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"'Curating Kisumu' and 'Curating East Africa': Academic Collaboration and Public Engagement in the Digital Age"

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Abstract: This essay examines the origin, permutations, potentials, challenges, and implications of two successive, collaborative public history research, teaching, and learning projects undertaken by the Department of History at Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio, and the Department of History and Archeology at Maseno University, Kisumu, Kenya between 2014 and 2018. The two projects explored how opportunities created by the mobile revolution in Africa could be leveraged to generate new ways of acquiring historical information and knowledge between students and faculty in universities separated by enormous distances and by disparate social, economic, and political experiences. Specifically, the projects examined how the cellphone revolution could reshape the production and dissemination of knowledge about important sites, places, events, and people in modern Africa. The essay examines the conception and permutations of the two projects; identifies and explores their potentials and challenges; and proffers thoughts and suggestions that may guide similar future endeavors.

Introduction[1]

The emergence of the "Curating Kisumu" and "Curating East Africa" research projects was prompted and undergirded by a quiet but deep-seated, revolutionary change that was taking place in the technological landscape of the African continent beginning in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. The number of technological devices such as desktop computers, laptop computers, and cellphones on the African continent was rapidly expanding, making their presence known in villages and towns across the continent, and literally upending how African people in the villages and towns led their daily lives, communicated with one another, and conducted business. In the 1990s the number of cellphone subscribers across Africa was almost negligible. By 2011, the number of cellphone subscribers in Sub-Saharan Africa had exploded to almost 150 million. By 2018, the number had soared to more than 450 million.[2] It is no exaggeration to suggest that virtually every African has at least some form of access to a cellphone. This is simply incredible. The trajectory of the mobile revolution in Africa has been well-documented. Kenya in particular, with its continent-leading adoption of smart devices, is also well-known for born-mobile innovations such as mobile money (M-Pesa) and crowdsourcing (Ushahidi). In 2018 Kenya reportedly became the global leader in the share of internet traffic deriving from mobile phones, at

83 percent.[3] However, despite the mobile revolution and the premise that digital literacy might reduce social and economic disparities in Africa, the embrace of digital humanities practice has been slow as a result of economic and technological obstacles, thereby diminishing the potential to document and advocate preservation of cultural heritage sites or engage public interest in the power of public history.[4] Most work on Africa in the digital humanities has focused on digitization, mapping, and three-dimensional modeling.[5] There has also been, until very recently, a dearth of digital projects built around the production and sharing of knowledge not just *for* but *by* and *with* Africans.

The growing presence of such a huge number of cellphones where there was hardly any just a decade or two earlier had major implications for Africans, and those implications did not go without notice among various groups in and outside of the African continent. Although the major function of cellphones among a large majority of the African people was and still is for communication, the mobile handsets were quickly adapted by entrepreneurs, social activists, and administrators for other purposes and situations transforming life in the African continent in amazing ways. The cellphones were, for example, leveraged by entrepreneurs in Kenya to create born-mobile innovations such as the M-Pesa mobile financial transaction system, a system that has now extended to other parts of the African continent. They were employed by some social activists to create the Ushahidi disaster management program that harnesses crowdsourcing to warn people about looming disasters and provide them with up-to-date information when such disasters strike.[6] The ubiquitous cellphone has also now been deployed to

enable farmers to network on how to employ best farming practices, how to predict and deal with bad weather conditions, and on how and where to get the best prices for their products.[?] The potential for cellphones to foster even more revolutionary change on the African continent seems endless, especially with soaring smartphone adoptions.

African History in the Age of Mobile Computing

Drawing from these novel, innovative ideas transforming lives in the African continent generated by the cellphone revolution, "Curating Kisumu" and "Curating East Africa" were conceived out of the realization that the cellphone revolution could also generate new ways of collecting, collating, storing, and transmitting historical information from older to newer generations; extend the boundaries of teaching and learning in the classroom by making it possible for students located in entirely different time zones in different continents to collaborate and exchange knowledge with one another in real time; and create new pathways for writing about the history of important historical sites, places, events, and people. More specifically, the two projects sought to examine how cellphones could be employed to facilitate the collection, storage, transmission, and dissemination of historical knowledge about specific locations, sites, places or landscapes in Africa in the modern digital age. They were conceived out of the realization that the cellphone revolution had ushered in a new moment in the historical practice in and about Africa, and, more specifically, on how historical materials were collected, synthesized, and disseminated.

The question for us therefore was, how might the digital revolution, which has been inseparable from Africans' embrace of mobile phones, offer new potential for the production of historical knowledge? As a new step in the progression from oral to written to digital transmission of knowledge, how might a digital humanities project encourage the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage in a part of the world where modernizing forces are daily erasing markers of place history?[?] How might the ability of the digital revolution to foster multidirectional flows of knowledge among an ever widening circle of African peoples reshape how the past is understood and conveyed? An interest in extending the reach of a half century's worth of transformation in the scholarly production of history in Africa, paired with public history and digital humanities methodologies that are maturing in highly developed

nations but only still emerging in the developing world, has inspired and molded our collaborative research project over the past five years.

In the US, the modern field of public history emerged more than forty years ago, although it has a more distant origin when understood as all history that is produced and shared in public, nonacademic realms.[9] As the field has evolved, it has increasingly valued the concept of "shared authority," which is an approach that embraces the notion that everyone possesses knowledge, whether through lived experience or derived from education.[10] Scholars and lay people, therefore, can benefit from collaborative investigation of the past. The tendency has been toward the decentering of academic scholars and the growing embrace of non-scholars as active partners, or producers, rather than passive audiences or consumers of knowledge. Although public history as practiced in the US and some other countries is not yet common in many parts of the world, including Africa, the rapid advance of the overlapping field of digital humanities has opened new possibilities for encouraging public-facing history projects that are not merely about Africa and directed toward the digitally saturated global North or, at best, toward a limited audience in Africa.[11] The two projects, "Curating Kisumu: Adapting Mobile Humanities Interpretation in East Africa," and "Curating East Africa: A Platform and Process for Location-based Storytelling in the Developing World," are therefore focused on how societies in Africa and the Third World can use cellphones to collect, transmit, and disseminate information and knowledge to future generations in a world where the internet is fast becoming the major medium for learning, transmitting, and exchanging knowledge. They are intended to create new pathways for doing African history. They are directed toward looking into how the history of Africa can be collected, stored, and transmitted to future generations using cellphones where cellphones are the most ubiquitous gadget for communication, and performing other forms of social transactions. In the same way that the oral tradition and the written word served the earlier generations, the cellphone can serve the modern and future generations in the emergent digital age.

