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Program
- 2015 Morris Goodman Award, Program of African Studies, Northwestern University.
- 2013 Mellon Interdisciplinary Cluster Fellowship. African Studies, Northwestern University.

### **Invited Talks**

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- 2022 Moderator and Co-organizer, with Wendy Griswold. Symposium on “Africa and the Avant-Garde.” Northwestern University. April-October 2022.
- 2021 Moderator, Postgraduate Workshop on “Literature and the Economy.” Bristol University. 20 May 2021.
- 2020 “The Patron and the Hustler: Contemporary Funding Flows and Literary Agency.” Symposium on Global and Local Strategies of Twenty-First Century African Artists, Northwestern University. 1-2 May 2020. (*Postponed*)
- 2019 “Transglobal Africa, Youth, Poetry, and Hip-Hop Culture.” Symposium on Global Africa, Migration, and the Arts, Rutgers University. 27-30 March 2019.
- 2018 “Performing Community: Networked Poetics and the Malawian Public Sphere,” Department of African & African American Studies, Washington University. 18 September 2018.
- 2015 “The Performance of Nationhood: Poetry and National Identity Formation in Malawi Under Hastings Banda, 1963-1993.” English Department Seminar, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa. 26 August 2015.
- “Contemporary Malawian Poetry.” Kistrech Poetry Festival, Kisii University, Kisii Kenya. 3-10 August 2015.

### **Conference Presentations**

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- 2022 Co-convenor, with Tosin Gbogi. “Music, Animation, and the Post-Pandemic Life of African Digital Media.” African Studies Association Annual Meeting. 17-19 Nov. 2022.
- “Archives/Algorithms/Ethics.” African Literature Association Annual Meeting, 20 May 2022.

- “Teaching the Fourteenth-Century Mande Epic *Sundiata* in an Anglophone Literature Methods Class.” Modern Language Association Annual Meeting. 6-9 Jan. 2022
- “Against Algorithmic Aesthetics: Sapitwa Poetry’s Production of a Multilingual Poetic Public.” Modern Language Association Annual Meeting. 6-9 Jan. 2022
- 2021 Co-convener, with Scott Newman, “African Sound Studies.” African Studies Association Annual Meeting. 16-20 Nov. 2021
- “Hear Our Voices: Listening to New Media Poetry Readings in the Pandemic.” African Studies Association Annual Meeting. 16-20 Nov. 2021
- “Algorithmic Aesthetics: African Poetic Forms in the Social Media Era.” African Literature Association Annual Meeting. 25-28 May 2021.
- “Poetry as Public Relations: IGO Poetry Prizes and Malawian Literary Production.” American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting. 19-22 Mar. 2021.
- 2020 “The Poet and the University: The Malawi Writers’ Group and the Establishment of National Identity.” African Studies Association Annual Meeting. 19-21 Nov. 2020.
- “Trash Children: Wasteful Futurity in Contemporary Malawian Writing.” African Studies Association Annual Meeting. 19-21 Nov. 2020.
- 2019 “The Places of Protest: Digital and Theatric Representations of South Africa’s Fallist Movement.” African Studies Association Annual Conference. 21-24 Nov 2019.
- “Decolonizing the Canon: Lingua Franca Spoken Word Movement and the Transformation of South African Poetry Institutions.” European Council on African Studies Annual Meeting. 12-14 June 2019.
- “The Promise of a Pan-African Poetics: The Spoken Word Project, IGO Poetry Prizes, and the Establishment of Digital African Poetry Networks.” African Literature Association Annual Conference. 15-18 May 2019.
- “Social Media Canons: The Digitization of Literary Prestige in South Africa and Koleka Putuma’s *Collective Amnesia*.” African Literature Association Annual Conference. 15-18 May 2019.
- “Posting Poetry, Publishing Protest: Social Media Publications and Poetic Activism in Zimbabwe.” Modern Language Association, 3-6 Jan. 2019.
- 2018 “Poetry’s Interfaces: Tracing Digital Logics in Malawian Performance Poetry.” African Literature Association Annual Conference. 23-26 May 2018.
- 2017 “Poetry in Action: Evan Mawarire’s ‘This Flag,’ Networked Protest, and the Hashtag as Collective Poetry.” African Studies Association Annual Meeting. 16-18 Nov. 2017.
- Panel Chair, “Word! Languages and Institutions Over Time.” African Studies Association Annual Meeting. 16-18 Nov. 2017.
- “Digital Voices: Negotiation Global Forms and Local Identity in Cape Town Performance Poetry.” African Literature Association Annual Conference. 14-17 June 2017.
- “The Migrant and the Refugee: Contrasting Images of Movement in Zimbabwean Poetry from South Africa.” African Literature Association Annual Conference. 14-17 June 2017.

