

ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЕ

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**Emergent Poetry of Northern Nigeria
within the Digital Space***A. V. Lyakhovich*

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The author of this article presents an analytical study of a poetry forum at kanoonline.com, which targets Northern Nigerian readership. The forum reflects emerging literature as it sets out to shape its own standards of literary creativity, transmission, circulation, as well as communication reality and perception in cyberspace. Poetic texts are created in a digital medium, a means that presents itself as an inexhaustible source for the rapid circulation and unlimited distribution of texts. The emergence of a text as a digital unit ensures the immediacy of its communication to an audience, which simultaneously generates intensive reader feedback. Based on an analysis of selected topics, the author discusses metatextuality as being the essential nature of a digital text. The posting of a text, which is obviously a completed product of individual creation, serves as a starting point for a further creative process. The agent of this textual reworking is the audience which generates different interpretations of a given literary piece. What we witness is a switch from an individual creative process to an impersonal collective deconstruction, a process engendering metatexts. Most of the abovementioned forum's experimental poetic formations can hardly be captured, identified, comprehended or interpreted well in terms of both content and form for several reasons. The shape of virtual texts may be viewed as awkward, chaotic, and confusing. And the contents of the texts, while definitely reflecting African modernity, on the other hand, is determined by subjectively portrayed day-to-dayness, freely displaying open mundane experiences in a fragmentary and momentary way. Forum poetry — poetic creation, performance, publication, reading, and perception altogether — within the virtual space has an explosive effect, which is unpredictable, uncontrolled, chaotic and momentary. Moreover, poetic content often makes a strong reference to certain immediate and fragmentary environments of African everyday life which are most urgent and alive at the very time of creation, performance and perception. Thus, capturing virtual texts within this broad context — the context of author/reader interaction,

communication and creation — enables one to read both the content and formal properties inherent in the genre of web-forum poetry.

Keywords: Northern Nigeria, digital literature, forum poetry, creative writing in cyberspace.

Introduction

In the 1990s, Ibrahim SHEME, one of the first “literary journalists” in Northern Nigeria, emphasized an urgent need to create a new literary arena subsequently shaped as newspaper poetry in the following way:

[W]hen I became a journalist I discovered the power of giving people chance to express themselves in any way they can. Poetry is one of those ways. I realised that many of our people have poetic intuitions, but the lack of space to communicate their poems was hampering their creativity. I have learned ... that the responsibility of providing such space for our numerous poets lay heavily on me. I had the opportunity, being an editor with clout in all the newspapers where I worked/contributed (*Sunday Tide, The Reporter, Hotline, New Nigerian, Weekly Trust, Leadership, Public Agenda*). So I created poetry columns (beginning from the *Sunday Tide* in Port Harcourt in 1990) essentially to give creative minds the chance to express themselves, to try to become Wordsworth [1].

One decade later in 2002 the first virtual poem was published on the KanoOnline poetic forum as evidence of how Northern Nigerians absorb a new space for their literary experiments.

It seems vital to articulate that both creative expression and journalistic self-consciousness of African modernity are ceaselessly seeking a new space. A widely explored suggestion is that literary creation and performance in Africa have developed long-term interactions with other media such as theatre, video, radio, etc., in which a variety of vernacular emergent forms are brought into being. The same applies to literary forms that nowadays are vigorously spreading through digital environments.

Karin Barber encourages us not to underestimate newly emerging literary forms [2], marginal genres which do not belong to the mainstream environment of African cultures [3]. Indeed, literary studies ought to take into account recently developing transformations of African literary culture, determined by the rise of alternative literary expressions and spaces.

What is of particular significance here is a general critical perspective that is required in the reading of such formations. In this respect, I am in agreement with Heike Schaefer's proposal to “stop thinking of literature as a single, clearly bounded medium” [4, p. 170]. Schaefer claims that we should conceive of literature as “a transmedial configuration or network” [4, p. 179]: “[I]nstead of discussing intermediality solely with regard to the interactions between literature and other media... we could also comprehend it as a constitutive element within the literary field itself” [4, p. 170].

The analytical framework for the present study was predetermined to a large extent by the evidence and hypotheses introduced by Dina Ligaga [5], Godwin Ikyer [6], Shola Adenekan and Helen Cousins [7]. These scholars deconstruct the digital literature of Nigeria and Kenya in regard to a wide range of pressing issues. The present survey however aims at expanding African literary studies on the emergent poetry of Northern Nigeria, which is created, performed and read within the digital space of a web forum. A particular

focus will be given to the forensic literary approach introduced by Ashleigh Harris in her *Awkward Form and Writing the African Present* [8].