The mobile revolution that was taking place in Africa also opened up new vistas on crafting new pedagogical methods in the African classroom. It literally extended the boundaries of what it meant to be a teacher, and more specifically a history teacher, in a classroom because it created new ways of teaching and learning and exchanging knowledge among students and teachers especially in Africa, in particular, and the Third World, in general, where the cellphone was the most pervasive device of choice for

communication. "Curating Kisumu" and "Curating East Africa" investigated development of a pedagogical program based on cellphones to facilitate learning and teaching history in the classroom in Africa and much of the Third World, much the same way that M-Pesa and Ushahidi programs were doing in other aspects of African life. The premise was the same. We asked ourselves how the smartphone, the electronic device of choice among Africans, could be used to enhance the sharing of knowledge among students, teachers, opinion leaders and stakeholders in and outside the classroom. We realized that the growing breadth and depth of the cellphone industry in Africa had the potential of dramatically transforming how African students, teachers, opinion shapers, community leaders and other stakeholders accessed information, conducted research, and shared knowledge in the classroom.

The quest for such a program prompted us to ask several questions, questions that need to be examined and answered. The first was whether it was possible for students, not just within Africa, but also between Africa and the industrialized world, students from different parts of the world, from different academic programs, different time zones, different languages, and different social-economic backgrounds, to use a cellphone-based program to learn together, share ideas, and exchange historical knowledge. The second question was how to create such a program relying on cellphones within the classroom situation to facilitate knowledge exchange between faculty and students and the communities within which institutions were based. How would the students and faculty actually go about sharing knowledge? Could teaching and learning activities for students studying in different geographical locations be conducted in real time?

We were not just thinking about a program of teaching and learning where students and faculty from comparatively similar backgrounds could learn and share historical knowledge. There were already such programs.[12] We were also not just thinking about a program of learning like we usually see with scholars and students travelling from their institution or country to other institutions or countries to learn for a few days or even months or years. Such programs were already there. They had been there for years.[13] Rather, we were thinking about programs anchored on the use of cellphones facilitating teaching and learning among teachers and students in Africa, and their counterparts mainly in the industrialized world, students from resource-scarce countries and those from resource-rich countries learning together

in a virtual classroom in real time. We felt that a program facilitating learning between students from such countries with diverse socio-economic profiles located in different parts of the world could lead to more meaningful, tangible, and substantial exchange of historical knowledge than in the most typical existing exchange programs. In a nutshell, was it possible, for example, for a program based on the cellphone handset to facilitate knowledge exchange between students and teachers at a university in the United States, and students and teachers at a university in Kenya, to facilitate teaching and learning about history in real time? If so, how would such a pedagogical program, anchored on cellphones, actually work in the classroom in the United States and Kenya? What were the possibilities and challenges of such a program of learning and teaching and sharing historical knowledge?

The cellphone revolution in Africa also created new opportunities for writing about the history of specific places, sites, and landscapes in Africa and the Third World, preserving knowledge about them for future generations. The history of important places, sites, and landscapes are today literally under threat of disappearing from memory because of unmitigated greed by land grabbers and unregulated expansion of modern developments in the African continent and the Third World. Historical buildings in places and sites are getting demolished. Old streets, roads, arcades, and railroads that defined places are being redrawn to make way for modern highways. Historical marketplaces, bars, and restaurants, to mention only a few, are getting destroyed to give way to superstores and parking lots. Old men and women are dying with their knowledge about places and sites. With cellphones permeating every village and town in Africa, and the Third World, new opportunities are emerging for people to tell and preserve stories about such buildings, roads, schools, waterways, markets, and even their own lives that would otherwise disappear from memory and thus from history. Through our projects, we sought to examine the possibility of using cellphones to preserve and share the histories of places, sites, people, and events before they disappeared completely from memory. In a nutshell, the two successive projects had three major objectives. First, we were interested in examining, collecting, collating, storing, and transmitting knowledge from older generations to future generations using cellphones in the modern digital age. Second, we were interested in examining how to craft instructional methods relying on cellphones in the classroom in Africa and the Third World. Third, we were interested in curating, preserving, and protecting stories about specific sites or places before they were destroyed and forever lost from memory.

The Impetus for Curating Kisumu

The construction of the Uganda Railway prompted the founding of new towns or transformation of old ones into colonial administrative posts in Kenya in the 1890s and 1900s. These included Nairobi, the future Kenyan capital, and Port Florence, founded in 1901 and named in honor of Florence

Whitehouse, the wife of George Whitehouse, the chief engineer of the Uganda Railway.[14] Located on the shore of Lake Victoria, Port Florence became known as Kisumu within a short time after its founding. Although it was situated in a place that had served for centuries as one of a number of markets in Luoland, Kisumu was redefined as a place that existed to support imperial ambitions. As in other colonial cities, Africans found themselves relegated to quarters set apart from European and Asian "zones," or banished to the rural fringes beyond the neat geometry of squares, plazas, and estates of the planned city.[15] If Africans were marginalized with the arrival of colonial rule, their history in Kisumu was nonetheless inseparable from that of the growing city. With a combined city-county population of more than one million, Kisumu is now Kenya's third-largest metropolitan area and the largest city in Luoland. It is a bustling center of activity for the Luo, the Abaluhya, and the Abagusii and their neighbors but also a place shaped by the presence of Arabs from the Middle East, by South Asians, many of whom were descendants of the railroad laborers secured by the British, and also by the Europeans largely from Britain.

Our project is based on studying the history of Kisumu. It developed from a series of collaborations in the Department of History at Cleveland State University. In 2010, one of the authors, Mark Souther, worked with Mark Tebeau and Erin Bell in the department's Center for Public History + Digital Humanities to create *Cleveland Historical*, a smartphone application (mobile app) with content served from a modified Omeka web publishing platform that paired place-based multimedia narratives with an interactive map interface.[16] This project grew from a few dozen location-based stories at launch to nearly seven hundred over the next several years. It also spawned a generalized codebase, eventually named Curatescape, that the Center began developing in 2011 with seed funding from the university and a digital humanities start-up grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).[17]

The Center released Curatescape as a free, open-source, web-based toolset and offered mobile app development and support via license to a growing number of universities and cultural organizations, mostly in North America.

The project focuses on the history of Kisumu, Kenya, for several reasons. First, Kisumu is the nearest major city serving our research partners and collaborators, Maseno University. It is only about 30 miles away from Maseno University by road. The Kisumu City College Campus of Maseno University is based in Kisumu. Due to the relatively short distance between Maseno University and Kisumu, it is possible, though not always easy, for Maseno University students to travel and collect research materials in Kisumu. Second, Kisumu shares a remarkably similar profile with Cleveland. Kisumu and Cleveland are both port cities with long, rich histories, and face similar social, economic, and political challenges. Kisumu City is the third-largest city in Kenya and has a population of about 400,000. Cleveland is the second-largest city in Ohio with a population falling within the same range as Kisumu. Just as Kisumu serves as a gateway to the Great Lakes region of East Africa, Cleveland is connected to the Great Lakes of North America. Maseno University itself is also similar to Cleveland State University. They are both public universities, and they both have around 15,000–20,000 students. Moreover, the students at Maseno University, just like their counterparts at CSU, are adroit at using cellphones. Thus, Kisumu's history as the onetime terminus of the Kenya-Uganda Railway and as a principal trading center in the Lake Victoria basin; its role as an administrative post for provincial government and, more recently, the East African Community; its proximity to important Luo heritage sites; its growing standing as a site of NGO activity in public health, housing, and human services and of ecotourism; and the longtime importance of nearby Maseno as an education center make the city an attractive place for a project such as ours.

