

During the Cold War and before the independence of her country, **Funmilayo Kuti** travelled widely and angered the Nigerian as well as British and American Government by her contacts with the Eastern Bloc. This included her travel to the former USSR, Hungary and China where she met Mao Zedong. In 1956, her passport was not renewed by the government because it was said that "it can be assumed that it is her intention to influence [...] women with communist ideas and policies." She was also refused a US visa because the American government alleged that she was a communist.

<https://dailymedia.com.ng/history-the-first-woman-to-drive-a-car-in-nigeria-Mrs.-olufunmilayo-ransome-kuti/2/>

Left-identified women such as Communist Party USA, theoretician and activist **Claudia Jones** is documented as attending the same meeting as **Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti**, at the World Congress of Women in the USSR in 1963. And again in Japan in 1964 they both helped to pass a resolution against the proliferation and use of atomic and hydrogen weaponry. They were both affiliated with the Women's International Democratic Forum (WIDF) which has been identified as a leftist women's organisation. In that regard it is important also to place Ransome-Kuti in a much more class-conscious framework than how she has been recently identified mostly as Fela's transcendental mother in the (2008–2012) *On and Off-Broadway* play of the same name.

(Carole Boyce Davies: "Pan-Africanism, transnational black feminism and the limits of culturalist analyses in African gender discourses," in: *Feminist Africa*, 19, 2014. <http://www.feministafrica.org>)



Ransome Kuti's activism is traced back to the marketplace where she helped women entrepreneurs with their businesses. This led to the creation of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) a movement that aided Kuti to promote women's rights to education, employment and to political participation. [...] According to Tomiwa Oladele, Kaymu's public relations manager, said, *Women like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, are a pride to any nation and stress the vital role of women as agents of development and change.* Kuti was described in 1947 by the *West African Pilot* as the "Lioness of Lisabi" for her leadership of the women of the Egba clan on a campaign against their arbitrary taxation.

<https://nigeriacommunicationsweek.com.ng/kaymu-com-celebrates-funmilayo-ransome-kuti-women-right-advocate/>

In 1949, she [**Funmilayo Ransome Kuti**] led a protest against the native authorities, in particular the Alake of Egba land, Oba Ademola II. She presented documents alleging abuse of authority by the Alake who had been granted the right to collect the taxes by the British colonial government. Through a series of marches involving tens of thousands of women, a refusal to pay taxes, strikes and a wide spectrum of measures of civilian disobedience, the Abeokuta Women's Union forced the Alake to abdicate his throne and won women representation in the Sole Native Authority (a committee that was granted some say in the colonial administration). This eventually drove the administration of the Egba kingdom, which was under the authority of Great Britain, to the brink of collapse. These protests (which caused a sensation across the nation and internationally) are often referred to historically as the 'Egba Women's War' or the 'Nigerian Women's Struggle'.

<https://zodml.org/discover-nigeria/people/funmilayo-ransome-kuti#.W3Qxry35xTY>



The idea of "recovering local epistemologies" is however a compelling one, and in that context the discussion of the role of *iyalode* may provide a kind of model for advancing an available construct transferable in terms of women's leadership to someone like **Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti**. As described above, Ransome-Kuti was a feminist activist in her own right, with international connections to left-oriented women's groups. She absolutely applied a gender/class praxis in her approach to advancing women's rights in Nigeria.

(Carole Boyce Davies: "Pan-Africanism, transnational black feminism and the limits of culturalist analyses in African gender discourses," in: *Feminist Africa*, 19, 2014. <http://www.feministafrica.org>)



Left: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti with her son Fela found on <https://twitter.com/felakuti/status/971877091221344257>
 Right: Still from *Lyttleton Tours Nigeria* (1952). Unissued / unused material, Pathé.
 Below: Still from *Freedom Park Lagos (And the chain was not)* (2011), prod. / dir. Femi Odugbemi. <https://www.freedomparklagos.com/about>

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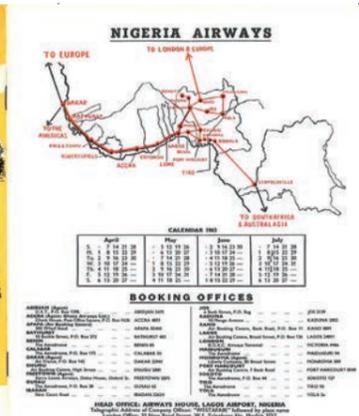
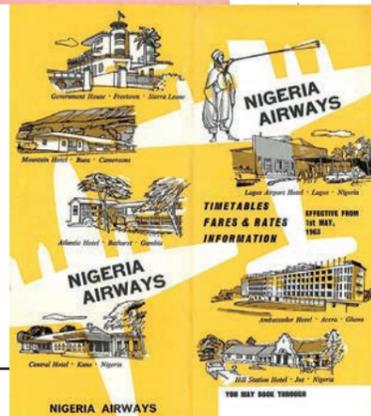
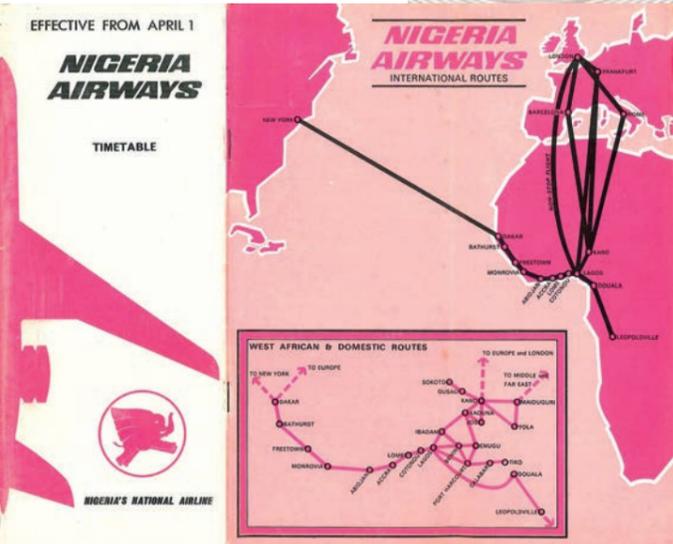
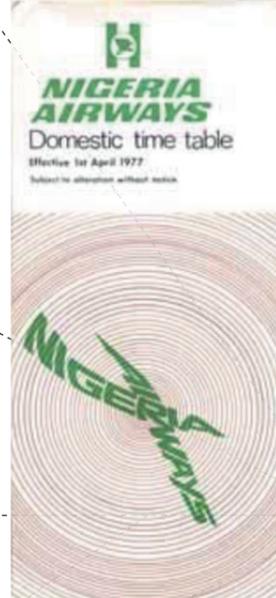
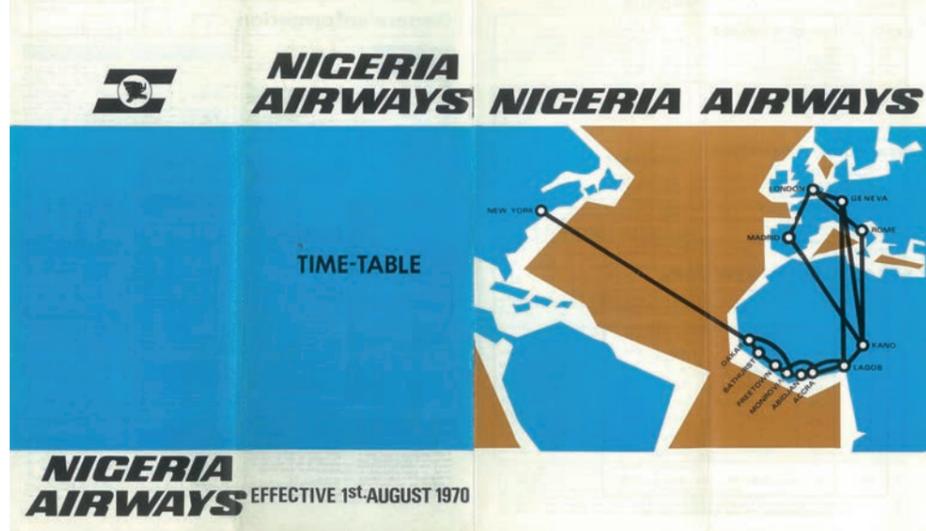
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Una Marson, like Claudia Jones and **Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti**, is identified as working transnationally with women's rights organisations like the International Alliance for Women, a global feminist organisation. Allison Donnell has an interesting take on Marson, suggesting that her women's rights positions pre-date her going to London. Clear about the simultaneity of oppressions her awareness of pan-African movements ran parallel to her other interests and allowed her to see "the urgency of contesting racial hierarchies." One sees in this formation immediately a series of challenges to "all systems of domination," linked to the development of a full humanity in which political and economic power is shared. This formation, in some ways, recalls the early incarnation of the second wave of Black feminist politics in the US which had similarly begun an articulation of a feminism that accounted for class and race along with gender.

(Carole Boyce Davies: "Pan-Africanism, transnational black feminism and the limits of culturalist analyses in African gender discourses," in: *Feminist Africa*, 19, 2014. <http://www.feministafrica.org>)



#2 Search Research



Looking for ... someone, something is about setting in motion oneself or others, a machine, a place, ideas, doubts, papers. Often we don't know why we keep looking. Sometimes there is a decision to take it seriously, to keep in touch, to commit, to get involved. Decisions can acquire momentum. Looking for might lead to research—a search that keeps us attached and that changes the attention's direction and meaning: to look at something again and again and again until we begin to see.

Research always makes life complicated. We might end up knowing too much, getting lost in accumulated information, stories, details, in between perspectives that all fall apart. How do we begin such a process and how do we navigate it, how do we move within? How do we set the premises? What do we do next? What to do with a discovery we don't want to make? Which form, format should it take? All these questions will stay with us and transform through issue 2 of the *Women on Aeroplanes Inflight Magazine*. And yes, as many answers turn up as people sitting around the table.

The decision to look for Colette Omogbai, a promising artist from the 1960s who vanished from the art scenery soon after, brought us to Lagos. Together with a painting of hers, *Agony*, that travelled from Bayreuth's Iwalewahaus to CCA Lagos and back. The attention towards her and her painting could be the beginning of a serial mystery story—definitely a story to be continued in the next issue. We knew enough to know that we won't find her in person, not in Lagos, but Colette Omogbai became a frame, a thread, a cause. She triggered the questions of and for research. A research alongside ..., in the perception of relations. Once the decision is made to go sideways—not to look for central figures but for their collaborators, the ones who were and are active alongside, who are involved but don't get the attention—once that shift is made, the historic narrative becomes interwoven with a plurality of characters potentially hiding in the archive. Wherever that be. In archives that might show up while becoming a character, and multiply as such. And all of a sudden so many female names pop up, and it is no longer a complaint about their going missing but the question, what is it that makes us not see them?

Happy landing

Annett Busch, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet, Magda Lipska

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Inflight Magazine #2

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All additional image footage used in the collages has been found here and there during years of research: film stills, details of photographs, to form a pattern of new meanings. All rights reserved to the holder of the photographs' copyright.

Colophon

Passenger List

Ayò Akinwándé is an architect, photographer and multi-disciplinary artist who experiments with lens-based media, performance and installation. His work flow involves constant questioning on socio-political realities as his presentations incorporate spatial processes to evoke both intimacy and the monumental. He co-curated the 2017 Lagos Biennial and was also a participating artist at the exhibition held at the Nigerian Railway Museum.

Garnette Cadogan is an essayist whose research explores the promise and perils of urban life, the vitality and inequality of cities, and the challenges of pluralism.

Ndidi Dike is a multi-disciplinary artist who keeps the past present by addressing critical issues of our times, and moonlights as a chef whenever it catches her fancy.

Jihan El-Tahri, a true woman on many aeroplanes, is an investigating, tirelessly questioning, propelling force. She makes documentaries and writes books. And she searches until she has found the right person to talk to, the document to read, the turning point, and the lost image.

Rahima Gambo is a visual artist, storyteller and documentary photographer who explores themes of postcolonial Nigerian identity, gender, history, memory and socio-political issues through long-term visual projects.

Lungiswa Gqunta is a visual artist, born in Port Elizabeth and working in Cape Town. Her practice considers the hidden structures of exclusion and oppression that continue to perpetuate the legacy of colonialism and how this is manifested in different forms of violence.