Digital space for a literary text

To start with the obvious, digital space differs significantly from the printed one. In her prominent study on electronic poetry, Giovanna di Rosario makes detailed distinctions between them, such as:

The space offered by our recently fashioned digital support is a new space, a space freed from the constraints imposed by the printed word. Both the author and the reader can manipulate, transform, interact with this space in order to create poetry. This new space allows us to easily connect words and images, to see them in 3D, to have motion and ... introduces the notion of time to the text and, finally, the possibility of adding sound: all these elements are easily parts of an electronic poem [9, p. 113].

Digital space enables the reader's involvement for an interaction with the digital text which may go far beyond reading as such. Comparatively new experimental art displays so called "collaborative poetry" [9] where the reader can even "create and erase both text and links" acting in the same role as the author [9, p. 103].

How does the materiality of the Internet influence the poetry of Northern Nigeria? Does it change the aesthetics of a poetic text or induce a shift in author-reader roles/capacities?

According to Friedrich Block [10], modern digital poetry is a phenomenon that lies "in-between", and is "a part of the technically and medially coined world": "There isn't another literary field in which the concern has been so intensively with new media technologies and with things technical — not simply thematically, regarding content, but primarily in the formal structures themselves" [10].

Kano poetry is not seeking to reflect new media technologies. On the contrary, it has concerned itself mainly with language as material. Language is seen as the main source from which to construct meanings, images, ideas and metaphors. Audiovisual media, such as picture-like elements or graphic qualities of letter materials, have been rarely involved in the formation of a poetic text and have never been seen as capable of creating an independent meaning.

An example of this would be the unconventional placement of question marks at the beginning of each line in *Dear Nigeria* [11], quoted below, as a choice made by the author wherewith to introduce a new form of expressiveness — in this way, the problematic aspect of the discussion is brought into focus:

Nigeria as it is today
Is nothing but a hopeless prey
The ever ungrateful hearts of men
Has left Nigeria tangling in the lion's den
The powerful feast upon the nation's wealth
And so it goes until there is nothing left
While the weak are been made endless promises...

Poems may be accompanied with smileys which serve to reinforce the emotional impact of the text and expressiveness of the author's emotional state at the moment of creation.

Hungry Waif

With tears in my eyes
With no water or ice
People all around me are not nice.

I walk the streets of my town
Believing I can find water down,
Hunger eating deep down me I have no pie
I wonder how I could linger and not die.

I have no mother
And my father does not bother,
I have no school to go further
But I can be wise with little butter.

Lord, God to you I cry
For I don't have anybody that could try
To help even as I get dry [12].

Therefore, Kano poetry does not aspire to generate contexts other than those which are linguistically based. Mostly, its poetic expressiveness has remained so far insensitive to the evolutionary processes in the field of digital poetry, i.e., it neither introduces new ways of sensation or perception, nor enjoys the advantages of nonverbal communication.

What experimental innovations does a digital medium such as a web-forum allow in regard to a poetic text? As Hessa Alghadeer indicates, a poetry blog may possibly constitute a “multimodal context that provides rich means of active meaning making”:

Some poetry blogs provide links to a wide range of online resources, including audio archives of poetry readings, multimedia archives of illustrations and manuscripts, photos and video clips, anthologies, critical essays, interviews, and lectures. In this sense, these blogs serve as fine multimodal contexts where poems can be simultaneously and instantly redesigned through existing online resources and against a backdrop of thoughtful literary critiques on digital output [13, p. 93].

On the contrary, the KanoOnline poetic forum is solely focused on publication, discussion and appreciation of poetic texts. The poems are initially released as embodiments of individual creativity, expressions of subjective emotions, ideas, and everyday experiences. The forum does not provide any additional contextual links — the only material the audience has to deal with is a pure and free flow of poetic expression.

Every poetic topic reveals various levels of discourse. The primary level is that texts are created in a digital medium which presents itself as an inexhaustible source for their rapid circulation and unlimited distribution. The next level, constructed by the emergence

of a text as a digital unit, is the immediacy of its communication to an audience, which simultaneously ensures the possibility of intensive reader feedback.

