

Call for Papers

International Conference: “Postcolonial Internet Studies”

8-9 October 2026, Haus der Universität (Düsseldorf)

Organiser: Hannah Pardey (Hannah.Pardey@hhu.de)

Confirmed keynotes: Sandra Ponzanesi (Utrecht University), Roopika Risam (Dartmouth College), Francesca Sobande (Cardiff University)

The conference will bring together GAPS members and international experts to engage with the nexus between postcolonial studies and a swiftly burgeoning field whose diverse lines of inquiry are collectively referred to as critical internet studies. More specifically, the conference asks: What does it mean to do postcolonial studies in the digital age?

To begin with, it means investigating the various literary and cultural phenomena that have emerged since the uptake of the internet in the 1990s from text- and system-oriented perspectives. Born-digital postcolonial literatures such as Facebook fiction and Instapoetry or texts which employ references to the digital to negotiate the conditions of their production, distribution and consumption not only “create new forms of expression” (Adenekan 10) but also subvert the increasing concentration of power among conglomerate publishers. Frequently conceptualised as “democratizing space[s] for the proliferation of new communities and knowledges” (Risam 23), digitally networked literary cultures potentially challenge the neo-colonial structures of the global book market and foster more inclusive literary practices. As Sandra Ponzanesi and Francesca Sobande, among others, have shown, this subversive potential extends beyond the realm of literature as social media provide impactful sites for the expression of postcolonial and diasporic subjectivities and the organisation of collective activism.

On the other hand, scholars focusing on the institutional and social agents of the digital (literary) sphere have shown that the digital is not “a decentred medium” (Yeku 262) but an economic system that reinforces colonial hierarchies on social, political, linguistic and cultural levels. Against this backdrop, doing postcolonial studies in the digital age also means acknowledging the near-monopoly power of tech giants, their practices of extractive capitalism and environmental exploitation as well as the denigration of vulnerable social groups (Luitse & Denkena). Often adopting transhistorical viewpoints, scholars have pointed to the disproportionate effects of digital technologies on postcolonial societies. For instance, Siddharth Kara has exposed how the extraction of cobalt exploits both the mineral wealth of the Congo and the bodies of Congolese workers (and children), whereas Safiya Umoja Noble and Yarden Katz have disclosed the racialised bias inherent in algorithms; Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias, moreover, discuss the profitable extraction of human data in terms of ‘data colonialism’.

Taking special interest in the material infrastructures and socio-economic power relations that render postcolonial digital literatures and cultures possible in the first place (Huck; Pardey), the conference equally considers how the unavailability of any position outside the internet economy influences computer-based research designs (Chun). Seeing that “[d]igital spaces are increasingly becoming the ones where human knowledge is produced, disseminated, and amplified” (Risam 139), a key objective consists in analysing the extent to which computational methods and tools activate colonial ideologies and devising approaches that can de-bias digital humanities research.

Generously funded by GAPS and supported by the “Anglophone Literatures / Literary Translation” section at HHU, the conference encourages GAPS members to attune postcolonial studies to the internet era and guide this promising research strand into a more settled conceptual and methodological framework.

Possible topics for 20-minute papers include (but are not limited to):

Born-Digital Postcolonial Literatures

- Instapoetry, Twitter fiction and TikTok storytelling as postcolonial literary forms
- Digital vernaculars and multilingual experimentation in digital postcolonial writing
- Online literary communities and the decentralisation of the global literary marketplace
- The influence of digital paratexts (comments, hashtags, reviews) on postcolonial literary reception
- Fan fiction and participatory storytelling in postcolonial contexts

Postcolonial Subjectivities and Networked Cultural Practices

- Digital self-representation and identity formation in diasporic and postcolonial communities
- Influencer cultures and the commodification of postcolonial identities
- Constructions of class, gender and race in digital spaces
- Indigenous and marginalised knowledge production through digital media
- Memes, short-form videos and digital humour as sites of postcolonial cultural expression

Digital Colonialism and Platform Capitalism

- The economic power of global tech corporations and the persistence of colonial hierarchies
- Data extraction and surveillance economies as forms of data colonialism
- Global labour structures in digital economies (clickwork, data labelling, etc.)
- Resource extraction, supply chains and environmental exploitation linked to digital technologies
- Governance, regulation and technological dependence in postcolonial contexts

Algorithms, Knowledge Production and Epistemic Inequality

- Racial, linguistic and cultural biases in algorithms and AI systems
- Platform moderation and the politics of digital representation
- Algorithmic in/visibility and the marginalisation of non-Western knowledge systems
- The role of algorithms in shaping digital cultural and literary circulation
- Translation technologies and language hierarchies

Decolonising Digital Infrastructures and Methodologies

- Uneven internet infrastructures and the geopolitics of connectivity
- Material infrastructures of the digital (data centres, hardware production, etc.)
- Ethical challenges and colonial biases in computational research methods
- Decolonising digital humanities tools, datasets and archives
- Community-driven digital archives and counter-archival practices

Please send **abstracts of 250-300 words** along with a short bio to the organiser Hannah Pardey (Hannah.Pardey@hhu.de). The deadline for proposals is **15 June 2026**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by **15 July 2026**.

ECR members of GAPS are explicitly encouraged to submit proposals. They can benefit from the exploratory nature of the event, take part in discussions with experts and peers and build networks of scholarly exchange early in their careers. A limited number of travel bursaries are potentially available for those with limited financial resources; interested applicants are invited to contact the organiser for further information.

It is the organiser's firm aim to publish the conference papers, preferably in the GAPS book series *Anglophone Postcolonial Studies*, to enable GAPS members to share their research in a high-quality, open-access series with global reach.

Works Cited

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- Yékú, James. "'Thighs Fell Apart': online fan fiction, and African writing in a digital age." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2017, pp. 261-275.