Her work features familiar and domestic objects that are adapted and combined to create tools and weapons, engaging in histories of resistance and highlighting black women who have been overlooked in these narratives.

Gladys Melina Kalichini is a visual artist and researcher from Lusaka. Her work explores the representation of women in relation to dominant, national and colonial histories. Her first project, consisting of a written piece and an exhibition, explored the erasure of women in Zambian history by analysing the ways in which Alice Lenšhina's and Julia Chikamoneka's narratives are marginalized and made less visible within the context of the official narrative of the Zambian liberation struggle.

Maryam Kazeem is a writer based in Lagos. Her work consists of experimental writing, multimedia installations, and film. By exploring questions around the archive, memory, and what it means to write the black female body through image, text and other media, her work seeks to unearth the possibility of speculation as both an artistic and writing practice.

Fabiana Lopes is a New York and São Paulo-based independent curator and a Ph.D. candidate in Performance Studies at New York University. Her work focuses on the artistic production from Latin America, and she is currently researching the production of artists of African descent in Brazil.

Seloua Luste Boulbina is a theorist of postcoloniality and decolonization of knowledge. At the moment, she is Associate Researcher (HDR) at the Laboratoire de Changement Social et Politique (Paris Diderot University), programme Director (Decolonizing Knowledge) at the Collège International de Philosophie (2010–2016).

With an interest in documenting and creating contemporary channels of communication, **Temitayo Ogunbiyi** creates mixed-media artworks. Her approach is often site-specific, and explores botany, human adornment, and pattern—as textile, human habit, and repeated gesture. References imbedded therein are informed by history, current events, and her interactions with particular places. She uses drawing, sculpture, fabric, and collage to fragment and reorder this source material, which often includes personal anecdotes. Recently, Ogunbiyi's

work has featured renderings of hair with dessert, attachments made to hair, scars, topography maps, Facebook pages, and stills from music videos.

Wura-Natasha Ogunji is a visual artist and performer. Her work includes drawings, videos and public performances. Her hand-stitched drawings, made on architectural tracing paper, are inspired by the daily interactions and frequencies that occur in the city of Lagos, from the epic to the intimate.

Iheanyichukwu Onwuegbucha is Associate Curator at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos and founder of e-museum.org, a virtual museum project. His current curatorial and research interests include collective war memories in museums, inclusive virtual museums for Africa, and modern and contemporary African art with particular interest in female modernists from Africa.

Odun Orimolade continues to evolve an experimental, trans-disciplinary approach to her practice, incorporating and exploring different media that span painting, sculptural installation, performance, costumes and mixed media art. She has particular interest in drawing media as a connecting point, which is also a large part of her work. She keeps an open contexture to her approach to creative production and is attracted to the impact on and perception of individuals on issues that spread across a variety of genres.

In her curatorial, publishing, teaching and research practice, **Nadine Siegert** engages with discourses on archives and collections within public institutions as well as the collective image archives of resistance and revolution. She moves with care, in thought and practice, within the fields of aesthetics and politics.

Michael C. Vazquez is a writer and editor. Before he joined *Bidoun* magazine he was the editor of *Transition: An International Review* and remains a non-resident fellow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard.

Search Research

because nobody is interested in them while a sizeable chunk of the files were thrown away by the waste management folks when the place was cleared. We had a dance festival recently and I just went up and I saw a lot of these files on the floor. I started opening them and many have 'Top Secret' labels. I got some sacks and I filled them with the records I found littering the floor and even some scattered on the street and I took them to my house and kept them there. **(aa)**

I remember, when I used to run interviews with students, they would risk their life to hang on to their documents. They would not leave their documents because they just didn't have that trust in the Institution ... **(rg)**

You know, when Guinea Conakry was getting its independence, when the French left, they took everything including birth certificates with them. Those who did not have a birth certificate were all given 1 January as their date of birth. That certificate shows the ultimate power of the document. Documents are the objects of power, our governments exercise power through them. An important document is either to be concealed or it is made irrelevant so it cannot be used against the powers that be—it's about the power structure. They are only salvaged because someone thought this document was important. What becomes important when?—The relevance of something is disconnected from the concept of an archive. We tend to look at archives from the prism of what we think is important now. But archiving is a completely different thing. **(jet)**

So about Mrs. Awa, I think you should speak to Chijioke Onuora—she's still alive and she was with Chikezie Udeaku. It is about speaking to faculty in the school in your search and not students. Onuora has been recovering archives over the years. I was co-curating an exhibition for the 50 anniversary of the school, we were looking for photos of when it was built, photographs of the processes—so we had to go to his father's archive and dig out photos there. There are archives that one could access if you go to the right place. **(io)**

One interesting thing in this conversation is the action of those who were witnesses to these events. Speaking about Pa Fasuyi, I don't think, there is a systemic agenda to eliminate some things or people; it's just that they probably didn't think it was important. I remember while I was still in Architecture School, there wasn't any focus on the History of Architecture in Nigeria, all we were taught was about the Western Architecture History—the Gothic, Renaissance, and focus on the like of Le Corbusier, Frank Gehry, Frank Lloyd Wright and a host of others but no mention of any Nigerian or African Architect. It was after I left the university that I knew about the architectural practice of the artist, Demas Nwoko. So one would expect the people who witnessed these histories to write and document all of this but it often doesn't happen. We had Prof Adeyemi—the first professor of Architecture in West Africa, as the head of the Department at a time, we ended up knowing little or close to nothing about our architecture history. **(aa)**

So, what you are doing—searching for and putting together a story—is bigger than an archive, but we shouldn't forget that the archive is a tour guide. It shows us a bunch of different rooms, revealing its personality as it does so. Someone comes in and recognizes that personality, and imagines: Here's how I can get a handle on this information, following the path laid out by my guide. One is in search of the character of the archive, then, so that you can tell a story in a way that reveals trails that will help other people tell their stories as they explore those archives ... **(gc)**

Women on Aeroplanes, Second Iteration: Search, Research 23—26 May, 2018, CCA, Lagos

Looking for Colette Omogbai initiated a search that is going way beyond the actual person, Colette Omogbai, a promising Nigerian female artist in the 1960s who vanished from the art scenery soon after. She became a reason for us, a baseline, and triggered all sorts of questions around methodologies of research, of how we approach and navigate an archive, or the archives, and what we might do if there is just none. In the third issue of the *Women on Aeroplanes Inflight Magazine* we will continue with more contributions on Colette Omogbai at length. In the meantime, we'll follow several other tracks of passionate debates. Among many other changing fellow passenger we had on board: **Ayo Akinwande** (Lagos), **Garnette Cadogan** (Boston), **Ndidi Dike** (Lagos), **Jihan El-Tahri** (Dakar), **Rahima Gambo** (Abuja), **Lungiswa Gqunta** (Cape Town), **Gladys Melina Kalichini** (Grahamstown), **Maryam Kazeem** (Lagos), **Fabiana Lopes** (New York), **Seloua Luste Boulbina** (Paris), **Wura-Natasha Ogunji** (Lagos), **Iheanyichukwu Onwuegbucha** (Lagos), **Temitayo Ogunbiyi** (Lagos), **Odun Orimolade** (Lagos), **Nadine Siegert** (Bayreuth), **Michael C. Vazquez** (New York).

What you are doing is bigger than archive—. **(gc)**

As soon as you say, *She was really important, I have to find this person*, you have already decided that she was really important although the archive is telling you she isn't; so what does it mean to you to find a space and listen and interact with—I hate the word—raw material—but in a way, it is. It is not necessarily footage; when I'm talking about archive, I'm talking about much wider things. You can find an object in an archive; an idea or something that she said or quoted that opens a hole or a lock. Sometimes, one of the things I love finding in an archive are contact sheets because on them you have a given time circled in red; there's so much information in just that decision that says so much about the person. **(jet)**

Knowledge is one thing, orientation is a whole other thing, and then there is information. The largest archive we can ever carry is the body. It is a fantastic machine. What the brain does while storing information is very minor compared to how the body stores it. Our bodies experience two million sensational impacts per second and less than two hundred of these get into the brain consciousness. Then all this information just gets stored up in our cells—you carry information. **(oo)**

If you know Broad Street, there is the old Ministry of Justice building which was the headquarter until the capital of the country was moved to Abuja from Lagos in 1991. Most of the records and archives have been abandoned. They have become like nuisance,

Alongside Mrs. S.O. Somefun and Mrs. Awa

A conversation between Odun Orimolade and Ndidi Dike

Odun Orimolade I met Ndidi Dike in 1994. I was a student; she was opening a show that day and I had only heard of her. I remember she had these huge locks and I kept going, *I'm gonna do that!* In 2006, when I had my first solo show she called me on the phone; I had just had a baby a few days before and my dad had just died so it was just a mess and she said, *Odun, this is Ndidi Dike*, and I kept looking at the phone, *You are doing great. You must keep doing what you are doing. I'm so impressed; us girls need to stick together.* And we have been friends since.

She works in all sorts of media. She encourages me to go out there, considering that I'm bowled over with work all the time. She's such a wonderful person to brainstorm with. I bring my students to her at every opportunity or drag her to be where they are. She is a force to be reckoned with concerning women in arts, in my opinion, because there's a lot of history before her that, as far as I'm concerned with, doesn't get attention. I can't say we need to hog the spot light or anything, but they don't get the recognition they deserve, and she won't have any of that, which is good. Ndidi Dike.

Ndidi Dike Thank you Odun. Odun is an artist and a lady I have a lot of admiration and respect for because there always seems to be this notion that once you're married or you have children, you can't be a good artist. She teaches, she mentors at the Yaba College of Technology's Art School. The students don't joke with her, she's always there for them, and she encourages them. In our society, that strength or determination is very important. There are plenty of women who have come before, but there doesn't seem to be much information on them. We've been on residencies together in Cameroon, she comes to my studio regularly. We talk about some of my projects. She actually assists me in my projects. We've gone on so many different tours, markets and sites all over Lagos together. For me, it's a very important relationship, sharing some of the knowledge I have and also working with the next generation. She's a fantastic writer. She does a lot of research and I think she's very vital to the Yaba College. Odun.

Odun We started talking about influences, about great women. I'm young so I have people like **Nike Okundaye** and others, people that I can look up to, that I grew up watching, who didn't vanish. One could say that it's technology and people finally documenting, but then documentation had started a long time ago. Our school turned 70 and people were writing left and right and publishing stuff. I read something about the Fine Art Department¹. It said the department was developed by Yusuf Grillo from 1964 "alongside **Mrs. S.O. Somefun**", who helped with the painting section. I immediately looked for the author of that note to ask who Mrs. S.O. Somefun was. I was told it was a name that came up in an interview with another lecturer who had retired. So, I called him on the phone, *Sir, do you know who this lady is?*

No, he said. *She was there before my time but the name is familiar.* And so, the search began.

I went to the school archives; I was informed that a lot of the things from before 1967 were no more². While looking for her, I went through everything I had and she wasn't there. I checked in other departments and there was nothing. It started looking like she didn't exist. I didn't know what to do about it. The first person I talked to was Ndidi, we talk about a lot of people who aren't mentioned popularly in Nigerian art history, but then the note I read says that S.O. Somefun was a painter. If so, she was the first woman to have instructed painting there and I needed to get to the bottom of this.

