

OlongoAfrica to Me

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I'd always loved writing, and curating them, and interrogating those who produce them. It's a life-affirming thing. We are made by stories, so listening to others tell theirs or showing us how they get to set them down, or doing so myself, is a delightful experience. Has always been.

From 2009, I had a travel blog from where I published some of the earliest observations that eventually made it into my collection of travel poetry. It started as a travelogue of my American travels and evolved into a place of writing about teaching, student life, American and Nigerian social and political life, literature, and a global platform for my thoughts on a number of other public and personal things.

Later, from 2011 to 2015, I became the editor of another publication called NTLitMag which focused solely on creative writing. It was four years of close-up contact with Nigerian and African literature and new writings everywhere. I recently put all the past issues of that publication online. Both were efforts I greatly enjoyed, that gave me access to the pulse of the generation in different ways, and a way to relieve myself of burdens of thought and creativity.

This is a third experiment — different but complementary. Over the years, new writing platforms have sprung up giving spaces for readers and writers to interact, but many of them were built on a non-sustainable model that gave up after a while. Without the funds to support writing, very little can survive the inevitable storm either or advertiser boycott, government policy, or even personal lethargy. The Brick House Cooperative re-imagines a different idea, a platform built by writers and readers for writers and readers, where new work is produced, and writers are compensated.

When Maria Bustillos first mooted this idea to me in the late summer 2020, I was immediately drawn to it for its creativity, but mostly for the passion and commitment for which she sold and then pursued the idea from its ideation stage to completion. We won't be here without her. And now that we are live, after a big fundraising drive early in the fall, I am more convinced that we have stumbled on something big, beautiful, and necessary. I am happy to be a part of the story.

At OlongoAfrica, my flat in the Brick House, the focus will be on many things, united only by quality writing, be it nonfiction, poetry, fiction, drama, interviews, reviews, politics, travelogue and journalism. My work over the last couple of years has intersected with all of these at different angles

and will continue.

We intend to sustain a publishing collective that pays all our contributors. This is no small ambition. Earlier platforms like this have fizzled out from lack of institutional support, lawsuits, or dependence on an advertising model that eventually crashed on the unreliability of the patronage marketplace or other issues. Can we thrive by making readers and writers be the most important elements of a publishing business, via an annual subscription that gives them access to writings from all around the world? Yes, we can. This is the bet that the Brick House has made. Along with nine other publications, OlongoAfrica aims to fill a crucial niche in the production of readable content from the continent. And the best thing is that if you subscribe to one, you get access to all. Ain't that sweet?

I have not published frequently as often as I used to (My Tweeting doesn't count. Lol). There are book writing, research, editing, linguistic, and academic commitments that have kept me scatterbrained for a few months. But with the help of collaborators like Ọlájídé Salawu (Managing Editor), Precious Arinze (Poetry Editor), and others yet to onboard, this task is a lot easier. Together, we will work to bring to you some of the best, topical, writings from the continent, and share in the renewed access to the opportunity to learn more about ourselves, through our own words.

Hit us up at submissions@OlongoAfrica.com

PS: Shoutout to writer superhero Lola Shoneyin whose first use of the name *Olongo* in Ibàdàn in the early aughts as the title of a short-lived print literary journal inspired this return from memory. This, now, is our twittering space.

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