A web forum as a space that specifies author/audience relations

Within the context of digital poetry, the shift in author/audience relations and roles has inevitably become obvious for literary studies, yet this issue appears to have been difficult to handle, resulting in ambiguous interpretations.

Different forms of digital poetry imply various restrictions on author/audience involvement in text creation, on the quality of functions they perform. In the evolution of digital poetry, as indicated by Block, esthetic attention has been drawn to “symbolic, cognitive and communicative processes” leading “particularly to the direct incorporation of audience or recipient” [10]. To comprehend this new notion of ‘recipient’ as referring to habitual ‘reading audience’ or ‘reader’, it is reasonable to adduce the following explanation made by Block: “[W]hile the author function is relativized, these are also projected onto a ‘new’ active recipient who comprehends and completes the creation process. The ‘new reader’ has become an ideal figure for open and self-reflexive perception, interpretation and comprehension processes” [10]. This statement is partly true with respect to Kano-Online poetry.

On the contrary, the KanoOnline forum grants autonomy to a poetic text implying that poetry is always presented as a completed individual artwork and the published text always remains unchanged. Readers are not allowed to act as co-authors in the sense that they introduce changes to a poetic text they read. This restriction of reader interaction with a poetic text brings KanoOnline poetic forum closer to printed word rather than to other forms of electronic poetry where “the interaction allowed by the digital medium is of a different kind entirely and that it can push forward this kind of experimentation — it can allow the reader to write/erase/rewrite parts of the text, or to become part of the text like for instance in Simon Biggs’ *Re-read*, in which the reader can physically get into the text, and see her image in the work” [9, p. 105].

A web forum as a digital mode serves well as both a literary community and communicative practice. As a literary community the forum embraces literary inspired people that have absolutely different literary tastes and backgrounds. The forum is evidently aimed at the processes of perceiving and appreciating poetry. Each author of any given text also functions as a ‘communicator’ (in Dencker’s terms) engaging the audience into ‘reading’ which is viewed as a process of communication-perception-appreciation. Virtual space enables KanoOnline poetry, in contrast to printed literature, to transform, to quote Dencker yet again, “from materially graspable to immaterially thinkable product, from closed artwork to an offer of open communications” [14].

In their analysis of Nigerian and Kenyan writing space, Adenekan and Cousins highlighted the intimate connection between writers and readers:

Readers and writers are able to see each other’s personal life in pictures and in video with some writers regularly sharing family photos, day-to-day activities, political thoughts and fashion tips with their readers on social media sites, alongside short stories and poetry. Equally, readers can leave comments on many of these sites relating to the author’s writing, at times instigating a dialogue about the work, providing extra-textual material that alters and shapes that work. The nature of texts within the new medialandscape is altered by

the close interaction between the writer and her or his readers. It removes the tenets by which distinctions and value judgements are traditionally made about what is “good” versus that which is “popular”, generally based on the reputation of the publishing house and on individual authorship. In this process, both writers and readers are starting to embrace different values regarding literature, as cyberspace abruptly frees up notions of literature for experimentation, collaboration and disconnection from specifics of place, politics and culture [7, p. 202–203].

Writer/audience interaction on the KanoOnline poetic forum can be described as informal and personal, conducted in the climate of trust and human credibility. Though without any sharing of family photos, the community — both writers and readers — share and exchange their political and religious thoughts, personal life experiences, or revive their flashbacks. There is much truth in the thought that the Kano forum community has developed its own modes of collaborative text interpretation and collaborative appreciation. Consistent with Adenekan and Cousins is the observation that “cyberspace abruptly frees up notions of literature for experimentation, collaboration and disconnection from specifics of place, politics and culture” [7, p. 202]. I single out the significance of ‘reading’ as being a special field of this collaboration and experimentation. The digital space of the Kano poetic forum first of all brought into being a practice that was new to Northern Nigerian literature, namely that of ‘reading’ as collaborative (often involving the authors’) perception, interpretation and comprehension processes. I contend that here we witness the existence of two distinct processes — individual creation (as ‘writing’ that produces a completed artwork) and collaborative perception-interpretation-appreciation (as ‘reading’ this individual and completed artwork). Thus it would be misleading to conceive of Kano poetry as belonging to that type of digital poetry where the artist and artwork seemingly disappear almost entirely, their function and existence being hardly any longer recognizable, replaced by the activated recipient, in whose mind the “artwork” first arises by virtue of his power of imagination [14].