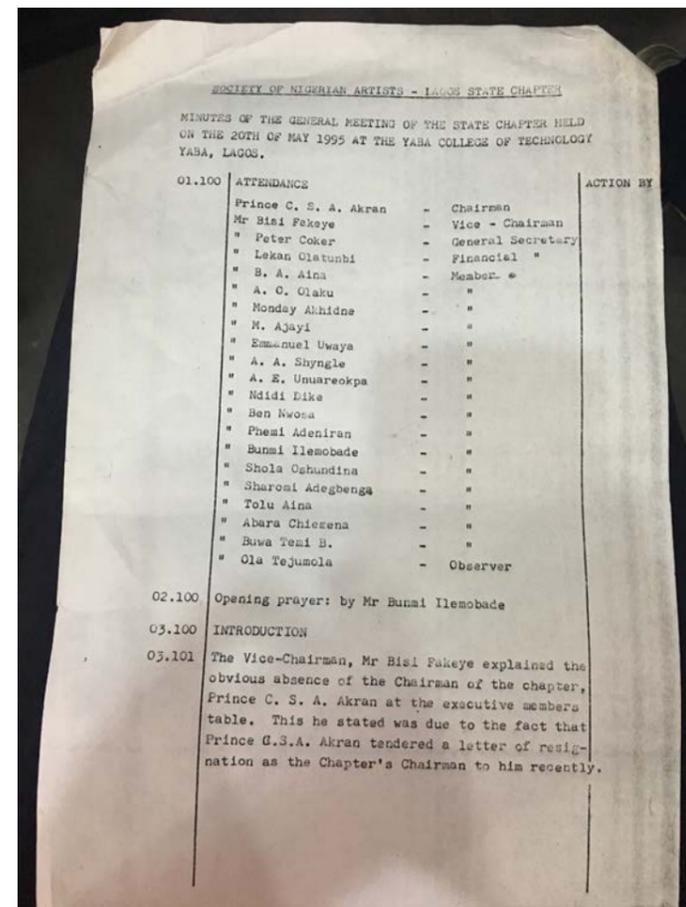
Everything I do now is still a work in progress. The more I searched for her, other names came up. Sometime last week, I had an interview with Pa Timothy Banjo Fasuyi. He's 83. He told me, *the name sounds familiar*. He explained: *The best person to ask this question to will be Yusuf Grillo*. He worked at the institution part time and worked with ministries at the same time, but Grillo was fully in charge of the department. *She might be an expatriate that married a Nigerian*. Well, that's still a thought. Then Pa Fasuyi ends his sentence with: *I can't remember*. I was asking him about the other women that he could mention, to which he asked: *Did you find Clara's daughter? Which Clara?*

He told me about a **Clara Ugbogada** who was a familiar name to me but there's little information about her and she's long passed. I also know that she came from the Zaria School that is today Ahmadu Bello University.³

Frustrated with the search for S.O. Somefun, I talked about it in one of my drawing classes. We were talking about the validity of drawing and how drawings are like women—important, and then not. Everyone started discussing and asking: *Is there no record? They said they'd help me*. I said: *I'm the only one that can get to the records and if I can't find anything, how would they find anything? Unless we make records ourselves?* Right there, we started a project and I called it, *Invisible Ink*. Everyone started giving me possible full-forms for the initials, 'S.O.' Some said she was a foreigner, some said, because it was Somefun, she must be from a specific state. This brought up the discussion about artists who get married and how they lose their last name. So, if she was Mrs. S.O. Somefun, who was she before that? Then someone said: *Okay, we'll write about her family, we'll give her a name*. Some started making portraits of what they thought she would have looked like—which was really hilarious. They talked about the dressing of the time and how people behaved in the 1960s. Some said: *She was an old married woman*. Someone said: *No, she was really young. She had just gotten married when she started working with the school*. And there we started creating this whole fictitious archive.

While talking about women, **Mrs. Osemwegie** came up, someone I had met. She was still working at the school when I was there. She used to make intricate crocheted work. Since then, I've not seen any of her work. *But this person ought to be alive now*. When I went to see Pa Fasuyi and told him that I was also looking for Mrs. Osemwegie, he kept calling her by another name. While I said, *no, she's a woman*, he insisted, *Osemwegie is a man! His course mate married him and she was the only girl in the class!*

Oh!
He explained that she was the daughter of Isaac John (after Isaac John Street in Lagos). I couldn't believe it. He went on: *She was*

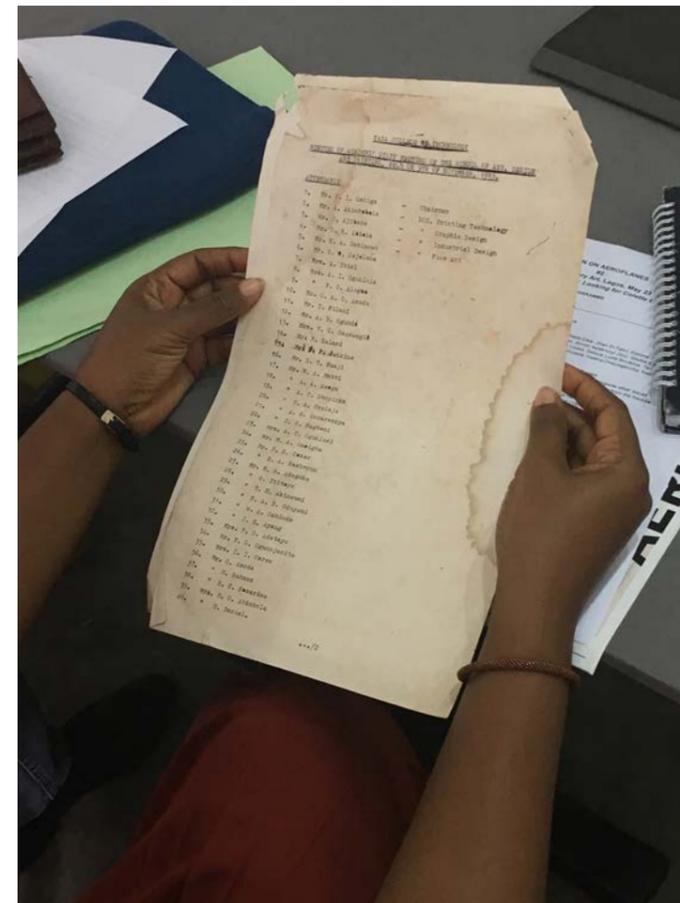
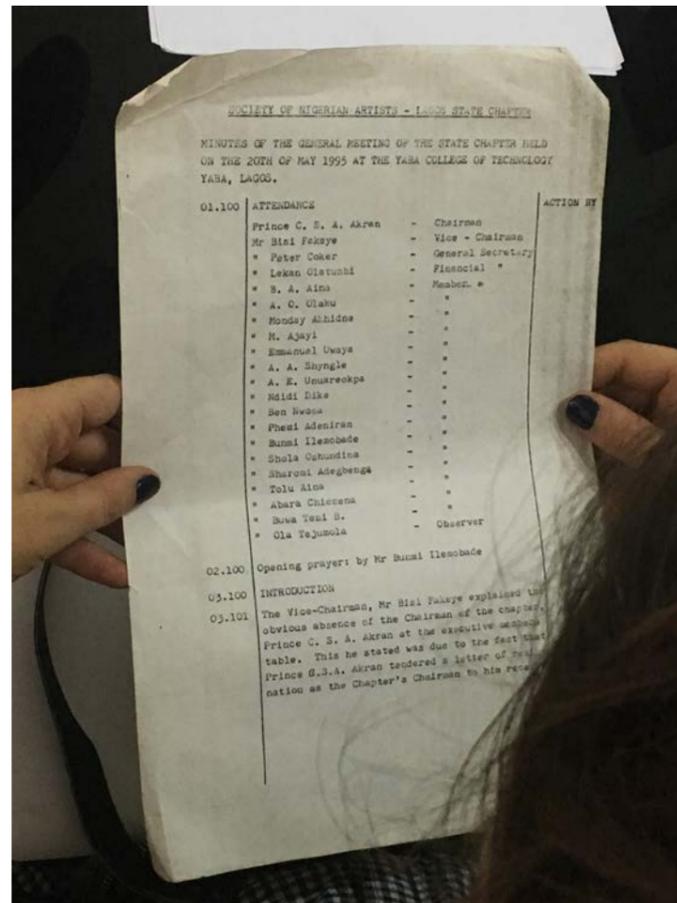
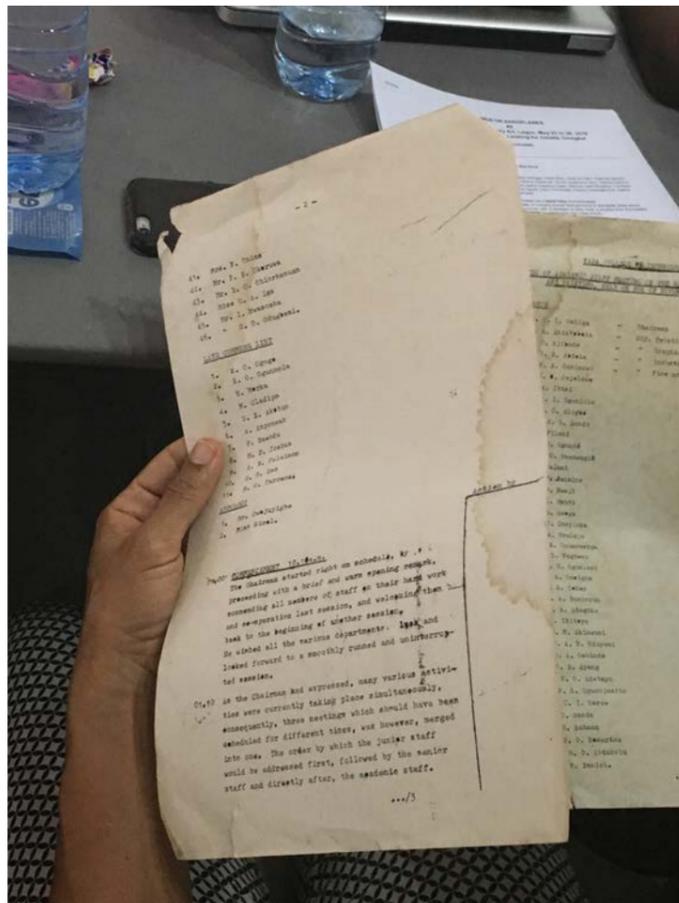
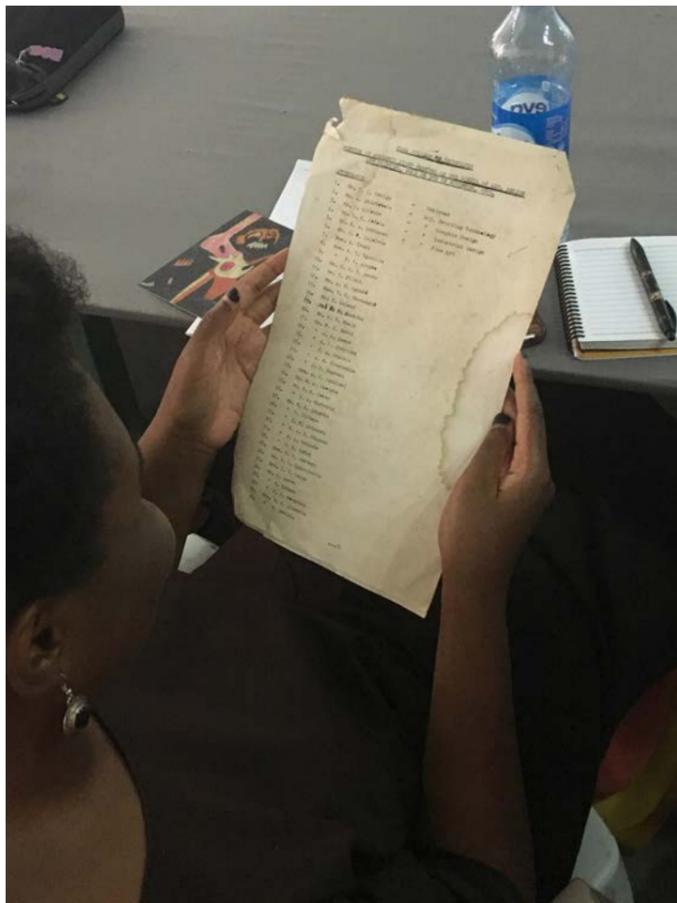


Copy of Society of Nigerian Artists meeting attendancesheet in which Ndidi Dike is the only female and listed as (Mr.)

1 The School of Art of the Yaba College of Technology enjoys a long history of being the first institution of higher learning for the Arts in Nigeria, also of having huge impact on the practice of Art in Nigeria. The School of Art started in 1952 from the Fine Art Unit which is the Fine Art department today.

2 Unfortunately the official records before the 1967 civil war is minimal up to the few years after it started and she is not there, but then there is much writing that has transpired over the years but to this point, in foraging archives there is yet to yield something of value concerning her.