Although there are a number of studies on Kisumu, a city founded a little more than a century ago, the studies are few and scattered. The studies usually focus on the historical experience of the Luo community, the most populous community that regards Kisumu as its home city, rather than on the history of Kisumu specifically.[18] Such studies tend to mention Kisumu only in passing, and whenever they do, they tend to provide only a panoramic

overview of the history of the city[19] as opposed to an intensive historical excavation of every individual aspect of the city – the first streets and roads, schools, hospitals, bars and restaurants, offices, stores, marketplaces, to mention a few. There are also a few accounts of the history of Kisumu in articles, reports, theses, dissertations, and books.[20] Although such accounts are important in providing knowledge about the history of Kisumu, they tend to be too scattered to provide a comprehensive, complete understanding of the history of Kisumu. In fact, many of the accounts tend to provide remarkably different and, in some cases, even contradictory information on the history of Kisumu. The accounts do not even agree on the etiology of the name "Kisumu."[21]

The accounts also tend to relate the history of Kisumu in a formulaic, regimented fashion, presenting Kisumu and its history in a very predictable way. In such accounts, the story of Kisumu begins with flourish. Kisumu is a small but promising port town known as Port Florence on Lake Victoria, emerging at the terminus of the newly built Kenya-Uganda Railway in 1901.

The accounts then mention a few momentous occasions and events in the history of Kisumu. The accounts then take a dark turn; Kisumu, during the independence period, becomes a waning port city going through a tumultuous, ominous cadence. Kisumu fails to meet its potential because of tribal discrimination and political challenges. The accounts call for something drastic to be done to save the city from collapse. The accounts then come to an end. It is a clean and neat history. Nothing messy, untidy, or unpredictable in these historical accounts of Kisumu's emergence, evolution, and development. As previously noted, this tidy telling of the city's history leaves little room for Africans as historical agents. Another related issue is the tendency of the existing accounts to focus on the most well-known sites, events, and institutions in the history of Kisumu, on landmark events such as the building of the Kenya-Uganda Railway and the rise of the Kisumu Port, but remain silent on other events, places, and sites that, however miniscule, are nevertheless important in the history of Kisumu. Although Kisumu emerged in the recent past as the third-largest city in Kenya, its history has only begun to be conveyed in more than fragmentary ways. Until Godfrey Anyumba completed his doctoral dissertation at Delft University in the Netherlands in 1995, no sustained written analysis of the city's history had been produced. Only after nearly two more decades, when Bethwell A. Ogot published *History of Kisumu City, 1901–2001* in 2016, did there exist any comprehensive historical narrative of the city.[22]

As seminal as these works are, they are not widely accessible. Anyumba's dissertation is available via an online institutional repository, but those few who discover the full-text download link will likely be scholars outside Kisumu and even Kenya, for in a setting in which the internet is almost solely accessed from mobile phones powered by small, pay-as-you-go data allowances, and hampered by low bandwidth, few people would be likely to download a pdf of more than thirty megabytes, let alone scroll through nearly four hundred pages on a tiny screen. Similarly, it seems that the reach of Ogot's monograph, published locally by a small press, would be necessarily focused toward the scholarly community. But what about the general public in Kisumu? How might they be able to tap into and contribute to conversations about the city's past? As we discovered very quickly, virtually no reliable information exists online about most sites of historical importance in and around Kisumu.

There is therefore a need to provide a more comprehensive history of Kisumu by looking at other no less important places, sites, events, and people that are missing in most of the currently existing accounts of the history of Kisumu. Kisumu has a rich history, and the two projects, "Curating Kisumu" and "Curating East Africa," leverage the cellphone revolution in Africa to study Kisumu in a systematic and comprehensive way. Their goal is to collect materials on every important site, place, institution, organization, events, and even people that have been instrumental to the emergence and evolution of

Kisumu, and put all of those materials together in one place where students, teachers, and all those interested can easily find them, read them, and comment on them, preserving and facilitating knowledge exchange about Kisumu in a much more dynamic and robust way. The projects seek to identify and present the history of individual sites, places, events, and people, and aggregate each of these individual histories into a comprehensive history of Kisumu. In focusing on the history of individual places, events, sites, and people, we are emulating the strategy that was employed by historians of Africa such as Atieno Odhiambo and David William Cohen in their book *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape,* in which individual stories or stories about individual places, events, and people in Siaya are used to provide an account of the history of such places, events, and people, as well as the total history of Siaya. In the words of the historian Gregory H. Maddox, our approach extends the place-based approach in the same region explored *Siaya,* but provides a counterpoint to prevailing ethnically based understandings of place history.[21] We want to write about individual places, sites, and people in Kisumu, collect and collate accounts about them, place these accounts on a digital platform where they can be open to the public to view and read, and importantly invite the readers to engage in discussion, comments, and critique of their own history. We want not just to write about Kisumu, but also about individual aspects of Kisumu. We want to write about the Kenya-Uganda Railway in Kisumu as one story about Kisumu. We want to look at the history of every individual school, hospital, street and road, administrative office such as the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner's Headquarter. We are also interested in the history of important individuals in the history of Kisumu. In this way, the two projects will not only provide us with the history of specific places and sites in Kisumu, but also a comprehensive history of Kisumu in general. Put another way, we want not just to write about the history of the forest, but also about the trees that make up that forest.

Implementing the "Curating Kisumu" Project

We were therefore elated when we found out in August 2014 that the NEH would fund "Curating Kisumu," the first of the projects. In this project, we would research what technological and institutional constraints in western Kenya might tell us about how to adapt Curatescape for developing-world contexts. We would also begin to build a fruitful partnership that might create a model for faculty and student collaboration in historical research and sharing of knowledge in ways that might collapse the temporal, geographical,

social, cultural, and economic gaps that often limit the prospects for sustainable partnership.

We immediately embarked on planning how to carry out the project. We knew that proper and careful planning would be critical to the success of the project. We started holding a series of planning conversations among those of us based at Cleveland State University, and also with Gordon Obote Magaga and Jethrone Ayumba, our project partners based at Maseno University. We identified all the major stages or steps in the project, and the activities to be carried out during each of those stages or steps. We discussed how we would implement each of the activities, and distributed tasks and responsibilities relating to those activities among ourselves.