Panel Chair, "Literary Performance in Cyberspace." African Literature Association Annual Conference. 14-17 June 2017.

"WhatsApp Poetics: The Structure and Style of Chichewa Poetry Groups on WhatsApp." British Association for Applied Linguistics Seminar Series. 28-30 Apr. 2017.

"Slam Africa: Language and Politics in the International Poetry Slam." Northwestern University African Studies Graduate Student Conference. 14-17 Apr. 2017.

2016 "Zonse Zimene za Kamuzu: Genre, Performance, and the Construction of a Malawian National Identity Under H. Kamuzu Banda." Boston University African Studies Graduate Student Conference. 25-26 Mar. 2016.

### **Intramural Talks**

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2019 "The Places of Protest: Digital and Theatrical Representations of South Africa's Fallist Movement." Humanities Luncheon, College of Wooster, October 2019.

2018 "Viral Verses: Poetic Movements and Social Media in Southeastern Africa." Kaplan Institute for the Humanities, Franke Futures Forum. 20 April 2018.

2017 "Poetry in Action: Evan Mawarire's 'This Flag,' Networked Protest, and the Hashtag as Collective Poetry." English Department Graduate Student Colloquium. 15 November 2017.

"Page and Stage in the Digital Age: Tracing Poetic Circulations in Southeastern Africa." Africa Seminar. 16 February 2017.

2016 "Locating the Performative in Print Nationalist Texts." English Department Graduate Student Colloquium, 17 February 2016.

### **Teaching Experience**

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#### **Teaching Areas**

African Literature and Performance, Sociology of Literature, Global Modernisms, Poetry and Poetics, Media Studies, Digital Humanities Research Methods, Social Media and Literature

#### *Introductory Courses & Expository Writing*

**"Writing Human Rights."** ENGL12000. College of Wooster.

- Introduction to the major course which introduces key skills in literary studies while exploring the influence of literature on human rights law in the twentieth-century.
- Taught memoirs by Olaudah Equiano, Antjie Krog, Primo Levi, and Wangari Maathai, and essays and short stories by Rachel Carson, Toni Jensen, Toni Morrison, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

**"The Art of Social Media."** FYSM1010030. College of Wooster.

- Introductory writing and college skills course focused on the use, misuse, and effects of social media through analysis of social science research, artistic productions, and personal experience.
- Course assignments included digital writing, in-depth research projects, and close reading essays to hone critical reading and writing skills.

**"Poetry and Performance in Protest."** FYSM10100. College of Wooster, Spring 2020.

- Introductory writing course highlighting the use of lyric language and performance in protest movements since the turn of the century.
- Includes case studies in the US Civil Rights Movement, Caribbean decolonization efforts, South Africa's Fallist movement, and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

#### *Advanced Seminars*

**“Introduction to African Literature.”** ENGL23050. College of Wooster.

- Survey course on twentieth-century African literature emphasizing the role of verbal arts in establishing and contesting nationalist narratives.
- Includes novels, poems, and plays by Chinua Achebe, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Nuruddin Farah, Yaa Gyasi, Nnedi Okorafor, Okot p'Bitek, Wólé Šóyínká, and the Baxter Theatre Company.
- Course assignments include formal essays as well as digital mapping assignments highlighting the geographic interplay between literary worlds.

**“Postcolonial Poetics.”** ENGL21033. College of Wooster.

- Comparative survey course on the role of poetry in decolonial politics since the 1920s.
- Taught poetry by Christopher Okigbo, Okot p'Bitek, M. NourBese Philip, Warsan Shire, Dylan Thomas, and Derek Walcott.

**“Introduction to Global Anglophone Literature.”** ENGL21022. College of Wooster.

- Survey course exploring the role of migration and linguistic variance in Anglophone literature since the twentieth century.
- Taught work by Louise Bennett, Kaumau Brathwaite, Bessie Head, James Joyce, Jhumpa Lahiri, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Marjane Satrapi.

**“Literature and the Media.”** ENGL30019. College of Wooster.

- Advanced research and methods seminar for junior majors which introduces students to media studies and sociological approaches to literary analysis and guides them in developing independent research skills.
- Includes literary texts by D. T. Niane, Charles Brockden Brown, and Claudia Rankine, to ground analysis of scholarly essays by Benjamin, Ong, Ngugi, Habermas, Warner, and hooks.

**Independent Study.** ENGL4000. College of Wooster, Fall and Spring.

- Mentor 3-5 year-long senior capstone projects each year.
- Topics supervised have included formalist analyses of contemporary queer literature; sociohistorical analyses representations of identity in Appalachian literature; and historical studies of nineteenth-century urban mystery novels.