3 Talks with Sir Fasuyi included other women such as a **Miss Spiropulus** (Nigerian/Greek) who was fatally involved in the Lalupon train disaster of 1957 that killed several art learners heading to Zaria. Also the late **Clara Ugbodaga** was the first indigenous lecturer in the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. She left Zaria, came to Yaba and then moved to Benin to build an art school there. At some point she married a Cameroonian and became **Mrs. Ngu**.



really academic, she ended up working in the school, I think. I said: Yes, I met her. And he said: Oh she's still there? She should be older. I said: She's been gone for about twenty years. He couldn't remember her full surname because the name that she was known by was, Isaac John. He said they had thought: *This is a rich man's kid, take care of her and things like that.* No one called her by her name. I started pulling out the graduate lists from the school archive. I have information from 1964 to 1965, but then I don't have anything between then and 1974⁴. Then I found a list of names that had the husbands' names. There was one list that had "miss" in brackets. That was the one I kept, I couldn't validate it until I found out if this was the same person. It is really interesting how I couldn't find anything about her, twenty years is really recent ... We should be able to find stuff about her, but I have almost nothing. All I have are some lists. There is a list from 1989, a list of a meeting that had happened in the school, her name is there but it is listed as Mrs. **V.G. Osemwegie**. Why is she so interesting to me? Is it that it's different from someone I just heard about, because she is someone I saw? I know what she looks like. She used to have an Afro, very dainty. A few years ago, a lot of people I loved, left the college. Their offices got allocated to others and they wanted to ask cleaners to come take care of it. I told them that I'd take care of it. That experience got me looking for other people that were retiring and didn't need their papers anymore. This is how I collect a lot of the stuff I have. Recently a colleague went to see the family of someone that was in the department in the 1980s who had passed away. He told me: *Odun, there was this table with files and I saw Yaba.* I've been negotiating how I could go make friends with this family just to get to those papers. While foraging, I found an attendance list for the 'Society of Nigerian Artists' from 1995. The only female name there is **Ndidi Dike**, written as 'Mr.'. It's been really interesting looking for these people, because every time you look for one person, someone mentions another name you've never heard of or you never thought was there at all. I had always thought about **Clara Ugboadaga**, which is a name that you hear in whispers but then there is no expansive record of her. I also thought about **Lara Ige (Jacks)**, she relocated. She is one of those people that you didn't want to see go. She is in

many lists for meetings, someone that I experienced. I know what her work is like, I remember things she talked about to me personally and I maintain a relationship with her now. (Now I think I should be talking more about her). Earlier, I started looking for work done by female students, like her, in the college records. Of course, there are works that were there from the inception of the department. Some of the first works that were made are still available. I went from room to room asking: *Where did you say your work was?* I started picking out the girls' works because when I looked for mine, I couldn't find it (I know I will very soon). It could be hiding somewhere, maybe in an office that I haven't walked into or a storage room. It is all a work in progress. The sad thing is that amongst the women that I have encountered, the only one I knew and still know personally is, **Lara Ige-Jacks** and I have access to her and she has access to technology so she can't be erased. But then there are others who I have searched for and am still searching for. This is an on-going thing. On S.O. Somefun we have gone through Google and if you ask for Somefun, it will give you so many hits. Same thing on Facebook, but then it also recommends "some fun" to you. When you type S.O. Somefun it directs you to: so some fun. And when you add 1964, it will show you names of clubs.

Ndidi The title *Searching for Colette Omogbai* is really good; it takes me back to my first trip to Iwalewahaus where I went to research at the archives. There they have only one work by one woman and that is, **Colette Omogbai**. I was quite intrigued when the *Women on Aeroplanes* project came up. It opened up a Pandora's box—with Odun and I sitting down and thinking about women in arts. Between my time in Berlin and now, I've discovered five more artists that people don't really talk about. Even **Clara Ugboadaga-Ngu**, who was mentioned earlier, actually taught uncle Bruce [Bruce Onobrakpeya] and Uche Okeke in the University of Zaria. Hardly anyone remembers that. Mr. Imoukhuede, the former Federal Director of Culture ... was he the editor of the *Daily Express*? I had a discussion with him the other day and he told me that he used to write a lot on Clara, on

Afi Ekong and others. From the University of Nsukka, a very significant university, I have to mention **Mrs. Awa**⁵. I remember she was actually appointed as a lecturer in the department of fine arts in 1981. She was a sculptor and also a specialist in printmaking. I can vaguely remember seeing her, listening to her talk. The interesting thing is that when you talk about the University of Nsukka, her name is never mentioned. According to some of the sources, her file is not there. The little information I have is purely based on phone conversations with the person I sent to go find out information and what he has been able to cling to. I remember another artist, **Nkechi Abii**. We went on an excursion to Northern Nigeria in the mid 1980s. We went to research glass-making in Bida in Niger State. That was when Nigeria was safe. We went by road and I can remember she was the one that took us on that particular trip. I've been wondering why, even when they talk about Zaria Rebels, they never mention that Clara taught Uche Okeke and Bruce Onobrakpeya. Also when you talk about the history of contemporary art, nobody ever mentions Mrs. Awa being the first and only female teacher in Nsukka. All these gaps, erasures and neglects ... It is up to some of us to really do some more in-depth research and fill some of these gaps; that have been missing for decades. One of the reasons why is—as you pointed out in the list I'm supposed to be a man! I remember when I first started my career as an artist, a lot of people assumed I was a man. It was when I started writing "Miss" in front of my name that they realised I was a woman. On several occasions, they would come to me and say: I thought you were a man. There has been that assumption that when someone is productive and doing really well, they are male. It can't be a woman.

4 The search is still in progress so there is a possibility of getting more information.

5 In *Almost Erased* there has been an investigation on **Mrs. Awa** who lectured in the Fine Arts Department at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. So little is mentioned of her that it is almost as if she was not in the faculty, impacting and teaching young learners. She is a sculptor, with some experience in jewellery making also. She particularly carved wood and stone. She was married to Prof. Eme Awa and was appointed a lecturer in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, UNN in 1981/82. She was recruited by Prof. Uche Okeke particularly for her experience in metal work and jewellery. This made her the first female academic staff of the department. She taught modelling and casting and some other courses in sculpture. Mrs. Awa produced wood sculptures that perhaps can still be viewed in El Anatsui's studio in Nsukka, also a terrazzo piece that still stands in front of the Enwonwu Building in the Fine and Applied Art Department. She also worked with El-Anatsui and Seth Anku. He was a male lecturer who nobody mentions either. They were both Ghanaians. I think they were recruited by Uche Okeke, like El-Anatsui himself. Apparently, Mrs. Awa had enrolled for an MFA programme in the department under the supervision of Mr. C. Amaefuna. She left the depart-

Two or three questions
Ndidi Dike

Who has been an important source of inspiration and influence for the way you think, work and live?

The following names are of some women who I have researched and periodically followed. Their work has not necessarily influenced the way I think and work, but definitely the multiplicity of their practice and work has impacted me in one way or another: Kara Walker, the late Belkis Ayón, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Sue Williamson, Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Phyllida Barlow.

Who would you love to meet and have a conversation with? Where and what about?

My choice is María Magdalena Campos-Pons whose work is autobiographical and she primarily works with photographs, performance, audiovisual media and sculpture. I would like to have a conversation with her on her investigative history, memory, loss, politics of selection, Cuban identity and the slave trade.

Two or three questions
Odun Orimolade

Who has been an important source of inspiration and influence for the way you think, work and live?

There are several women in my memory but as an influence I would have to say these would be the women in my life, family and friends. Growing up though, there were Nigerian women of interest to me at different levels such as Toun Oni, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Professor Sophie Oluwole, Adunni Oluwole and Lady Oyinkansola Abayomi amongst so many others.

Which work of art / literature / music / photography resonates with you?

I am woman (1972), written and performed by Helen Reddy. What lyrics! The music was written with guitarist, Ray Burton.

Which books did you always want to read, but never found a copy, the time, the entry point?

Oh, where do I start? Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1986); Adaora Lily Ulasi's *Many Thing You No Understand* (1970), *Many Thing Begin For Change* (1978); Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974); Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) and *Anowa* (1970); Zora Neale Hurston's lores, her research on Haitian culture and I would like to read her writing, *Barracoon* (1931/2018), even though the anticipated reality of it troubles me endlessly. I do not think language is enough of a barrier; it would be like dealing with Amos Tutuola's non-conformity. Hurston's reference to research as 'formalized curiosity' resonates with me. I

would also like to get to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988). I am in search of notes by Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, my gut says they exist, or maybe quotes taken from things she said that made the papers then ... I would like to see the late Mrs. Awolowo's diary and notes. I was gifted a collection of speeches by Obafemi Awolowo and I can just imagine what kind of woman she was, what influence did she weave over him? I think the same way about Fathia and Kwame Nkrumah, I also have collections of his speeches. The translated poems of Nana Asma'u: just imagine what these women would have put down or said. Actually my list does not and will not likely end, as I learn.

Is there a work you would have wanted, but never managed to see properly either in a good equipped cinema or as an original in a museum or attended the concert instead of listening to the record?

A beautiful dream come true would be to physically see a retrospect of Louise Bourgeois, Marianne North, Harriet Powers, Georgia O'Keeffe, Yayoi Kusama, Frida Kahlo, Barbara Hepworth, Camille Claudel, Tamara de Lempicka, Berthe Morisot and Joan Mitchell. Quite particularly, I am looking forward to a broad and emphatic retrospect on the works of the Nigerian artist, Madame Nike Okundaye, with more of her early work and a photo archive. It would be great to push for her to be there in person, she is still alive and working. There is something that Toni Morrison said that rings true and itches me all the time, "If there is a book (or anything else) that you want to read but it hasn't been written yet, you must be the one to write it". This is not really fair! My list goes on ...

Who would you love to meet and have a conversation with? Where and what about?

Although passed away, it would be great to meet Louise Bourgeois. We would be in the studio. There is just too much about her that I am interested in, both her life and work. We would talk about everything! Art, history, myth, books, balancing family and work, just everything! We would have sleepovers and talk about the murder of fear and the will to will. I would learn about her inspirations, observations and influences from her. She would have been a keenly insightful character. I imagine her calm on the surface with a hurricane within. I would go through her tools and studio storage. She would take me through her notes as I go through them and we would have more conversations, metaphorical derivatives in negotiations of experience and spaces of the mind and imagination. Her eyes, to me, have always seemed kind and full of knowledge and mischief.

Marianne North. We would probably be in her library or field with equipment to collect or note things and interactions. I think of her as extremely intelligent and academic in her engagements. I imagine she would see beyond the obvious and the easy activism. She would be like the saying, still waters. Her interest in nature, for me, is a characteristic of an astute observer. We would talk about external influences, balancing, impact and interactions on how we are and could be.

Among the living, it would be Yayoi Kusama. It would be in her safe place. I would love to hear her story not told by the impression of others, which would be more of an unfettered recant of experiences rather than postulations of art writers. I saw a picture of her in her twenties of a performance that she did with a horse. The dots that are now iconic and polished were raw and rustic. I would like to know about that person and her experiences, that are noted or not, that have moved on since then; one foot in front of the other. The tormentors and the negotiations, the blurs of reality and her thought processes. It would be great to go through her archive of old pictures and not those that have been selected for publication. To meet not as some interview or anything that would engender espoused reactions, rather to just be and observe and interact maybe ... to actually see her.

Which woman artist / figure should be rediscovered and should get a retrospective or a solo show or a proper catalogue?

Nana Asma'u bint Shehu Usman dan Fodiyo (1793–1864). I am yet to encounter her collection of poetry translated to English. She has lasted through history as an important figure of continued influence in Northern Nigeria—which is odd for a female character. And I keep thinking, this must be quite a character. She is recognised as a force, as the precursor to modern feminism in Africa. She is understood to have a body of over 60 surviving works created over four decades including historical narratives and creative literature.

I am actually not a Waka music fan but I certainly think that the work of Waka Queen, Salawa Abeni, ought to benefit from this idea. She was honoured by the Alaafin of Oyo for her contributions to Yoruba Culture. Also, the work of Madame Comfort Omoge who began her practice at the young age of fourteen. She was the Queen of Asiko music, a Yoruba folkloric genre that employs traditional instruments and ideologies. Also, would be the work of the publisher of *Emotan Magazine*, Mrs. Tola Adenle, amongst so many others ...

Did you ever have a favorite heroine in fiction, in reality, in history ...? And who would that be?