We were cognizant of the problem of "digital imperialism" or "digital colonialism," one in which Westerners (both North Americans and Europeans) have tended to introduce technological solutions to Africans that in turn perhaps offered greater returns on Westerners' own investments and benefits for their own societies rather than producing advances that truly benefited and, more importantly, empowered Africans.[21] We wanted to avoid making unilateral decisions for or on behalf of our partners at Maseno, an unfortunate, but all too common tendency among partners from the industrialized world working in projects with partners from the developing world. We were very self-aware to approach our Kenyan partners without assuming

that we had all the answers. We therefore embarked with a genuine desire to meet our partners in the middle, to work together to find the best way to support them as they experimented and evaluated how public history and digital humanities practice could extend and augment their teaching and research as well as build their capacity to be in conversation with the public in western Kenya so that history and culture might be documented to the good of Kenyan society. We agreed on the need for constant consultations and collaborative decision making. Apart from regular consultations and engagements with our partners to guard against the pitfalls of digital colonialism and imperialism, we also decided to release the WordPress plugin and theme we developed on GitHub, a public repository for code, so that anyone in the world could use or modify it freely without the need for outside involvement.

We realized that one of the most difficult, yet critical components of the project during these planning stages would relate to creating humanities content. We therefore spent the first month of the fall 2015 semester discussing how students from Cleveland State University and Maseno University would collaborate on producing materials for the digital platform. We developed several questions to guide us on how students would study, conduct research, synthesize data, write their reports, and then disseminate them for their audience. We thought about how we would organize and structure the courses to accommodate the interests of our students who we knew were from different cultural backgrounds, had different levels of access to economic resources, and lived in different parts of the world. We debated how to synchronize the academic calendars and programs and courses from both institutions. We discussed how to actually conduct the classes. We debated the kinds of learning activities in which to involve our students. We identified many other questions requiring our attention during the planning stage of the project. How, for example, would we grade the students? What kinds of assignments would we give them? After the students worked together, collected data, and wrote their reports, where would they deposit the reports?

After identifying the key steps of the research project, making plans for each step, and determining duties and responsibilities, we moved to the initial stage of implementation of the project. We quickly realized that we could reach an agreement on how to deal with at least some of the issues and questions we had identified during the planning stage. We agreed that while some of our partners worked on the technical aspects of the project, those of us working on the content creation aspect would direct our students to upload and deposit their reports on a website to be created to serve as the repository for all the materials generated for the project by students and the public at large. We anticipated that this website would be accompanied by an app that cellphone users in classrooms throughout Kenya, Africa, and the Third World could access easily and cheaply. This agreement led to the creation of a website for the purposes of housing the materials generated out of the project. We agreed to name the website, *MaCleKi* (https://macleki.org), a portmanteau combining the first letters from [Ma]seno, [Cle]veland, and

[Ki]sumu. This name was actually coined by our Maseno University research partners, an early indication of the collaborative stance we had agreed to take throughout the project.

The next important stage in collecting materials on Kisumu and running the project generally was the ten-day trip that we made to Maseno and Kisumu in January 2015. The trip, as has already been mentioned, was aimed at giving us a sense of the ground where we would be implementing the project, the resources that our partners had, and the possible challenges ahead. In close consultation with our Maseno partners, we developed a detailed schedule of events we would engage in during the trip. During the trip, we held meetings with faculty at Maseno University, including Gordon Obote Magaga and his colleague Jethro Ayumba. We met with Felix Kioli, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maseno. We also met with Dominic MacAwiti, the Vice-Chancellor of Maseno University, and with the official in charge of the Office of Partnership, Research and Innovations, and the Director of Link-ages, Outreach, and Consultancies at Maseno University. We also met with the Principal in charge of the Maseno University Kisumu City College Cam-pus. We held meetings with all these officials, discussing and exchanging ideas on the project. We carried out training sessions with the faculty, students, and other stakeholders on how to use the website, and explained to them why the project was very critical in helping to protect, preserve, store, and disseminate knowledge about important heritage sites, people, and events in Kisumu in this age when many people are dying with their knowl-edge, and where important heritage sites and places are under constant threat of demolition from development agencies. The highlight of these meetings was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Cleveland State University and Maseno University, formalizing the commit-ment of the two institutions to the project. Vice-Chancellor MacAwiti was very enthusiastic about the project and declared support of the university for it. We also took advantage of the trip to look into the possibility of expanding our collaborative engagements beyond Maseno University and bringing in new partners to work with the project. Some of the potential partners we identified included the Kisumu county government, Kisumu City Council, Kisumu Museum, and OSIENALA, the environmental conservation and protection agency dedicated to Lake Victoria and its surroundings.

The trip helped us to take note of several issues that could cause serious challenges to the project unless dealt with at an early stage. We learned that Jethro Ayumba, who was supposed to help Gordon Obote Magaga run the project within his Department, had been accepted into a doctoral program in Germany, was leaving for his studies soon, and that a replacement was needed. Magaga identified Bernard Busaka, who quickly stepped in and started working with us. From that point onwards, Magaga and Busaka became our project partners on the Maseno side. The most serious issue that came to our attention during the trip was the dearth of resources at the disposal of our partners. The students at Maseno University, for example, did

not have resources to enable them to travel, collect data, write their reports, and upload their work on the *MaCleKi* website. Basic equipment was lacking, even for faculty. Access to the internet was peripatetic. Due to the absence of even the most basic equipment, we began to wonder whether our partners at Maseno University could take ownership of the project and make it an independent medium for the exchange of knowledge in Kisumu, Kenya, and the region as a whole as we had envisioned. We realized that the shortage of resources and the dearth of a trained manpower to support the technical and pedagogical aspects of the project would be a persistent problem.

During the trip we also developed collaborative syllabi to guide us in conducting classes that students at Cleveland State University and Maseno University would take together. We found out right from the beginning that creating the syllabi would be easier said than done. In fact, we found out from this early stage of the project that developing a joint syllabus for students at Cleveland State University and Maseno University would probably be one of the most serious challenges to the project. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that Cleveland State University and Maseno University did not have a common calendar. Their programs and schedules did not run concurrently. The Cleveland State University semester in spring 2015 had already begun and was, in fact, in many respects, already running full steam ahead, while the Maseno University semester was only just beginning. Cleveland State University students would need a lot of patience and understanding while participating in the project. They would have to wait for their counterparts at Maseno University to start their semester before embarking on rigorous research and writing in their own assignments related to the project. To make the situation even worse, we found out that Cleveland State University and Maseno University did not have a common African history course or program for the students participating in the project to take together at the time the classes started in spring 2015. This meant that we either had to develop one common course for the students to take from scratch, an impossibility at that point in the semester, or, identify two closely related courses that were already on the calendar of the two universities, harmonize them, and offer them to meet the interests of the students registered for the courses while at the same time serving the objectives of the research project.