Description of the KanoOnline poetic forum

The KanoOnline forum at <http://kanoonline.com> is more or less a newly emerged public space that contributes to the intensification of public deliberation on a wide range of issues, such as Islam, business and commerce, health matters, security matters, science and technology, education, sports, history, culture, Hausa music and poetry. The structure of KanoOnline also reflects regional variation and concern. Under the name of KanoOnline, 5 distinct regional forums — Kano Forum, Jigawa State Forum, Kaduna-Katsina States Forum, Borno-Yobe-Adamawa — provide an additional public space for discussion. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that poetic the forum named Member Poetry, which is only one of several forums at KanoOnline forum, targets Northern Nigerian readership in general.

The launch of the poetic forum was announced by its first topic issued on the 6th of January 2002. The author of the topic pointed out that the forum is incorporated within the project of The Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), Kano State branch. Recent topics date back to 2016. 1539 posts and 393 topics in total, published between 2002 and 2016, contain the creative writing of poets who hail from Northern Nigeria, each topic putting forth a discussion in its own right and encouraging further comments, quotes, etc.

The forum is framed as a list of “subjects” (the name of the poem for most of them). Each topic contains information on the person who started the topic (usually the author of the poem), the number of comments (here referred to as “replies”), the number of views and the date of the last comment. The most viewed poem is *This Pretty Face* [15] — 11046 views and 25 replies in total. Curiously, the most viewed and discussed poems are primarily lyrical: *This Pretty Face*, *Like Myself*, *The Scarf*, *Ummita Ummita*, *I Would if I Could*, *Poetry*, *Two Weeks More*, *Sallah Greetings*, *Illusion of Our Thought*, *Aisha Makarfi as She Sleeps*, *MHM*, *The Lucky Girl*, *THE BOY NEXT DOOR*, *WHY I LOVE U*, *Fulani Maiden*, *Lady in Blue*, *Love and Hardy’s Tess*, *When I First Saw You*, *Misery*, *Together Forever*, *Every Day I Love You*, *Ex-boyfriend*, etc.

The forum format enables its members to benefit from a wide range of services. Thus, the process of publishing the text is immediate and spontaneous, not restricted or affected by any censorship, competitive selection or editing. What we end up with is, in many respects, “rough”, “unpolished” material, and a free flow of creative thought. For example, some texts are not grammatically correct — a feature that cannot obviously be traced to some poetic way of meaning-encoding invented by authors. Another distinctive feature of the poetic texts that deserves mentioning is that the poems are written in English, but some of them show the emergence of code-switches to Hausa and, to a lesser extent, to Arabic — a feature facilitated by the multilingual practice of Nigerian poets.

The forum format also allows authors to take advantage of statistical data, which is a prominent indication of poems’ and poets’ popularity. Respectively, the information on subjects which gain the most attention is publicly accessible. The motivation behind the publication of poetry lies primarily in the desire for aesthetic self-expression, and to a lesser degree in sharing everyday experiences.

The reading practice on the KanoOnline poetic forum

The process of reading as commenting, discussion and interpretation altogether specifies forum poetry under discussion as a peculiar and specific poetic genre shaped by the digital space. I argue that in the case of the KanoOnline poetic forum, it is precisely the “reading” practice that differentiates virtual literary texts from printed literature.

Not surprisingly, the forum admins use the word “reply” instead of “comments”, thus prioritizing the dialogical aspect of the reading process (interaction between authors and their readers) over evaluative and judgmental critique.

Naturally, the most common and immediate comments are those that express a reader’s subjective evaluation — they are determined by the first impression of encountering a poetic text.

Nice poem man. *Na dade ban karanta abu mai ban dariya kamar naka ba* [It’s been a long time since I read anything as funny as you wrote]. Keep up the good work! [16]

As the above extract shows, some forum members naturally introduce English-Hausa/Hausa-English code-switching into their remarks. A portion of comments are written in Hausa only.

Conversational mode enhances semantic links between comments by different forum members. The new remarks appear as a reply, in agreement or disagreement with the previous replies of other members. A kind of word-play syntactic repetition may be engaged:

The more you see, the less you understand...

Another person comments:

The more you see, the more you understand... [16]

Some evaluative comments provide a thorough critique of the author's artistic mastery, such as:

This is a good poem. it has a good rhythm and captivating flow. the sound is soothing and romantic. However, I try to look for the object of the poem but could not find any. Who do you love? The person's imagery could have been embedded in the poem. The poem is about love and the question was asked why I love U? The attempt at giving the reason for the love as purity (I love thee purely) was shattered by infatuation rather than pure love (I love thee for a wild romance we did). Anyway it is a well written poem [17].