The women of history and myth that intrigued me: Let me start with Princess Moremi Ajasoro of the Yoruba Kingdom, Queen Idia of the Benin Kingdom, Queen Amina of Zaria. There were also the Yoruba Iyalodes, formidable! Formidable characters like Efunsetan Aniwura, Efunroye Tinubu, and the other Iyalodes of Yoruba culture. These women had guts and power. Though there is many a terrifying tale that precedes them, there are also stories of trade, power, influence and strength. Bilikisu Sungbo, architect of the Sungbo Eredo defensive wall system in Oke Eri, South West Nigeria, would have been someone to know in her time. The women of the Ilara wars (Ilara is a place in Ekiti State of South West Nigeria). The story of the women of the so-called *Aba women's riot* heralded by Madame Nwanyeruwa. The Amazons, the female regiment of the military force of the Dahomey Kingdom. The kind hearted Emotan of the Benin Kingdom, Alimotu Pelewura, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, there are so many others. The clause *so many others* recurs, as I am resolute that there are so many that have gone before without highlighted records.

Considerations that come into play In Freedom Park with Temitayo Ogunbiyi

For the past two years, I have explored hairstyles and botanical forms and ways to bring the gestures created by hairstyling into dialogue with the gestures seen in nature—thinking about whether they are one and the same, whether they complement one another, whether hairstyling just responds to what we see in nature or whether we are actually of nature. Maybe there is something within us that is expressed, that is indeed part of what we see around us.

For the better part of the last two years I have been working with pencil on paper. I like to think of these works as just little experiments or punctuation marks. The research that I do around hairstyling began with Yoruba hairstyling from the 20 century. There are really some fantastic hairstyles coming out of this region and some of them are referenced in the drawings that I do. One of them is one of the main sources of inspiration for the playgrounds. *You will find peace and play among palm trees* is the first phase of the first one, and the palm trees' reference can be anything you make of it. For me it's a reference to Lagos, a reference to the ocean, a reference to Freedom Park, because if you look closely you will see palm trees. I'm very interested in how we respond to what we have locally—harnessing what is of value and seeking to expand it. The structure that I've started with here is, for me, a trunk of sorts, a trunk of the palm tree perhaps.

This location was allocated as a playground within the park. I was invited to be part of the Freedom Park Playground Committee and before I knew it, I was asked to come up with an idea for what I could contribute as an artist. The red structure outlines prison cells. For me, it's been interesting to think about how any gesture that I add to this space is not only in dialogue with what already exists here, but also with the larger conversation of how this space was a prison and now a park—but, is it still a prison? And how do we really challenge the way that we interact and engage with what it has to offer? The palm trees are more a reference to the form of the undulating bars. I don't actually use palm trees to make the sculptures. The material I've used is called Manila rope. It's made from a plant, Abacá, and is wound around galvanised steel piping. There's a debate as to whether it's produced in Nigeria or not, we're still trying to figure that out.

So, first we laid the concrete foundation. There is a drawing that I did that looked like ... I don't know how to describe it ... just, literally, lines and the preferred distance between the two points. Once we'd laid the foundation we had the *bender* come with his machines and then we bent into the foundation what we had laid. The electric *bender* gave us a pretty perfect curve, which is what you see for the most part. But then, the manual *bender* gave us the flexibility that you see in the higher monkey bar forms.

I didn't even know what an electric or manual bender was—a thing with some legs and a funny head. The bender was fighting with the bending machine. It was quite an intense experience working in this space. We didn't have electricity, so we had to get electricity from elsewhere. There's literally a neutral cable. My husband, Bayo, was very supportive and helped us tremendously with every step of realising this project. I was open to changes. I don't really like it when things are exact, it seems too mechanical. I like the idea of it being a drawing, guiding the form. We drew in the sand, we pointed to things, and we managed to communicate what we wanted and we were happy with it.

I have done other projects at Freedom Park in the past. I've exhibited in their gallery. I also have an outdoor piece that I like to think of as an ephemeral piece that continuously changes. I don't touch it but people move things and take things from it. I stumbled upon this park when I first moved back to Lagos in 2011, it was just being constructed then. I hadn't lived here before, but I find that it really is a place that is open to creative expression in terms of music, theatre, and art and I've always felt very

comfortable here. The government keeps an eye on it although it isn't officially a part of the government parks. They are much more flexible/ accommodating? than some of the other outdoor spaces that you see in Lagos, especially when you have to go up and down figuring out who to talk to. There are two people who oversee everything that happens in the park and if you're able to convince them that what you want to do will add something to the park, then they will support you or at least give you what you asked for. So I chose to work here. I was also lucky to have been given this opportunity. I feel like this is more like how this came to be: I was talking to a friend who said we should have a playground in Freedom Park and I said, of course! Before I knew it, I was on a committee and then the sculpture was made. That's how it worked out.

Working site-specifically has always interested me. It's important to spend a lot of time in the spaces where you work, thinking about what sort of space it is. I should preface this by saying that when I started building this structure did not exist, it was just sand. This is the area that we felt could be a good starting point. I really thought hard about the materials that would be kid friendly. Since, we don't have a materials' library where I could go and research, for example, how red oxide reacts on skin, I wanted to go with plant-based materials considering the environment here. This, of course, is a gamble. Once we laid down the foundation we had to work with what we had. We bent into the ground using a weaving cane, that is used to weave baskets, to roughly lay out what the composition might look like. This was a huge help for me and I quick-

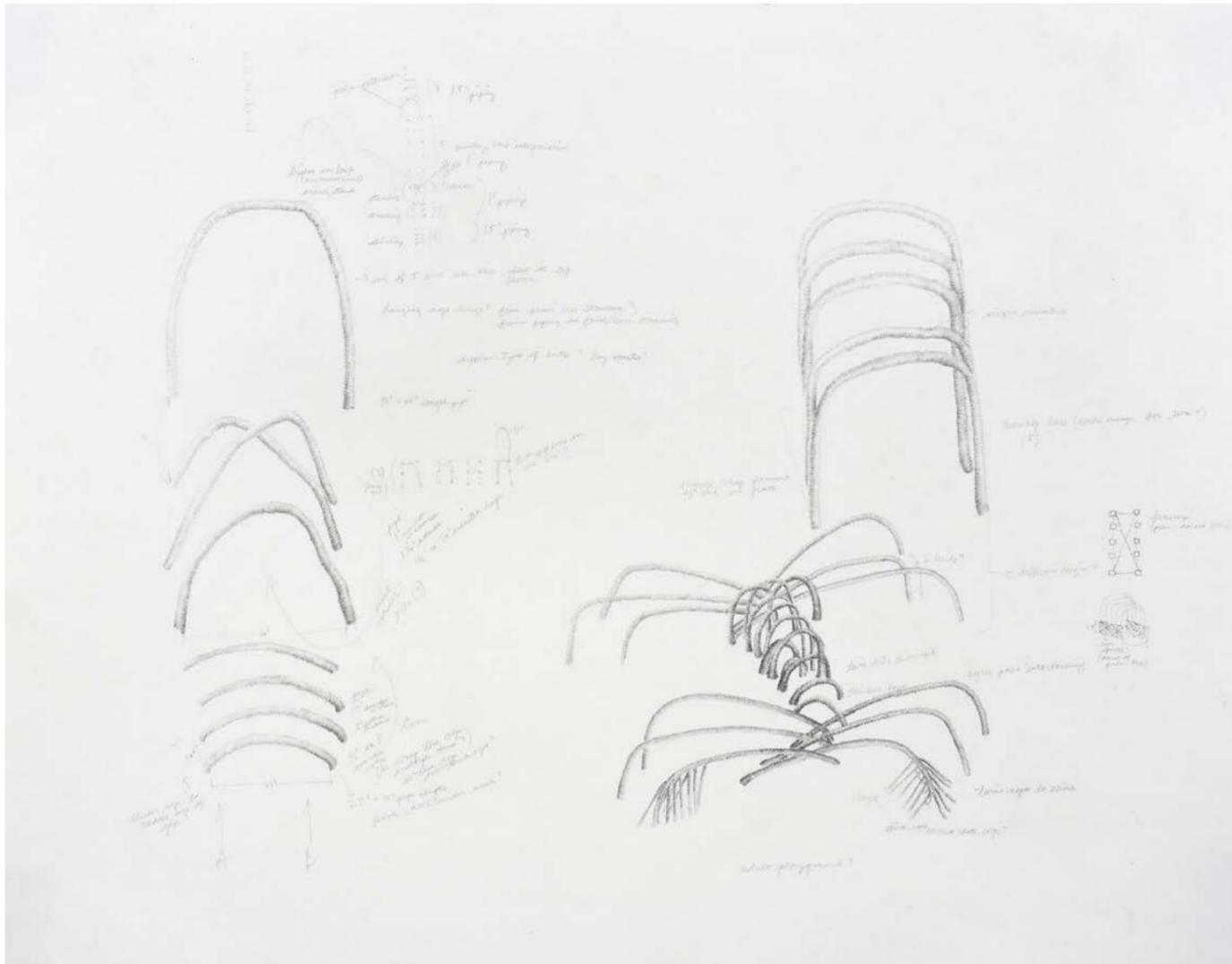
ly realised that the models I'd laid out before were way too large to fit into this area. Dealing with public space, especially here in Lagos, is not just dealing with what we see. It is dealing with what you don't see—the people that you don't see, and the people who are going to come and ask, *Oh, what's going on here? What's happening here?*

It's a playground. There are people smoking weed at the back and signs forbidding the smoking of weed in the front. So, there are all sorts of considerations that come into play. Working here has really expanded what engaging with public space means and can mean.

I wanted to confront this structure. It was a structure where people were once held prisoner; these were prison cells. Another artist has created an installation to emphasize this history. I have found

that I enjoy working in historically and politically charged places. I feel like, yes, I could have worked here but why not confront it instead? Why not try to have a conversation with lyrical gestures in the midst of a very rigid composition?

A lot of what we see here—all the sculptures and the persons depicted in this park, except my piece, are done by men. I mean, a man built this whole place, but just one woman was known to have been imprisoned here, Esther Johnson. There is a restaurant-cum-bar named after her, *Esther's Revenge*. She killed her British fiancé. She killed him because he took all of her money and married someone else in Britain. So it's interesting that we're talking about this in relation to the notion of freedom in Freedom Park. Nigeria's founding fathers were



You will find peace and play among palm trees, 2018, pencil on paper, 18 x 24 inches

Executed over the course of building Phase 1 of the first 'You will' playground project, this drawing recorded the architectural and aesthetic decisions hoped for during the process of building. It also

served as a place to keep notes and think through the impromptu decisions taken throughout the execution of this project.



You will find peace and play among palm trees and learn that ideas lack dimensions, 2018, neutral wire, sand, and repurposed styrofoam

Imagining designs that incorporate the lines of threading hairstyles that are popular in South-West Nigeria, these models are three-dimensional expressions of playgrounds and the artist's first sculpture that interprets

threaded hairstyling. For decades, such hairstyles have been assigned meanings that chronicle historical events, such as 'kobo and naira', a style celebrating the issuance of Nigerian currency in 1960. This pro-

ject has been influenced by Isamu Noguchi's work with playgrounds, especially his use of landscape and his creation of miniature models by appropriating ready made objects used in building construction.

Two or three questions Temitayo Ogunbiyi

Who has been an important source of inspiration and influence for the way you think, work and live?

Denyse Thomasos. Her advice to aspiring artists, to paraphrase: live the most interesting life possible.

Which work of art / literature / music / photography resonates with you?

Burial at Goree (1993) and *Pigeon-holed*. I can't remember the year of the second one, but it was a site-specific installation.

Which books did you always want to read, but never found a copy, the time, the entry point?

Epistrophe: Wall Paintings is the only book written about Denyse Thomasos! I received it a few weeks ago, but I am still too excited to read it.

imprisoned here, but what about the presence of the woman, the Nigerian woman—not only in terms of what we see but also the history of this space?

We were thinking about what we should do and how do we cordon things off? In the end, you know, part of being a kid and playing is getting hurt and learning what you're not supposed to do to get hurt. To paraphrase what I remember from Takaharu Tezuka's TEDx talk, once the space is a bit dangerous, children learn how to help each other. I think it's the potential to teach kids by putting them in these circumstances which really makes working with playgrounds interesting for me.