In the end, we agreed with our Maseno University colleagues to adopt the most closely related courses for the students to take under the project at that point in the semester. The students at CSU were already set to take a course titled, "History of South Africa since 1900," while their partners at Maseno University were scheduled to do a course on "Modern Africa." We subsequently coordinated and created a collaborative syllabus for the students at Cleveland State University and Maseno University taking these two different courses, which enabled them to study their respective courses while at the same time participating in the project during the semester. The syllabus included a detailed roadmap outlining every important aspect of the project – the goals of the project, the books and articles for students to study, the

assignments to be undertaken by the students, and, more importantly, the topics for the students to carry out their research on.

We spent considerable time identifying important topics on Kisumu for the students to collaborate in their research on, while at the same time taking their different courses on modern South Africa and modern Africa. It was quite a daunting task. In the end, we identified topics on Kisumu that bore some similarities to those in South Africa, and we used those topics to start the task of reconstructing the history of Kisumu and developing content for the *MaCleKi* website. The topics dealt with colonialism, foreign settlements, land alienation, nationalist movements, and opposition politics; centers for protest – SOWETO in South Africa, and Kondele and Nyalenda in Kisumu; Kisumu and Johannesburg as cities; Kisumu, and Cape Town and Durban as port cities; racial discrimination, Apartheid and similar forms of exclusionary systems in Kisumu and South Africa; personal stories of discrimination; education and segregation, for example racially segregated schools in Kisumu and South Africa; religious communities and spaces in Kisumu and South Africa; contestations over religious spaces in Kisumu and South Africa; prosperity religions/televangelists/sangomas, religious branding, religious independence in Kisumu and South Africa; trade and commercial exchange between Kisumu and South Africa; the mining industry based, for example, on gold in Kisumu and South Africa; the South African Development Community, and the East African Community in Kisumu and South Africa; and the construction and impact of railroads in the history of Kisumu and South Africa. The students who enrolled for the course, conducted research on these topics. As we ran the course, we also closely monitored the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning a joint-collaborative course taken by students based in different geographical locations in the world. We found our students very enthusiastic with the prospects of working together with students in universities in other parts of the world. The faculty and students communicated with each other regularly through e-mails and even by phone.

The spring 2015 semester course started with each student getting an opportunity to identify the topics on which they were interested in doing their research. This led to our organizing the students into nine groups working on nine different topics. We distributed responsibilities of students in each group, with CSU students focusing on reading secondary sources such as books and articles, collecting data, and sharing them with their group members, while Maseno University students focused on looking for primary materials from sources such as newspapers, interviews with informants, and the national archives. The students then began preliminary research on their topics. They wrote abstracts for their topics, and identified and developed bibliographies of books, articles, and other resources, which they continued expanding as they continued doing research. The students also started to identify photographs that were relevant to their essays and posted them on the *MaCleKi* website. The students conducted these assignments under close faculty supervision. After collecting the materials from various secondary and

primary sources, the students started analyzing and synthesizing their data to write essays on their topics. The students then submitted the first drafts of their essays for grading. Their drafts were examined, reviewed, and graded, and returned to the students, and the students then moved to the next stage of revising their essays, and, more importantly, preparing them for publication. The students proceeded to revise the essays. The students were also required, after revising the essays, to shorten the essays to four pages with a public audience in mind. They did this again with close faculty supervision. They submitted the four-page essays, and it was these essays that were then posted on *MaCleKi*. These were the final outcomes of the students' semester-long research. The essays were on the following eleven topics: "The Kisumu Port: The Challenges and Promise of a Port City on Lake Victoria," "The Bombay of East Africa: Asian and African Relations in Kisumu," "Miracle Healers in Kisumu: Comparing Father Juma Pesa of Kisumu, and Pastor Lesego Daniel of South Africa," "The Mamboleo Murram Extraction Site: Miners' Experience in Murram Mining in Kisumu and Gold Mining in South Africa," "The East African Community and the South African Development Community: A Comparison of Regional Bodies in Terms of their Origin, Functions, and Impact," "From Single-Faith-Based Religious to Multi-Faith-Based, Integrated Education: A History of Religious and Secular Schools in Kisumu," "Political Protests, Resistance, and Unrest in Kisumu: An Examination of Protests in Kondele and Nyalenda during the 2007–08 Post-Election Violence in Kenya," "Kisumu Girls High School: From a Mixed Boys-Girls School to a Single Girls-Only High School," "Land Alienation and its Impact in Kisumu: Miwani Sugar Company and the Creation of Kabonyo Settlement Scheme," "The Kenya-Uganda Railway: How the Railroad Shaped the Development of Kenya," and "The Mega City Mall in Kisumu: Mega City's Role in the Importation of Goods and Services into Kisumu from South Africa."

We continued with the content-creation aspect of the project during the fall 2015 semester. Using our experience from the previous semester, we embarked very early on, on identifying a joint-collaborative course for students at Cleveland State University and Maseno University to study together. During the fall 2015 semester, our students took the course "Modern Kenya." This course was probably one of the most suitable for the project because it was not only being offered at Cleveland State University and Maseno it allowed us to easily focus students' research on Kisumu, our area of interest, which is within Kenya. We identified topics on Kisumu for the students to research, and we organized the students into research groups as soon as they stepped into the classroom. We provided the students with detailed briefings about the project, the research activities, the assignments, the due dates, the *MaCleKi* website, and the expected challenges and problems. We emphasized to the students that they needed to maintain constant communication by phone and e-mail with their research partners, and that they needed to be very patient and understanding. We wanted the research to begin early and

be prepared for any eventuality. The resulting student-curated stories included "Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and the Rise of Opposition Politics in Kisumu," "WWII Cemetery in Kisumu," "The Ramogi Press," "The Jua Kali, and Other Informal Business Sectors in Kisumu," "Kibuye Market, Kisumu," "Ambrose Ofafa Memorial Hall," "The HIV/Aids Pandemic in Kisumu County," "Living with the Hyacinth Weed," and "The Livestock Trade."

Toward Curating East Africa

As the close of the "Curating Kisumu" grant approached, the authors obtained a Faculty Research Development grant, "Mobilizing Humanities Research in East Africa," from the Cleveland State University Office of Research for 2015–2016. This funding permitted an acceleration of planning for how to make Curatescape viable in the Kenyan context. We now understood that it was impractical to expect native apps (i.e. downloadable mobile applications for Apple and Android phones) to be an affordable, sustainable solution, and we had concerns about the capacity of the Omeka-based Curatescape framework to be maintained by institutions in developing-world settings. The internal grant phase helped us identify a web-only approach akin to the one used by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University (the developers of Omeka) for the *Histories of the National Mall* project. However, rather than continuing with Omeka, we opted to rebuild Curatescape as a plugin for the widely used WordPress platform. Building on WordPress, we believed, would simplify training, reduce users' data consumption, enable easy updating, and benefit from the platform's growing international ubiquity.