#### **Northwestern University**

##### *Instructor of Record – Expository Writing*

**“Writing Human Rights.”** ENGL101. Northwestern University, Spring 2018.

- Freshman seminar on the connections between literature and human rights law.
- Taught memoirs by Frederick Douglass, Antjie Krog, and Primo Levi, and essays and short stories by Rachel Carson, Toni Morrison, Kwame Nkrumah, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ramachandra Guha, Wangari Maathai, and Craig Santos Perez.

**“Traveling English.”** ENGL105. Northwestern University, Spring 2017.

- Expository writing seminar on experiences of migration through language.
- Taught work by Louise Bennett, Kamau Brathwaite, NoViolet Bulawayo, Lorna Dee Cervantez, Junot Díaz, Yiyun Li, Haryette Mullen, and Gene Luen Yang.

“**Global Englishes, Local Identities.**” ENGL105. Northwestern University, Winter 2017.

- Expository writing seminar on the history of English as a language of imperial power.
- Taught work by Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Louise Bennett, Kamau Brathwaite, Lorna Dee Cervantez, Junot Diaz, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Benjamin Zephaniah, and August Wilson.

#### *Teaching Assistant*

“**Introduction to Fiction.**” Winter 2015

- Teaching assistant to Prof. Jules Law.
- Led two weekly discussion sections.
- Taught novels by Arthur Conan Doyle, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Joseph Conrad, Dashiell Hammett, and Toni Morrison.

“**American Literary Traditions I.**” Fall 2015.

- Teaching assistant to Prof. Jay Grossman.
- Led one weekly discussion section.
- Taught works by Charles Brockden Brown, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mary Rowlandson, Anne Hutchinson, Ben Franklin, and Phyllis Wheatley.

#### **Professional and Community Activities**

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| 2021-22 | Co-chair, Junior Faculty Caucus, College of Wooster <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead monthly discussions with junior faculty members to ensure their representation in and engagement with issues of shared governance.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                      |
| 2020-22 | Comparative Literature Curriculum Committee, College of Wooster                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 2020-21 | College Representative, Great Lakes College Association Academic Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represented the College of Wooster at GLCA Academic Council biannual meetings, gathering and reporting on campus trends and concerns, and reporting on association news to the College.</li> </ul>                                                                                 |
| 2020-21 | ARCH Faculty Advisor, College of Wooster <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation support and academic advising for incoming first-year students at the College of Wooster.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2017-19 | Founder and Co-facilitator, Graduate Student Digital Humanities Pedagogy Workshop Series, Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities, Northwestern University. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founded and organized a year-long workshop series for twelve graduate student teachers on integrating methods and tools from the digital humanities into the university classroom.</li> </ul> |
| 2017-19 | Graduate Writing Fellow, The Writing Place, Northwestern University.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

- Mentored graduate student writers through year-long research projects and article development. Led interdisciplinary and discipline-specific workshops on cover letters and writing for public audiences.
- 2018 Organizer, Lingua Franca Artists-in-Residency Program, Program of African Studies, Northwestern University.
- Developed and facilitated a 2-week artists' residency for the 10-person Lingua Franca Spoken Word Collective in honor of the Program of African Studies' seventieth anniversary. Planned four talks at Northwestern and three performances in Chicago schools and theaters.
- 2016 Chair and Co-organizer, "Knowing Africa" Graduate Student Conference, Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, 15-17 April 2016.
- Led a 5-person interdisciplinary team of graduate students to organize a 3-day, 30-person graduate student conference.
- 2015-16 Student Facilitator, Africa Seminar, Northwestern University.
- Organized weekly seminars and annual conference for the Program of African Studies's graduate colloquium.
- 2015-16 Graduate Assistant, *Triquarterly* journal, Northwestern University.
- Collected metadata for the journal's digitization project.

### **Additional Training**

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- 2019 Africana Digital Humanities Institute. University of Arizona.  
3-week online seminar on developing Africana-oriented digital humanities projects.
- 2018 Digital Humanities Summer Institute. University of Victoria, Victoria, BC.  
Weeklong seminar on documenting and archiving born-digital work.
- 2016 The Centre for Language Study. University of Malawi, Blantyre.  
10-week intensive Chichewa training, second year level.
- 2016 Sound Studies Seminar. Summer Institute Cologne, Cologne.  
2-week intensive seminar on sound studies.
- 2015 Programming Bootcamp (Python). Northwestern University Big Data Initiative.  
2-week intensive introduction to Python.
- 2015 The Centre for Language Study. University of Malawi, Blantyre.  
10-week intensive Chichewa training, first year level.
- 2010 Middlebury Summer Language School: French. Middlebury, Vermont.  
French language program, fourth-year level.

### **Languages**

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English – native  
 French – fluent  
 Chichewa – advanced

### **Professional Memberships**

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African Studies Association

African Literature Association

American Comparative Literature Association

Modern Language Association