There are a lot of things that happened along the way that I didn't expect. First, the twine that we used came in three different thicknesses. When we began to work with the material, I quickly realised that if we wrapped even the thinnest twine available, the bars would be too thick for the kids to grip, especially the monkey bars. So we had to strip down the twine. While stripping the twine I realised that one third of the twine had a funny green thread in it, that I hated initially. *Why is it green? I don't want any colour.* But as we used it, it started speaking to the grass, the trees and everything around. So I tried to intersperse it in a way that was somewhat poetic. We also ended up using two different thicknesses of twine which I didn't anticipate either, but I realised that aesthetically it was doing something interesting for me and I imagine the kids might feel the difference between the two too.

The bars that were bent manually, I quickly realised that they were all slightly different from each other and when they were placed, I just closed my eyes and didn't say which ones should go where. I waited to see what would happen through the process and I was happy with the final result. The project started with me. Then I pulled my husband into it and finally we were twenty people. Among others, there were some who came to spray red oxide on the piping. Anthony probably dealt with twenty other people, but I didn't have to go and meet them all. It became such a big project that I realised that I couldn't control anything. It's like being a citizen of the world, you can't control everything. I think that really freed me up and encouraged me to try new things. There are two bars crossing over purely as an aesthetic gesture that we did while the bender was there. I just said, *Stop. Wait. Can we do this instead?* We had to go back and forth a few times but we got it in the end. There are a lot of things along the way that I had to flow with, let go and / or embrace to get to the finish line. At least we've got to the finish line for now.

The other thing I realised while building this was that adults probably need to play a little bit more because a lot of adults were asking me: can adults play here too? Thinking about what that means, creating spaces that ... What does play mean for an adult? Does that mean that I can just walk through it? Or does that mean I can actually work out on it? Can I run around it? That was also an interesting, unexpected development in working on this project.

The series of drawings that lead to this work, that are now on pause, are called *You will ...* Each work that comes out of this series begins with *You will ...* or some iteration of *You will*. This piece is, *You will find peace and play among palm trees*. I think it's interesting to think about creating these spaces that nurture (to paraphrase Stephanie Baptist's interpretation of my work) and that seek to disrupt or shift places.

Before we laid the grass, kids could play here. All sorts of things I didn't expect were happening: kids b-lined straight to the monkey bars; I'd come here to find balls all around ... This experience has opened my eyes to possibilities of play. As an artist, I think it's been really impactful, almost like a cleansing and rejuvenating experience that has opened my mind to other possibilities and avenues that I wouldn't have thought of had I not witnessed kids interacting with the sculpture, with the determination with which they interact with this space and other places as well.

Two or three questions Seloua Luste Boulbina

Who has been an important source of inspiration and influence for the way you think, work and live?

Diane Arbus is one of the most important photographers in my mind. Her photos float inside me like dream (or nightmare) images. They haunt me because they abolish social borders between “normality” and “abnormality”, public and privacy.

Which work art / literature / music / photography resonates with you?

The Twins (Diane Arbus). We are all and always the same, all and always different.

Which books did you always want to read, but never found a copy, the time, the entry point?

La soif, the first novel by Fatima Zohra Imalhayène, alias Assia Djebar, published in 1957. In 1956, during the Algerian war, she was as student at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, she was excluded from the school because she was striking for the Algerian independence and couldn't make her exams. Then, she wrote and became Assia Djebar, one of the greatest Algerian writers. I know that this novel has been recently published in Algeria. I have to go there to buy it.

Is there a work you would have wanted, but never managed to see properly—either in a good equipped cinema or as an original in a museum or attended the concert instead of listening to the record?

I would like to see Eija-Liisa Ahtila's *Where is where?* (2008, 55 min., Installation HD, 4 screens) and show it in Algiers. This work is inspired by Fanon. Fanon has met two young Algerian boys who had killed their friend, a young French.

Who would you love to meet and have a conversation with? Where and what about?

I would love to meet Awa Thiam, one of the first African feminists. I met her in the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, when I prepared my *agrégation de philosophie*. I was already interested in margins and I have immediately bought her book, *La Parole aux négresses*, published in France in 1978. I have never met her again. I couldn't find any information about her in Senegal. When I ask for her in Dakar, nobody knows (of) her. I would like to meet her in Senegal and have a conversation with her about ... her life!

Which woman artist / figure should be rediscovered and should get a retrospective or a solo show or a proper catalogue?

Valeska Gert (1892–1978) is one of the artists who should be rediscovered in a retrospective: *Tribute to Valeska Gert!* She was a pioneering performance artist. I would like to see *Monument 0* performed by Eszter Salamon, inspired by Valeska Gert, in such a retrospective.

Did you ever have a favourite heroine in fiction, reality, in history ... ?

My favourite heroine is Angela Davis. She is a philosopher and an activist as well. She was involved in a great unfinished struggle. The Black Panthers Party had, when I was young, an embassy in Algiers. It was supported by the government. Now Angela Davis is still as brilliant as she was. I admired her in the past, I admire her today.

Two or three questions Gladys Melina Kalichini

Who has been an important source of inspiration and influence for the way you think, work and live?

My practice draws from stories about women. It is largely influenced by the historical narrative of a Zambian woman known as Julia Chikamoneka. I am not exactly sure whether to categorise her as an artist in the traditional sense. By an artist in the traditional, perhaps even an artist in a contemporary rationality, I mean one who self-identifies as a maker, creator or author. However, I would argue that Chikamoneka could be perceived as a performer, particularly because the most iconic image of her (that I have come across) is that of her half-naked protest.

This woman was initially known as Julia Mulenga Nsofwa, she changed her last name to *Chikamoneka* that translates from iciBemba to English as, *it will be seen*. She changed her name because she was often arrested for being vocal in enflaming protests against the British colonial administration in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), and for hosting meetings for the United National Independence Party (UNIP) members that were threatened with imprisonment. She was also a member of UNIP's Women's Brigade, where she encouraged other women to participate in the independence activities. The most prominent memory of her is her half-naked protest with Emelia Saidi, along Cairo Road in Lusaka, down to the old airport, which led Iain Macleod, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to weep. Later, she states one of my personal favorite quotes by a Zambian woman:

We walked down Cairo road. We just wanted the white man, particularly Roy Welensky (the Premier of Central Africa) to know that African people were the only people who could build their own nation, not them to build the nation for us (Chikamoneka in Geisler 2004).

Which work of art / literature / music / photography resonates with you?

This is perhaps the easiest question for me to answer within the confines of this conversation, mainly for two reasons: the first is because I used the image of Chikamoneka that resonates with my work in the first question, the second reason is that there is not a lot of images of Chikamoneka in the archives in Zambia or online which makes the two images of the half-naked protest a default selection. In answering this question, I am actually confronted with the reality that there is an issue of visibility in relation to her narrative, which is rather ironic given that the name she chose implies a will to become visible.

Who would you love to meet and have a conversation with? Where and what about?

When I saw this question, I was really excited ... happy pills ... My answer was a simple, *a lot*. However, I have managed to contain my excitement and name just one artist, Marlene Dumas. I would like to have a conversation about her painting titled *The Widow* (2013). *The Widow*, is a painting made in reference to a photograph of Pauline Lumumba half-naked and mourning after the assassination of her husband, Patrice Lumumba.

Which woman artist / figure should be rediscovered and should get a retrospective or a solo show or a proper catalogue?

It would be interesting to see a show or catalogue that explores stories of women participating in national liberation struggles, particularly women that publically displayed their disapproval of colonial regimes; additionally, narratives of women who publicly perform socio-political narratives. Women like Julia Chikamoneka (Zambia), Alice Lenshina (Zambia), Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II (Zambia), Chibesa Kunda Kankasa (Zambia), Pauline Lumumba (Democratic Republic of Congo), Joice Teurai Ropa Mujuru (Zimbabwe), Josina Machel (Mozambique) and Queen Nzinga (Angola) among other women.

Two or three questions Lungiswa Gqunta

Who has been an important source of inspiration and influence for the way you think, work and live?

Well, this is a difficult one to answer as I've always grown up around a collective of women who play major roles in my life and the idea of singling one out as an influencer would be both unfair and seemingly impossible. The women who have helped me mould my work and myself are my mother and my aunts, iQhiya collective and all the black women I have encountered in spaces of healing and resistance.

Which work of art / literature / music / photography resonates with you?

I can only speak of where I am right now and where my research is focused and right now, the two songs that remind me of where my work needs to go are Miriam Makeba's *Amampondo* and Alice Coltrane's song *Turiya and Ramakrishna*.

Is there a work you would have wanted, but never managed to see properly—like in a good, equipped cinema, an original in a museum, or attend the concert instead of listening to the record?

I definitely would have loved to experience Nina Simone in concert. She is such an important historical figure not only in music but in histories of black resistance and liberation.

Who would you love to meet and have a conversation with? Where and what about?

Bell Hooks. I Would love to speak to her about critical thinking, black feminism and love. I've read her book, *All About Love* where she addresses all types of love and radical black love amongst women as vital.

Did you ever have a favorite heroine in fiction, in reality, in history ... ?

Mama Winnie Madikizela Mandela! She was the most underrated and unappreciated black female heroine of our time who fought with all her being so that her people could be liberated. Most don't understand that it is her relentless efforts and fire that got Nelson Mandela released because she never stopped doing the work on the ground and making sure the world knew what was going on. It is often the role that women played in the struggle for liberation, making sure that everything keeps going and that the resisting never tires.

Aluta Continua! Izwe Lethu!



Collectives live and take on many forms throughout our lives and we need to take some notes from these communities.

Everything I have been and will continue doing is in honour of black women. Having been raised by a community of them and finding myself in a collective of them (iQhiya), I continue to be in awe of the resilience we possess. Resilience in terms of love, strength, fight and self-preservation. As women we resist in many ways, from being on the front lines of liberation movements to simply existing in this world and continuing to build and love in our everyday. Often, we don't celebrate

ourselves and I'm simply here to do exactly that, celebrate and honour us because it is through the collective radical mothering that I am able to recognise my own greatness.

Lungiswa Gqunta

Our mere existence is a subversive act. Rethinking mothering from a radical point of view leads to considering survival as a form of self-love. (Loretta J. Ross)

Noluthando Gqunta, Kholiswa Shirley Gqunta, Nompumelelo Gqunta and Phumla Gqunta, New Brighton beach in Port Elizabeth, 1972

in London, and asked him, *How is it that for someone who was a Defence Minister, no one can even tell me if he is dead or alive?* And he said, *You know what, I think in the mid-1970s I saw him standing in a queue at a cinema in London.*

Well, that's the first clue: a queue at a cinema twenty years earlier. What do you do with that? Maybe he's in London. Basically, I decided on the very obvious, which is, I called the telephone directory every morning starting with the letter, A. Every morning, for five minutes, I'd arrive at the office and the first thing I would do:

Hello?

A for Aberdeen ... B, C, D ... It became such a ritual, they constantly told me, No. No. Nothing.

It became such a habit to do this that one day I was at P for Plymouth:

I'm looking for Mr. Shams Badran.

The woman on the other end said, *I have two numbers for Mr. Badran.*

I was so shocked that I didn't take down the number, so I had to call her back.

With the next step, I come to the question of methodology.

I found the man. Now, what do I do? Do I pick myself up and go to Plymouth and interview him? One of my mentors once told me that when you interview someone you need to know more about them than they can remember about themselves. So how do you actually do that?

I'm going to talk about two separate things: interviews and archives. You don't have to use either of them, but the process of finding them is what I call the process of construction.

I spent twenty years doing research and after some trial and error, I came up with a simple, effective solution—when I start a project, I open four different dossiers on my laptop: 1. Chronology, 2. Who is who, 3. Archive, and 4. Questions. I can spend a year just throwing stuff in there. Every date I find, I just put it in without any judgement; just a date and the *Who is who*, anybody whose name comes up in reference to whatever topic. Like in a jumble. And intentionally, I do not organise it.

So, let me start by interviews first. **It's basically about concentric circles.** Before you get to the actual person there are all sorts of people who are on the periphery: someone who might have one line to say about the person, someone who has an event to describe, someone who was his secretary and can tell you about his habits, his wife etc. As you come closer and closer to the person, you have established some kind of knowledge, not only of the content of what he is going to say, but the kind of person he is and how to approach her or him. Just to stick to Shams Badran, it took me two-three months. I didn't pick up the phone. I decided not to call him on the phone. Instead, I picked myself up and went to Plymouth and I found him in a hardware store selling lamps and nails. It was a bit of a shock. This was the former Minister of Defence of Egypt! I hadn't expected it to be a hardware store so I withdrew to collect myself.