One of the highlights of this transitional period was our opportunity to obtain internal funding to host a one-day symposium titled "Public Humanities and Modern Africa" at Cleveland State University in September 2015. We were able to fund travel expenses for Gordon Obote Magaga and Benard Busaka and one of their undergraduate students who had played a coordinating role among his Maseno classmates. In addition, we assembled a number of Africanists from Ohio, Minnesota, New York, and Texas. The symposium was an important way for us to connect our project to the campus community and the broader public, as well as to permit us to host our Maseno colleagues in the United States.

This phase in the project also supported two additional semesters of content development by Cleveland State University and Maseno University

student teams. During the spring and fall of 2016, we again offered the "History of Modern Kenya" course, and during that time, the students conducted research on the following topics: "Archdeacon Owens Monument in Kisumu," "The Old Nyanza Provincial Headquarters," "People's Parliament," "The Origin and Impact of Maseno National School," "History of Maseno University," "Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Referral Hospital ["Russia" – Nyanza Provincial Hospital]," "Oginga Odinga Hut at Maseno National School," "History of the Mission Hospital at Maseno," and "The Origin of Maseno Town."

In addition to discerning a way forward for platform and development and developing new location-based stories, we also submitted a new proposal in 2016 for an NEH Digital Humanities Implementation Grant that, if funded, would have spanned 2016–2019. As conceived, this phase, titled "Curating East Africa: A Platform and Process for Location-based Storytelling in the Developing World," would have seen the development of Curatescape for WordPress, an expansion of the CSU-Maseno partnership to involve additional partners in Kisumu, and the introduction of a second, cooperating partnership between the University of Dodoma in Tanzania and Texas Southern University. Our goal was to begin to create a regional network of partnerships between US and East African universities that would utilize WordPress's ability to aggregate multiple sites' content while allowing each site to retain its own identity. The venture presented some thorny questions for which we did not have ready answers: How would we incorporate multilingual support on both the administrative and public sides of the project site to respect Tanzanians' preference for Swahili over English? How or *should* we broker the development of a regional multisite network? How would scholars and public partners in different countries agree on approaches to content development? Could such a network become domesticated in the region and, if so, who would shepherd the endeavor? These and other questions, in retrospect, were among the reasons that our proposal was unsuccessful. We learned from reviewers' feedback and repositioned the project the following year with a more modest NEH Digital Humanities Advancement Grant proposal under the same title.

This approach proved fruitful. In 2017, we received NEH grant funding for an accelerated, one-year phase of content creation and toolset development. Under this grant, we built a working beta of Curatescape for WordPress, a single plug-in coupled with a recommended theme optimized for developing-world contexts. We crafted the theme expressly for mobile

users, with a single column and optimization for the kinds of smartphones most commonly found in Kenya and, by extension, in many developing nations in Africa. The plug-in greatly simplified the workflow when compared to the traditional Curatescape platform like that used by *Cleveland Historical.* Our selection of WordPress was careful and intentional. It permitted us to simplify user training, automate image-size optimization, drastically reduce data usage, and leverage a globally strong developer community.

Under the new NEH grant, in the fall 2017 semester, we also continued the content development collaboration in Owino's "Modern Africa since 1800" course after a one-semester hiatus in spring 2017. We identified the following topics for students to research on: "Leadership [chiefs and influential politicians]: Chief Ogola Ayieke," "Nyalenda Peri-Urban Neighborhood," "Nyawita Peri-Urban Neighborhood," "Manyatta Peri-Urban Neighborhood," "Fishing: Usoma Beach," "Education: Kisumu Boys High School," "Kibuye Catholic Church," and "Power of Jesus Around the World." Although many of these topics were completed and posted on *MaCleKi*, there are others that were not finished and remain in abeyance. The students from Maseno University who were working on those topics were prevented by political problems that broke out following the disputed presidential election in Kenya in 2017 from reporting to the university to finish their research on those topics. By the end of fall 2017, we had offered the joint courses five times, and the students registered for the courses had done research and written on at least twenty-five location-based topics on Kisumu and the surrounding areas. These were far-flung topics dealing with all aspects of the history of Kisumu, ranging from the coming of colonialism to Kisumu, to infrastructural development, western schools and the introduction of western education in the region, land problems and the emergence of slums, racism, religion, leadership, soil erosion and environmental degradation, livestock keeping and fishing, entertainment, and to war and politics.

In January 2018 we made another trip to Kisumu. During this visit, we trained our faculty partners and their students on the new platform. Perhaps more importantly, we used much of our time to visit numerous sites around the city to build awareness and support for our project among community stakeholders and to identify primary sources. Among our most consequential meetings were those with Kibet Daniel arap Mitei, the Coordinator of Antiquities, Sites & Monuments for the Western Region of the National Museums of Kenya, Phoebe Awiti, the Curator of National Museums of Kenya – Kisumu Museum, and John Obiero Ogone, the Minister of Education in the County Government of Kisumu. Some of the positive outcomes of these meetings included cooperative agreements with the National Museums of Kenya, Kisumu Museum, and the county government and gaining access to primary documents and promises to facilitate student research. Daniel Mitei's office produced a list of the most endangered historic sites in and around Kisumu, while John Ogone helped us obtain maps, reports, and other documents, and

promised ongoing linkage between the project and other ministries of the county government including Planning & Economic Development and Tourism, Sports & Culture. Phoebe Awiti shared historic photos and maps and was enthusiastically supportive of the idea of cross-promotion. We followed up by furnishing electronic printed promotional materials for the museum to distribute to the public, and the museum plans to link selected displays and exhibits to related digital content using QR codes, in addition to consulting with students who are developing future content.

Project team members also visited significant historic sites in the area, taking the opportunity at each to spread word about the project, conduct basic informational interviews, and/or photographically document the sites. These included commercial districts such as the old Indian Bazaar on Odera Street, heritage sites such as Kit Mikayi, industrial facilities such as Equator Bottlers and Kisumu Cotton Mills (KICOMI), and religious institutions such as Kibuye Cathedral, Power of Jesus Around the World Church, and St. Stephen's Anglican Cathedral, schools such as Kisumu Boys and Kisumu Girls High Schools and Victoria Primary School. In one notable case, at KICOMI, our visit led to our acquiring more than thirty historic images, including 1960s and 1970s artist renderings of the industrial complex and photos from the 1980s that traced the "journey of cotton" through the mill. In another, at the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Museum, we were permitted to photograph hundreds of historic photos and artworks for future use in the project. We are sharing all of these photographs on a new Omeka-based website, *Kisumu Archive*, http://archive.macleki.org, which includes nearly 1,000 images that we make freely available to the public.