One of the less frequent types of commenting involves interrogation, rather than evaluation. Readers often address the author of a poem when their perception of any parts of the text, or any forms of poetic expression, or the poem as a whole, is impeded or incomplete. This is where I find the evidence that the reading process, which implies the establishment of comprehension in the case of KanoOnline poetry, becomes a Phenomenon/result of the author's and reader's collaboration. The role the author plays in the reading process, presented as a mixture of commenting, discussion and interpretation, is vital taking into consideration the fact that the author normally initiates, guides, and supervises both communication and comprehension.

Prompted by a lack of comprehension, the reader seeks the author's assistance and expresses his/her confusion in a spontaneous, free-and-easy manner, employing an informal style of speech which is marked by grammatical and spelling errors, code-switching, etc.

Can sumone tell mi wat waz dat??... Well if it waz really a poem then I cant understand it's context,it's substance I mean every bit of it.Ok ummita iz tha poem right,? but wat about Ummita tell us more about her. Let us get da rhythm and essence of tha whole thang [16].

I must acknowledge that poets treat this reasonably intensive reader feedback with patience and attention. Fulfilling the role of the communicator in this communication-perception-appreciation practice, the author often provides clarification on the issues raised: the main idea of the poem, rhythmic structure of the text, or emotional manifestations hidden behind particular lexical expressions. For example:

My question is on 'this unsoiled eyes', *gaskiya ina bukatan* [I really need an independent] lecture *mai zaman kanta akan wannan magana ya yi min dadi sosai* [on this expression that gave me so much pleasure] [15].

The aforementioned poem *This Pretty Face* aroused a vigorous debate. One of the readers asked the author if there was any story behind the poem that actually happened in the author's life. In response to the positive answer (For every piece there is a story. It is deep in the inner heart. Only this type of rapture may capture or reveal it somehow), another reader requested the author to share his story. The poet refused saying that he was a bad storyteller and this is why he chose to write a poem about it. In return, the author offered his audience to play along in a collaborative interpretation practice:

Let's see if we can together build a story around the poem's lines. Like a game, I can start while someone continues from where I stop by interpreting the lines of the poem. Can we make a story out of it? Maybe at the end it will make the real story or something else. Can we try? [15]

Or:

I personally welcome your efforts. And I will give a full support. Maybe we would come up with a beautiful story. Carry on! [15]

Reading a number of texts is restricted to this mere poetic text interpretation and de-coding of the author's ideas and emotions.

Maybe it was a crush as DB suggested.

Her beauty attracted you but you felt she was too good for you.

At the same time, you seem to be convinced that her beauty isn't natural.

Nevertheless you still had the crush but with time you concluded that she was not your kind.

Haka ne [Am I right]? [15]

However, for some texts their reading is more likely to accumulate and become a broader interpretation, morphing into a kind of secondary collaborative creative practice. Based on the given poetic text, the audience is capable of composing its own plot and characters employing metatextual references.

To me the story behind the poem is rather like that film 'One moment in time' (I'd forgotten the name of the film) It stars Christopher Reeves and Jane Seymour. He saw her picture and fell in love with her. Unfortunately, the time the portrait was done was 1912 and he was living in 1972. So she was the age of his grandmother at the time he fell in love with her picture. So I feel you are maybe in a similar situation. You have fallen for the photo of someone who is much older than you and you wished it wasn't so. That is why the reference to time and aging process [15].

Thus, the above example reveals metatextuality as being a possible dimension of 'reading' a digital text in the space of a web forum. I argue that posting a text, which is obviously a completed product of individual creation, may serve as a starting point for a further creative process. The agent of this textual reworking is the audience, who generates different interpretations of a given literary piece. Not only do readers make critical evaluations of published poems, they also endeavour to find hidden meanings, ideas, and emotions behind particular metaphors, images, or whole texts. Therefore, what we witness here is a switch from an individual creative process to an impersonal collective deconstruction, a process engendering metatexts. As we see, it may be shaped as a joint practice shared by authors and their audiences, where the former may initiate a discussion by providing explanations, or otherwise encouraging readers to voice their perceptions.