Then I went up to him and said, *Mr. Badran, I'm Egyptian.* And he almost fainted.

He looked at me in total panic, *How did you find me?*

—In the telephone book.

And he said, *I told my wife to put us on the red list.*

Standing in front of him, I represented everything he had fled from. He didn't know my name, didn't know why I'd come but my existence represented everything he had fled from. Little

by little I had to tell him that I came in peace, that I spent a year trying to find him because I've only been told one side of the story and as someone from a different generation I need to hear his side of the story too. No judgement included. He calmed down. We had three or four sessions, but when it was time to do the filmed interview, he requested that I not conduct the interview at all: *It can't be an Egyptian, I'm going to freak out.*

The narrative he gave me in the sessions opened Pandora's box. Nothing conclusive. I never asked him the question, *What happened on the 5 June?* The question he obviously feared most. Here, chronology comes into play; it's the key to everything. I had constituted, day by day, what had happened right up to the 5 June. I picked on a specific moment in time where an important event had happened for him and he was really astonished: *Oh my god, you remember that?* Little by little he started talking, not because of me. Every person alive wants to tell his or her story. The issue is: To whom do you narrate it? How do you approach it and how do you actually get that story out in a way that the other person believes that it's going to be safe. Not be betrayed. Even the worst bits.

We don't know what happened. Having a first-hand eye witness telling you their part of the story, what happens is that you get a flavour, a texture but you also get a reminiscence of a certain period of time, and that is always the lowest common denominator. If there was a meeting, for example, where there were six people, you go to all six people; everyone is going to highlight their bit. But in the six narratives, there will be one bit that is repeated by them all. It's really about how to assess and from which angle you approach things.

I'm going to show you a short clip from my film *Cuba, an African Odyssey*. It's an interview with Larry Devlin who was the head of the CIA Station in the Congo when Lumumba was killed. I started meeting and interviewing him about other things, peripheral stories I was less interested in, just to establish a rapport. An interview is not a one-sided interaction. He needs to be able to ask me questions as much as I can ask him questions. It's not just about sound; it's as much about sight. It's not only about understanding the language or understanding the lingo; it's also about seeing the body language. There is a moment when the person will sort of sit back, look up a bit and you won't exist. They are not talking to you anymore but going back to remember their own life. These are precious moments because they are not playing to the camera anymore, they actually want to leave a record. I did not expect the head of the CIA station to tell me that the President of the United States ordered the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. And the second layer of that story is in the way he was telling it. It was so light-hearted, hahaha, tooth-paste etc. He died six months after the interview and still couldn't see where the problem lay. He honestly thought that this was all part of the Cold War politics and that Lumumba was just one of the pawns in a chess game. And given that, you understand the narrative from his point of view in a totally different manner.

Conducting an interview is like a dance, a bit like a game, but ethically there is a moment where the game ends and you have to decide if you are going to engage in this game or not. You're going to someone to ask them to hand over their memories to you. And they are telling you that they are only saying things based on how they want to be seen. You need to find a way to diffuse the posturing and for

that game to stop being an interview and instead become a conversation, where the other is telling you their story rather than answering your questions.

Let me go back to the notion of chronology.

Chronology is the most amazing weapon. It orders cause and effect in a non-negotiable manner. The order of events tells its own story. More importantly, it is the way through which questions you would have never thought of, all of a sudden glare at you. When I start a project, I need to decide where my in-point and out-point is. Because whatever it is I'm going to do, I can only tell one story. Narrative is always a single main narrative. You can spice it up with all sorts of additional sub-narratives, but the narrative itself is one. So, my in-point and out-point lay down the parameters for the chronology. To be able to decide on the moment of the entry point, I need to know what happened before. It's about figuring out where to start, and that's anything but a banal question.

When I was researching my film about South Africa, *Behind the Rainbow*, I was going to start with the Pass Laws Defiance Campaign, which began in 1952 and ultimately led to the Sharville Massacre in 1960. I was trying to figure out whether this thread would unravel in an uninterrupted manner leading to the point I needed to end the story at. Will this event prove to be the beginning of the narrative? I realised that this particular narrative ended in 1976 with the Soweto Riots. By then the dynamics had changed and the storyline had shifted. After the Pass Law Protests, another narrative emerged. I kept trying to figure out whether to start with Soweto, although the Soweto narrative ended in 1983. It's not just a date; when you unravel the thread, you'll find the knot. As long as there is a continuum, that becomes your parameter. So, throwing in dates without organising them seems chaotic, which it is; but then you have to sit down and organise it. While organising the dates in their chronology, things glare at you, unwillingly. For example, in the books that I was reading there were three different dates for the assassination of Patrice Lumumba: the 16, the 17 and the 19 January (on Google, 17 is now the accepted date). Why isn't there a single date? That, in itself, becomes a story. And then while organising things, something that you have always thought of as the cause, you realise, isn't. There was an event right before, that nobody ever mentions, that makes this really important thing not a cause, but a reaction. With everybody thinking that the second event is the cause, it shifts the perspective of history. Who are the good guys and who are the bad ones, could have been reversed if the first event wasn't omitted.

Here is an example to illustrate the value of manually organising the chronology of events: I was working on the oil boycott. As I was organising things, I realised that the same week that the oil boycott took place (after the 1973 war), the Americans were sending new troops to Vietnam. But hold on a minute, Americans got 98% of their oil from Saudi Arabia; so how were they sending new troops during an oil boycott? The Sending of the troops, in my chronology, was just below? (came right after) the oil boycott—you can see this glaring at you.

So I went and saw a man who was very involved with the boycott and asked him, *How come?*

He looked at me for a while and said, *I can't remember the answer.*

—What do you mean you can't remember the answer?

He said, *We had a very specific communiqué for how to answer that question. But nobody has ever asked, so I can't*

remember what I am supposed to answer. It's been thirty years. I said, *Yeah*.

—*Okay, you know what? It's been thirty years. I guess there is now a prescription. So, come!*

He took me into his library. He had an entire library with identical notebooks with the month written on the side: October, November, December, and so on. He said it was October 1973. He started reading. He was the link between Aramco, the oil company, and the Saudi Government. He then told me about the US Secretary of Defence who was James Schlesinger at the time, calling him at midnight, going down to the bunker and saying, *Go tell your king that if we're missing even one barrel of oil we're going to invade Saudi Arabia tomorrow*.

He was reading this from his notebook. He continued to tell me that he went to see the king, who he went with etc.

My only reaction was, *Were there any cameras?*

He said, *Yeah, yeah. I think there was this ... I can't remember the name ... yeah, Egyptian, like you ...* So, he went on.

Of course, you then go on a hunt for the images. One of the things he told me was an anecdote of King Faisal who had strictly no emotion on his face (which is very true); the only way you knew he was really irritated was that he'd start picking hair out of his Bisht (a woollen robe). A year later, I found the footage and all you see is King Faisal picking hair out of his Bisht!

Being able to get these moments that are not considered important in history, that are just anecdotes, but anecdotes that speak volumes, actually tell you about their position without the person speaking. He can draw whatever image he wants of himself, but the anecdote gives you another one.

In terms of archives.

Most of the time we talk about archives as if it's just about finding the image. It's not. **It's about a whole process, about a long-term relationship** with what it is you've gone out to find. If it's a long-term relationship, you need to get a feeling, not just for how it is organised, but also for the little hints that the archive gives you. If you're interested enough and if you believe enough in it, you're going to follow the trail. As you follow the trail, you realise that what you're doing is not just going after that one story that you intended to, but that there is a whole context around it; there is a whole story that we haven't been told.

Here, I'm going to tell you again about *Cuba, an African Odyssey*. I started the film wanting to tell the story of proxy wars. Everything I had read, everything that was available in writing was about how, during the Cold War, Africa was the playground for this confrontation and that we Africans had nothing to do with it, we were just there to be trampled upon. As a rule, when I start my research, I apply to declassify documents based on the Freedom of Information Act. Of course, the chronology helps because to declassify documents you need the date and the event. I send out a whole list of dates and events and we see what comes back; they don't always give you everything. One of the documents that came back was a four liner of a wiretap between Fidel Castro and Khrushchev. They were slagging each other like there's no tomorrow! That was in 1964. But if they're on bad terms, how could Cuba have been a proxy power in the Congo for the Russians?

The more I tried to ask the question, the more everyone said, *I don't know, I don't know*.

So, I went to Russia to meet the man who was the head of the Africa Bureau of the KGB.

He said, *I don't think we knew*.

—*What do you mean?*

He said, *I don't think we knew that the Cubans were in the Congo until much later*.

He wouldn't give me any further details. The only way I could think of to find out more was to find Che soldiers. All I knew about them was that there were 123 black men and their names were in Swahili. One, two, three, four, five, six ... 123! How do you even start looking for them?

In Havana, I went to a place called Arroyo Naranjo where many black Cubans lived. I knocked on doors asking, *Do you know anyone who went with Che to Congo?*

Door after door and eventually someone said, *Yeah, the drunk guy at the cafe spends his time telling stories about being with Che in Congo*.

The drunk man managed to give us one additional name and from there we would start unravelling the links to the survivors from Che's troops in the Congo. When you start talking to people and ask them, *Do you have pictures?* They all say, *Of course not! We were undercover; of course we have zero pictures*. Obviously, you believe them because they're not going to be undercover in the Congo and take pictures. Until one day one of them pulls one out and you realise that there is a picture for the most unpredictable of things. I believe there is an image for everything—starting from 1920, or even before. Everything. It just depends on where it is and who is going to say, *I am going to give you this*. Some of them, for a year, absolutely and categorically said, *No picture. No picture. No picture*. But, for some reason, they all kept their pictures under their mattress. The minute they headed for their bedroom and lifted up their mattress, they decided, *Okay, I'll give you these two pictures*. You spend the next year trying to get the rest of the pictures from them.

In the global South, the problem with the archive isn't only that they do not have footage or that the footage is in bad condition. The number one problem is: how do you enter? A prison is easier to get into than an archive. If you go in, you will ask them things that they don't know how to answer. So keeping people out is just easier.

To get back to chronology.

I finally got into the Cuban archives, both ICAIC and Trimagen, after thirteen months of pure harassment. Every morning I'd go to someone saying that I needed to go into the archives and send letters of request and things like that. Their response was always, *No, no, no. Not possible*. Eventually, seven to eight months later, they gave me access to the films, to the edited films instead of the rushes, which was what I was looking for. So that took another seven-eight months. When they finally gave their *Okay*, I got into a space that was full of film reels, with just a scotch-tape with only the date written on it. Zero information. If I didn't have a chronology, I'd be standing in the middle of cans not knowing where to start or what to do.

Accessing the archive is absolutely fundamental. Normally, there is a certain feasibility when you have production money, time, and many other things that you might not consider as important. In an archive you find iconic images that

both capture a moment as well as tell you an entire story. For example, the girl in Vietnam running from Napalm. In Africa, there are very few of these. We haven't yet allowed our archive, our moments in history, to speak for themselves. The trust and the belief that they will not be mistreated, isn't yet there. It is a very long process; you don't just go dip into the archive when you need it. You need to commit.

Let me just give you some background. I had been banned from Egypt previously. When I got back, I joined everyone with the flag on Tahrir Square during the 2011 uprising. I was a bit late for the event, but I caught the tail end of it. One thing that I didn't understand was, why were people at all the exits around Tahrir Square, in the midst of our demand for change, sitting with tables selling old pictures? They were pictures of a man in military uniform that I did not recognize. So, when I inquired, someone responded, *He is the first President of Egypt*. I didn't even know that there was a first President, before Nasser, in Egypt. How can someone, like me, who spends time looking into history and is from the same country, not know about this. I decided that I needed to know more about this man and why on earth was he completely erased from history. His name is Mohammed Naguib.

Naguib's popularity was causing a strain. Nasser, the strong-man of the revolution, felt sidelined. He was suspicious that Naguib, under the guise of inclusiveness, was cosyng up to the figures from the ancient regime and the Muslim Brotherhood leadership. The battle over whether Egypt would be ruled as a democracy or would remain a military regime erupted on the night of 25 February 1954. The dispute was confined within the army. Naguib's call for democracy was supported by the artillery corps. Nasser's loyalists agreed that if the army stepped aside, chaos would prevail. The confrontation between Naguib and Nasser almost split the army and threatened to plunge the country into civil war. (Egypt's Modern Pharaohs, Part 1: Nasser, 2015.)