By the beginning of the spring 2018 semester, the new group of students working on the project and taking a new collaborative course, "Pre-Colonial Africa" started working on twelve topics. These topics included: "Fishing at Dunga Beach, Kisumu, focusing on traditional fishing methods," "A general history of Kit Mikayi," "Kit Mikayi in the history of migration, dispersal, and settlement among the Seme people," "Entertainment and leisure in Kisumu during the precolonial period," "Traditional homesteads among the Luo," "Traditional food such as vegetables, meat, and fish among the Luo," "Traditional elders' and leaders' meetings," "Funerals, burials, and memorialization of the dead among the Luo," "Kit Mikayi between tradition and modernity: Is tourism perverting local cultural beliefs and practices?" and "The place and status of the Mikayi woman in the Luo community." Unfortunately, the delay in starting the new semester at Maseno, combined with a resumption of a nationwide faculty strike at public universities, prevented our Maseno partners from fully participating in content development. This turn of events points to one of the many benefits of forging working relationships with multiple institutions. Our partners at Kisumu Museum worked closely with several teams of CSU students to furnish firsthand knowledge of traditional Luo culture and otherwise unavailable primary sources from the

museum's collection. Quite literally, the museum's involvement rescued the project from a months-long setback.

We resumed content creation in fall 2018, and this time the collaboration ran smoothly. Student teams added new stories on "St. Stephen's Cathedral," "Odera Street," "Sunset Hotel," "Kisumu Municipal Hall," "Kisumu Cotton Mills (KICOMI)," "Kisumu Museum," "Equator Bottlers," "Makasembo Road," and "Kisumu Social Hall." The Kisumu Museum staff supported story development again, which proved especially helpful. By the close of the second NEH grant in December 2018, *MaCleKi* featured fifty-four location-based stories. Along with this content development, we engaged our project advisors and evaluators in assessing and writing final reports on the project. Their insights and critiques are detailed in the project's white paper.

Contributions and Challenges

The projects therefore presented us with a new way of conducting research, writing, storing, and disseminating knowledge about places, events, people, and whole communities. Inspired by the digital revolution taking place in the African continent, they were successfully demonstrating new ways of collecting and preserving historical knowledge about important heritage sites, places, people, and events, especially the ones that are under threat of demolition and destruction. They showcased new ways of teaching and learning in the classroom in Africa, and the Third World in the modern digital age. They demonstrated that it is possible to create new pathways for students and faculty from different geographical, socio-economic and political backgrounds to share knowledge. In simple terms, they broke new ground on how to do history in Africa in the modern digital age.

Apart from demonstrating how knowledge about places can be collected, stored, and shared, the projects manifested their importance in other areas. They succeeded in equipping students with important life-long skills that will help them long after graduating from school. While learning under the aegis of this project, students who took courses under this project managed to acquire skills dealing with working with others in groups, doing research, collecting and analyzing data, writing, debating, and presenting their findings to wider audiences. The projects demonstrated great promise in helping bring universities from their ivory towers, where they have a tendency of remaining ensconced, down to where they can engage with members of the local communities. They helped to promote cooperation and collaboration between the university and the community in generating and sharing

knowledge. While conducting research, students and faculty consulted and worked closely with communities where they are based, and after finishing their research and writing their reports, they presented their findings to the communities, sharing their knowledge and getting feedback from them, thus bridging the gap between universities and the communities where the universities are based.

Cooperative enterprises between universities and communities are a good thing for academia and the public at large. They foster good relations between universities and communities around them. The two projects brought students and faculty from different parts of the world together. They helped to promote students' and faculty's sense of curiosity and desire to travel around the world and visit each other, thus enabling them to learn about each other's way of life and culture. They played a role, in their own small ways, in bringing the world together. They helped to break myths and stereotypes, and barriers/assumptions that often divide people around the world. Our students now have a better understanding of students from other parts of the world. Although the major goals of the two projects revolved around examining and showcasing how cellphones can be used to collect, disseminate, and share knowledge in the modern digital age, they also demonstrated that they have the potential to achieve even much more in equipping our students with important life-long skills, and promoting relationships between the university and the local communities, and people from around the world.

Of course, projects as large as these ones could not have run without experiencing problems and challenges. In spite of the success of the two projects so far, there were a number of problems that made it difficult or prevented them from achieving even more. There is no doubt that faculty and students at CSU and Maseno faced a number of challenges running and participating in the research project. Some of the problems and challenges were expected, anticipated, and dealt with from early on, but others were beyond our control. Indeed, we have already alluded to some of the challenges and problems. For example, the two universities run on different programs and schedules, making it difficult to synchronize and harmonize activities and deadlines related to the project. The courses are often placed on catalogues of the universities years in advance, and making it difficult to plan ahead (for example, in spring 2015 semester when we at Cleveland State University taught "South Africa" while Maseno University counterparts taught "Modern Africa"). It tends to be very difficult to replace such courses with more suitable courses relevant to the research project on time. The universities operate under different academic calendars, meaning that while CSU students may already be running their programs and going on with their studies, those at Maseno University may only be beginning theirs. This has happened virtually every semester. The students have often found themselves at different stages of learning, and this has caused major problems with teaching and learning, and running the project. In fact, it has caused a lot

of frustrations among CSU students whose programs usually started earlier than that at Maseno University.

There were problems of time-zone difference between Cleveland State University and Maseno University. Cleveland State University is behind Maseno University by seven hours during late spring and summer, and eight hours behind during later fall and winter. There were also problems of communication brought about by the dearth of computers and internet access at Maseno University. Maseno University students did not have computers, projectors, printers, and cameras for conducting research, collecting materials, and sending them to their Cleveland State University counterparts. Students at CSU did not often seem to understand why and how their research partners did not have access to computers and the internet. There were also financial problems that weighed down on our students, particularly those at Maseno University; the students there do not often have the resources to pay for travelling and doing research. On many occasions, students at Maseno did not have the money to even pay for trips either to visit historical sites or meet with informants to collect materials.

There were also students who came into the project with different expectations and were frustrated when they realized that the project could not meet those expectations. Quite often, CSU students expected their Maseno University counterparts to conduct their research quickly and send them their materials as soon as the project started, while Maseno University students on the other hand wondered why their CSU counterparts did not understand that, because of financial problems, they could not just travel, conduct research, collect materials, and send them to their counterparts at CSU. Maseno University students also came into the projects hoping to use them as a ladder to come to the US for further studies. This meant that some students often came to the project either with a lot of skepticism or expectation and we had to spend a lot of time explaining the project to them and trying to convince them that the objectives of the project were noble, viable, and important. Once the classes began, we found ourselves spending a lot of time constantly explaining the project objectives to the students, constantly assuring and reassuring them, and constantly shepherding them through the course to the end of the semester. We also realized that we could not expect full accountability from students who were not directly under our supervision. Just as CSU faculty could only expect accountability from CSU students, Maseno University faculty had leverage only over their own students. This could frustrate the completion of assigned project-related activities.