It seems significant to me to stress the key role of the author here: this game-like reciprocity is mainly controlled by the originator of a poetic piece and serves as a form of direct communication between poets and their intended audiences. Being fully integrated into a forum space, KanoOnline authors succeeded in the art of metacommentary, which is, as suggested by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, 'a sort of second text', generated

by the author of the main text, and which stands alongside it [18]. The distinction is quite obvious:

In the main text you say something; in the metatext you guide your readers in interpreting and processing what you've said [18, p. 130].

This regular practice of KanoOnline poets to comment on their writing, telling the audience how to interpret their poetry and guiding readers through the text, is something that Graff and Birkenstein refer to as 'stage managing'. Loss of control over the audience, should the poet neglect the use of metacommentary, may result in potential misreadings and negative criticism.

Reflection of day-to-dayness in KanoOnline forum poetry and during the process of its reading

The keen desire to relate the materiality of a poetic text to everyday contexts is an essential motivation which encourages both authors' and readers' activities on the KanoOnline poetic forum. Thus, publication of the poem *I Would if I Could* [19] is followed by the author's comment, which is the first in line, and therefore elicits further discussion. The author openly shares his story of love for a Fulani girl.

The philosophical poem *Illusion of Thought* by Jibo serves as an example of how authors using a poetic text trigger a discussion on pressing issues and put valuable insights into relief, thus raising public consciousness and self-awareness. So, in his comments the author states:

[In] Islam justice is mostly misunderstood, especially by the Hausas. They take it to be equality, in fact even in our educational system children are often considered the same, equal. Are they? Where a husband has two wives, he is expected to treat them equally, are they equal? Justic means placing everything accordingly and based on its nature and other consideration... But because we have an illusion on our imagination, we seldom think of it another way! [20]

One of the readers, Fulani Poet, who is a poet as well, promotes the discussion. In his interpretation, he especially points out the reference between the materiality of a poetic text and day-to-dayness:

Illusion of our Thought? What a 'strategic' heading/title! Illusion and thought are two ideas that can be in the realm of conditioning. Illusions and thoughts are first individualistic and can become, depending on the proponent, cultural or communistic. That is why a certain individual can see things in his/her unique way. Situations, good fortune or persuasion can create a group view, illusion or thought... Going by this poem, am I right then to say that we, as mere human beings, should never pontificate on what is right or wrong? Well, 5 and 5 makes 10 to somebody but makes 11 to another person! Everything is more or less of their value depending who is assigning the value! [20]

The poem *Rotten Apple* [21] receives readers' deepest appreciation as an embodiment of every day:

I think this is awesome Muda, something we can all relate to in our modern lives. Would love to see more of it, keep it up [21].

The same applies to another poetic piece *LIFE!!!!!!* [22], followed by comments such as:

Life is many things to different people. Life can even be different things to one person depending on the day and circumstances. This poem helps us to appreciate that! [22]

The poem *Cry of a Thousand Years* [23] also seems noteworthy as it portrays valuable observations recognized every day and highly appreciated by readers:

Old slave trade across the Atlantic, neoslavery in modern times and inequity and injustice in the land, you have captured it all in a succinct poem. Well done! [23]

A striking feature of the way people read such 'problematic' texts is remaining discreet and largely silent. A significant portion of the poems are loaded with pressing everyday issues and they are surprisingly left without commentaries.

Though KanoOnline poetry fails in the majority of cases to involve readers into discussions on pressing everyday issues, the poetry itself can be referred to as a significant and reliable source of forensic expertise in the way proposed by Harris. In her research, Harris resorts to Eyal Weizman's method of forensic architecture and shows that the forensic literary approach may be fruitful and in high demand for the appreciation of contemporary African writing. As my analysis shows, KanoOnline forum poetry provides significant literary material to be interpreted forensically. Of particular significance here are factors which enable poets to share their everyday experience with their audiences, so that readers can witness the authors' deepest fears, hopes, misery, etc. One of the obvious explanations for this is the fact that readership exerts heavy demands and expectations on poets to be honest, credible and trustworthy. There is no other way for the poet to gain the audience's appreciation and acceptance other than to rely on reality and use his/her poetic talent to make people 'reflect on life and see the true essence of it'. This assumption is also evident in such comments as 'scary reality...' in regard to *Explosion* [24], 'so creative and very realistic' in respect to *These Days* [25], 'a stinging commentary on one aspect of corruption in Nigeria' and 'THIS SOUNDS SO TRUE' in respect to *20naira policeman* [26]. In case a poem lacks realistic stylization, it is immediately criticized as the following comment for *I Am Africa!!!* [27] demonstrates:

I doubt that there will be a smile on the face of the woman who'd just had her thirteenth child and still counting. I think she is more likely to have a grimace of pain stretching her face due to her tired and overstretched womb. Anxiety stretching her heart, over how to manage another mouth with their already overstretched budget. Some aspects of mother/fathre Africa are rather grim... [27]

The most crucial precondition for the ability of Kano poets to bring their everyday experiences into open public discussion is not only granted by the awareness of readers' demands and the desire to meet those demands, but first and foremost by establishing a credible relationship between authors and their readership. This is where, I contend, the materiality of the web forum, being a special space for poetic activity, is of particular significance because it is the forum structure itself that allows people to establish long-term relationships of trust, support and cooperation. This atmosphere of credibility is nothing but an impulse for people to reflect and express the reality they witness, even some traumatic experiences they would never share if asked in a straightforward manner.

The materiality of blog and forum spaces is quite similar in this regard. Van House describes the phenomenon of ‘blogosphere’ which is characterized by informal personal interaction and ‘a high degree of self-disclosure (...questions of honesty, self-presentation, deception, and role-playing always underlie descriptions and assessments of blogs and bloggers)’ [28, p.4]. In contrast to ‘blogosphere’, ‘forumosphere’ implies a lesser degree of self-disclosure and intensive informal and personal interaction which is thematically restricted/specified, altogether working well to encourage forum members’ cooperation in an environment of mutual trust and credibility.

Conclusions

In this study, I pictured the emergent poetry of Northern Nigeria through the analysis of how the online space of ‘forumosphere’ shapes author/reader roles and interactions, innovative reading practices and the art of metacommentary, and how it generates meta-texts. The KanoOnline poetic forum is a good example of the way the materiality of the Internet affects poetic and artistic creativity. Most of this forum’s experimental poetic formations can hardly be captured, identified, comprehended or interpreted well in terms of both content and form for several reasons. The shape of virtual texts may be viewed as awkward, chaotic, and confusing. The contents of texts, while clearly reflecting African modernity, on the other hand, is determined by subjectively portrayed day-to-dayness, freely displaying open mundane experiences in a fragmentary and momentary way. Forum poetry — poetic creation, performance, publication, reading, and perception altogether — within the virtual space has an explosive effect, which is unpredictable, uncontrolled, chaotic and momentary. Moreover, poetic content often makes a strong reference to certain immediate and fragmentary environments of African everyday life which are most urgent and alive at the very time of creation, performance and perception. Thus, capturing virtual texts within this broad context — the context of author/reader interaction, communication and creation — enables one to read both the content and formal properties inherent in the genre of web forum poetry.

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Поэзия Северной Нигерии в виртуальном пространстве

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Проводится исследование поэтического форума на сайте kanoonline.com, ориентированного на читателей из Северной Нигерии. Рассматриваемый форум представляет собой весьма интересное явление в литературной жизни региона, поскольку устанавливает собственные стандарты литературного творчества, передачи, распространения стихотворных произведений с учетом специфики коммуникации и восприятия в условиях киберпространства. Поэтические тексты публикуются в цифровой среде, которая обеспечивает уникальные возможности для их быстрого и широкомасштабного распространения. Появление текста на форуме как специфической платформе для литературного творчества и коммуникационной платформе для литературного сообщества обеспечивает непосредственное и живое общение между читателями и авторами, что порождает интенсивную обратную связь. Размещение текста, который, очевидно, является законченным продуктом индивидуального творчества, служит отправной точкой для дальнейшего творческого процесса. Посредником этой текстовой обработки является аудитория, генерирующая различные интерпретации предложенного автором литературного произведения. Мы наблюдаем переход от индивидуального творческого процесса к безличной коллективной деконструкции, процессу, порождающему метатексты. Поэзия форума — поэтические произведения, перформанс, публикация, чтение и восприятие в целом — в виртуальном пространстве имеет взрывной эффект, непредсказуемый, неконтролируемый, хаотичный и отличающийся сиюминутным характером. Анализ виртуальных текстов в широком контексте взаимодействия автора и читателя, общения и творчества позволяет выделить как содержательные, так и формальные свойства, присущие жанру форумной поэзии.

Ключевые слова: Северная Нигерия, цифровая литература, форумная поэзия, художественное творчество в киберпространстве.

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