Faculty from both sides, but more so at Maseno University, found the time-and-financial demands of the project overwhelming. They were already overburdened with huge classes and many courses to teach at far-flung university campuses around Kisumu. They had a lot of work to begin with. The demands of the project as well as their regular responsibilities only added to the challenges they were already facing at work. They found themselves often travelling, making phone calls, writing e-mails, and carrying out other

obligations related to the project on top of their regular teaching responsibilities. Traveling long distance for work or for project-related research work was time-consuming, expensive, took the faculty away from their families for several number of days, and took a toll on their health and well-being. Traveling especially out of the country and on foreign roads often exposed the faculty to danger.

Another problem was that faculty participating in the project or who considered becoming involved anticipated greater personal rewards, usually monetary, from the project. Given the great burden of professional and familial commitments that are common on the African continent and proportionally greater than is common among their counterparts in the highly developed world, this is an understandable lens through which to assess whether one can afford to add another responsibility to one's slate. Aside from the issue of financial gain, some hoped for the opportunity to travel and visit the US in return for participating in the project. Others expected electronic equipment such as cellphones, computers, or cameras from the project. With real needs and aspirations factored into the equation, it was difficult at times to focus solely on the project as a means of promoting new ways of conducting research, collecting data, sharing knowledge, preserving historical memory, teaching and learning, and bringing different parts of the world together. It is important to underscore that these challenges were not insurmountable, and we found much common ground.

By far the biggest and most serious challenge we faced running the project were outside of our control. These were the problems of political and labor unrest that led to the closure of the university on several occasions during the previous semesters when the project were supposed to be running. Student unrest led to the closure of Maseno University for several weeks during the spring 2016 semester. Political unrest following the disputed presidential election in 2017 also led to the suspension of learning and closure of Maseno University for several weeks. Labor unrests and faculty strikes at Maseno University also led to the closure of the university for several weeks in spring 2018. In fact, the faculty of all public universities in Kenya, including Maseno University, were on strike at that time, demanding a pay rise and better terms of service. The constant closure of the university left our students frustrated and led to delays in assignments students are doing in the project. Political conflicts and labor unrests have often interfered with learning and other academic programs at Maseno University, and, in turn, affected students and faculty participating in the project. This has in turn caused a lot of anxiety and apprehension among CSU students involved in the project.

There have also been a few instances where materials collected and stories written by students and posted on *MaCleKi* have been misused or misinterpreted by people from different communities for their own ethnic or political agendas, leading to unnecessary misunderstanding and confusion.

The origin of the name "Kisumu" or "Maseno," for example, has generated debate as well as confusion among readers in and around Kisumu and Maseno.

Due to the dearth of resources at the disposal of Maseno University, there are questions about the sustainability of the project. It is not clear whether Maseno University will be able to find money to continue funding the project and making it viable and sustainable. The project has been, and will continue to be, worthwhile, but it will need the involvement of more departments and faculty at Maseno University, more stakeholders from around Kisumu, and it will need to expand into other parts of Kenya and countries in East Africa, and Africa as a whole to be viable and sustainable. It will also need to start exploring the history of other themes that have not been covered or have only been covered briefly, themes such as medicine and healthcare, and environment. Finally, it will need to explore how to safeguard university education from the dearth of financial resources, the ravages of political problems, and the devastations caused by constant labor unrest to reach its full potential.

Next Steps

Where do we go from here? It will be important to foster deeper relation-ships with stakeholders in Kisumu and invite the broader public in western Kenya into conversations around the histories of the places with which they interact daily. The best public history requires cultivating trust, creating dialogue, and building capacity. These actions are all the more critical in a part of the world in which societies cry out for the empowerment that knowledge, including humanities knowledge, can provide. Just as Kenyans leapfrogged the desktop computer era to go straight to mobile phones, we are arguably at a similar inflection point in terms of uptake of digital public history without the same intervening period of decades of non-digital public history that characterized the United States. With all of this in mind, we hope to continue our work in Kisumu. We will seek opportunities for scholarly exchange for students and faculty, inspired to this work by the knowledge of how the project impacted students like Leonard Obiero Odhiambo and Keith Messer-man, each of whom seized opportunities to travel abroad as a result of their experience in the project. We will endeavor to continue collaborat-ing with our partners at Maseno University while also seeking to invite additional participants to join in the enterprise of curating the city.

We see important potentials for using our work to further invigorate the educational programming offered by institutions such as the Kisumu Museum. We think it is a short step to making *MaCleKi* a seamless extension of the excellent work of the Museum in telling the story of its surrounding region. Stories on the website can be keyed thematically with exhibits at the Museum, enabling visitors to bring knowledge to their visits and to take

knowledge out into the city as they connect understandings from their museum experience to places in the landscape.

Beyond Kisumu, we want to encourage wider adoption of Curatescape for WordPress, which we have renamed PlacePress.[29] We will also share news of the platform with colleagues in Kenya, Tanzania, and other East African countries, as well as with American and European African Studies scholars who might see opportunities for partnership using the platform and process we have developed as a guide. Although the platform is free (apart from the modest costs of maintaining a domain name and web hosting), we are well aware that collateral costs and, perhaps more critically, pressing matters that compete for time and attention will remain hurdles for would-be adopters. In addition, the volatility of the political conditions in African developing nations is likely to remain a challenge, not least for the fact that many African universities are periodically gripped by faculty or student strikes, which often revolve around maldistribution of resources – itself a product of politics.

"Curating Kisumu" and "Curating East Africa" emerged in response to the opportunities created by the mobile revolution sweeping across the African continent during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The projects sought to examine new ways of collecting, storing, preserving, and disseminating information about important sites, places, and locations (and even people) that were particularly under threat of extinction, destruction, and outright disappearance from memory in the modern digital age. These projects have just done that. They have been on the vanguard of demonstrating new ways of conducting research, writing, storing, and disseminating knowledge about places, events, and people, especially those that are under threat of destruction and disappearing, in the modern digital age. In spite of a few challenges, the projects have been successful in showcasing new ways for students and faculty from different geographical, socio-economic and political backgrounds, especially those from the United States, Africa, and the Third World in general, to learn and share knowledge together in the modern digital age. They have also demonstrated the possibility of developing new strategies for equipping students with important life-long skills while learning with their counterparts from other parts of the world, skills that will help them long after graduating from school. In short, the projects have been successful in demonstrating how to do African history in the modern digital age.

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