The important thing is this: the man talking on camera is the head of the Military Intelligence. He talks about how they provoked and actually created the riots that eventually led to taking Naguib and putting him under house arrest for the rest of his life. He lived until he was 87. Even when Nasser died, they didn't release him. The man was alone under house arrest. It's a horrifying story that we didn't even know. There's one picture that I managed to get from the man who was guarding him under house arrest: he is in bed, almost 87 years old, with five dogs on the bed with him. It is most heart breaking. What did this man do to deserve this? Three different presidents erased him from history. Why? This story gives us insight into how we are still governed today; we are still under the same military rule. These archive stories are not about the past. They are about today.

While I was doing *Behind the Rainbow*, I was looking through the archive and I'd always find these pictures of unknown men next to Oliver Tambo; hundreds and hundreds of unknown men standing next to Oliver Tambo. What's the story? All I needed was a recurring theme; there were hundreds of tapes, but these snapshots kept coming my way. So what do you do? You sit down and pay attention to it although you need to be doing something else. It turned out that because there were a lot of collaborators during the period of struggle there was always the question of who could trust whom? There were different sections, different townships, and different articulations. When you're sending someone to join

the struggle in the underground, someone who is bringing arms or someone transporting a message, how does the person know that you're kosher? You can't say certain things for fear of bugs. So, the visiting card, when they sent people to the underground in South Africa, was a photo of that person standing next to Oliver Tambo. You would hand them this. It is an amazing story, but a whole different film. This archive threw a different narrative my way that I needed to pay attention to.

History is about archaeology. You have to unearth it to get it out. **No one, by blocking you, can stop you from telling that story**. To illustrate, *Cuba, an African Odyssey* is a Cold War story. Mr. Cold War is Henry Kissinger. Now, I had already interviewed Henry Kissinger twice. The struggle was that every time I contacted him, he wanted me to pay him, which I wasn't willing to do. The first time around, I explained to him why the story was really important and the second time, I sent him an email with fourteen reasons why it's in his advantage to give me that interview, he fell for it. The third time he said, *Hah, you think I'll fall for this a third time? No way! You pay me or nada*.

This was a real problem; I really needed the interview. Do I pay him or not?

I tried to convince him but he said, *I'm a lawyer and my time is money*.

I said, *But as a public servant, you are paid to fulfil the responsibility of telling me that story*.

He said, *But that's the trick you played last time*.

We had this exchange where he wasn't going to budge and I wasn't going to budge.

Eventually I decided against having him in the film, and sent him an email, *Dr. Kissinger, long after you are dead we are still going to tell the story of the Cold War*. So, I made the film and every time I show it, I think, damn, someone is going to ask me, why Henry Kissinger isn't in it. No one ever even realised he wasn't in it. I also made up my mind, why should he be in it. I have deleted him from history. He was given to us as the central figure, but when I looked at the film from a different perspective, he was no longer the central figure. Voilà.





The Seat Pocket Review of Books

Document and Eyewitness

And then, too, as with anything, the more you know, the more aware you are of what you don't know. I've always been a perfectionist, for good and ill, and I often run up against this fear of getting it wrong. I've also come to realize, alas fairly recently, that I am at times quite a sloppy storyteller. When working from memory, I fill in blanks, getting small details wrong but proffering them with great authority, true to the spirit of the story but sometimes far from the letter. This realization, for someone like me, is *horrifying*. So I have become increasingly interested lately in modes of writing that allow for failure or error; where the stakes are different, because the form has different parameters.

When Annett told me that the theme of the workshop was *Search and Research*, I immediately thought about a number of books I've been accumulating over the years, none of them relevant to my research as such and perhaps not relevant to yours, either, but all of them interesting on questions of form. Books that I hadn't read in years but that I loved, and often find myself recommending to people. I realized that they were all books that could be useful to me, in trying to imagine my way out of the writerly impasse I've been in for a while. And that they might be useful to you, now or at a later date. And here we are.

Document and Eyewitness

At some point, we were trying to come up with a title for this talk, which would somehow allude to the fairly disparate books I wanted to talk about. Eventually I remembered an old record by the British band Wire, who are definitely among my favorites ever. They'd started out as art students, and their approach to making music was very conceptual; at the beginning, they were like punk minimalists. They made three records in the studio between 1977 and 1979 and then a fourth, a concert recording, which was released in 1981, a year after they broke up. Now, a "live record" is already a slightly weird notion. Among other things, the phrase promises a kind of intimacy or immediacy superior to what can be achieved in a studio. It's the abiding fiction of presence, epitomized by Ike and Tina Turner's live record, *In Person*. Wire, perversely, promised an altogether more clinical experience. They called their live record *Document and Eyewitness*.

I've always loved that title. It has a kind of forensic poetry to it, having stripped away any glamour or mystique of the personal—of life. And it also evokes all the letters and photographs and sundry ephemera that we sift through as we make our researches, and the people whose testimony we seek out, because they or their parents or life-partner *were there*. Eyewitnesses—such a great word—whom we covet, whether or not they are reliable or whether we even know how to evaluate their reliability.

Wire has this song called "Ex Lion Tamer" where the vocal delivery is super-urgent and the lyrics are about alienation and modern life and I was always somewhat puzzled by the title—not that it took away from my enjoyment, maybe the opposite—but it was a mystery. The song said nothing of lions or circuses. Was it about an elderly former animal trainer, reduced to watching televised tales of manly adventure, subsisting on a diet of fish sticks and milk? Then one day I saw a book about Wire at the record store which I purchased immediately and I distinctly remember being in my college dorm and reading about that song and discovering that the title was a by-product of their practice as an art collective: one of them had written a set of lyrics about a lion tamer and someone else proceeded to edit them, trimming words to heighten effects, and by the end of that process there was no longer a lion tamer. So the title refers not to the person glued to his TV set but to the song itself. Which is a small thing, and maybe just an inside joke of theirs, but I remember exactly where I was when I read that bit, because it fucking blew my mind. I loved that song, I'd played it on the radio, and suddenly I was in on it. I would say that the meaning had become clear, but in fact nothing was really cleared up by this information; and yet it was unforgettable. And all this seems somehow very much emblematic of the huge and at the same time tiny pleasures that emerge when doing intense research—the literal thrill of discovery when a detail comes into focus and a mystery is revealed, when the obscure is

suddenly legible. Or when a new mystery starts glimmering at you, having been hidden in plain sight.

So today I will be presenting my own personal eyewitness account of four books that represent interesting and maybe exemplary ways to do things with research—alternatives to biography or the monograph or the historical essay. Modes of writing that in one way or another incorporate the search and the research themselves.

Edie: American Girl

The first book I want to talk about is *Edie: American Girl* (1982) by Jean Stein—a deceptively simple title. It's about Edie Sedgwick, a fashion model and actress, one of the iconic 1960s It Girls. *Edie* is an oral history of this person, or rather of all the worlds that collided to produce her and launch her into the world as a public figure in the mid-1960s—and then, a few years later, to destroy her. Edie comes from old WASPy New England money and a deeply dysfunctional family, from which she manages to escape. She gets to New York and falls in with Andy Warhol and stars in several of his films. It's a particularly ripe moment for Warhol, as he transitions from Pop Art painter to film director and even, ostensibly, music producer. (My own introduction to Warhol, almost for sure, was the first Velvet Underground album, with the iconic banana on the cover.) More to the point, he is in a sort of chrysalis phase, on the verge of becoming famous for being famous.

What's amazing is that at that moment of emergence—you read accounts of it in the book—Edie basically upstages him. It's 1965 and the crew from the Factory are in Philadelphia for Warhol's first-ever solo museum show and the opening is basically a riot in slow-motion. The staff has preemptively taken all the paintings down, for fear they'll be crushed; the crowd is huge and increasingly agitated, and Warhol and his entourage are trapped on this



Edie Sedgwick, photographed by Enzo Sellerio, *Vogue*, August 1965.

old staircase that leads nowhere. Someone describes Warhol as white—whiter, I guess—with genuine fear. The situation is fluid. And then Edie, who is dressed like a starlet from Mars, starts talking to the crowd, playing with them, and she just kind of superstars them into submission long enough for someone to cut a hole in the ceiling, through which they escape. Later on, people will cite this night as an early masterpiece of performance art. Andy will say, *We were the art exhibit. We were the art incarnate*. But that night, the art incarnate is Edie Sedgwick.

The book's credits are interesting. *Edie* is "by" Jean Stein and "edited with" George Plimpton. I feel like Jean Stein is one of my favourite writers, though I have almost never read anything in her own words. Stein helpfully distinguished between "oral history," which usually takes the form of a recording or a transcript, which scholars then consult for their own researches, and "oral narrative," in which those interviews are edited down, shaped, and deployed in the service of story. Stein began working on this book in 1972, not long after Edie's death, and over the next five years she interviewed over 250 people, some of them multiple times. *Edie* is an epic feat of research, and then an even more unbelievable feat of ... editing? The word really seems inadequate to the achievement—the generation of all this material, the selecting and culling of it, the sequencing, the staging of narrative and digression.

Part of what I love about this book is how it confounds my prejudices about myself. If there was one thing I was pretty sure I was not interested in, before *Edie*, it was the history and psychology of old WASP families in little New England towns. Like Stockbridge, Connecticut, where the book begins, with one member of the extended Sedgwick clan describing the family plot in the town cemetery, known as the "Sedgwick Pie," with its very specific spatial organization. The bodies are arranged in a circle centered on an obelisk, beneath which lies the remains of Judge Theodore Sedgwick, Edie's great-great-great grandfather, so that on Judgment Day, when the dead awaken, every family member will rise from the grave facing the judge, looking out onto a sea of Sedgwicks.

It's just so heavy, and so deep. This is a patriarchy that is built to last—all the way through to the other side of the resurrection. And this stray detail, which has nothing to do with anything I ever thought I cared about, is now something I'll never forget. There are a lot of moments like this in *Edie*. There's a whole sequence where aging members of an outlaw biker gang reminisce about what it was like to roll into a small town in a group of two hundred and just cut the telephone lines and rob the general store. (Edie spends time with a group called the Vikings shortly before her death.) Or this moment when some guy reflects on how difficult it was to have an orgasm in the late 1960s, because of the volume and variety of drugs everyone was on—this, while recollecting the time he and Edie went to see Jimi Hendrix perform at a Manhattan club, and Jim Morrison from the Doors was so wasted and so into it that he crawled up onstage and went down on Hendrix.

One of *Edie's* recurring characters is the poet and musician Patti Smith, who claims that Edie Sedgwick was the reason she moved to New York. Smith had gone to the Warhol opening in Philadelphia and was just obsessed with Edie, inspired by her. *You have to understand where I came from*, she says:

Living in South Jersey, you get connected with the pulse beat of what's going on through what you read in magazines Vogue magazine was my whole consciousness. I never saw people. I never went to a concert. It was all image.

Smith was seventeen and when she saw this *Vogue* magazine photo of Edie in black tights, standing in a ballet pose on this rhinoceros in front of her bed, a horse drawn on the wall behind her. You look at that image and you see that horse and you think, Yeah, Patti Smith will totally do stuff with that horse one day.

Edie is full of small but startling details—the judge in the cemetery, the horse on the wall—that ought to be trivial but instead sear

themselves into your imagination. I can picture myself drowning in the ocean of details that Stein had gathered over the course of her research. The book is like an object lesson in selecting details that are both profoundly trivial and incredibly emotionally communicative.

Patti Smith wrote a poem, which is reproduced in the book along with her narrative of how it came to her, the day she found out Edie died. Smith had been talking with a friend on the phone and was thinking about what Edie meant to her, and then wrote the poem—because, as she tells Stein, *I felt really bad. I feel a real responsibility to the images I get attached to.* Which still strikes me as an odd and lovely thing to say—this idea of being responsible not to the facts or the person but to an image. And there's maybe something in this, too, that gets at one of the potentially liberating things about oral history or oral narrative or whatever—the multiple voices combining to create a mosaic whose pieces don't—can't—quite line up. You can always see the cracks.

Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on His Life and Work

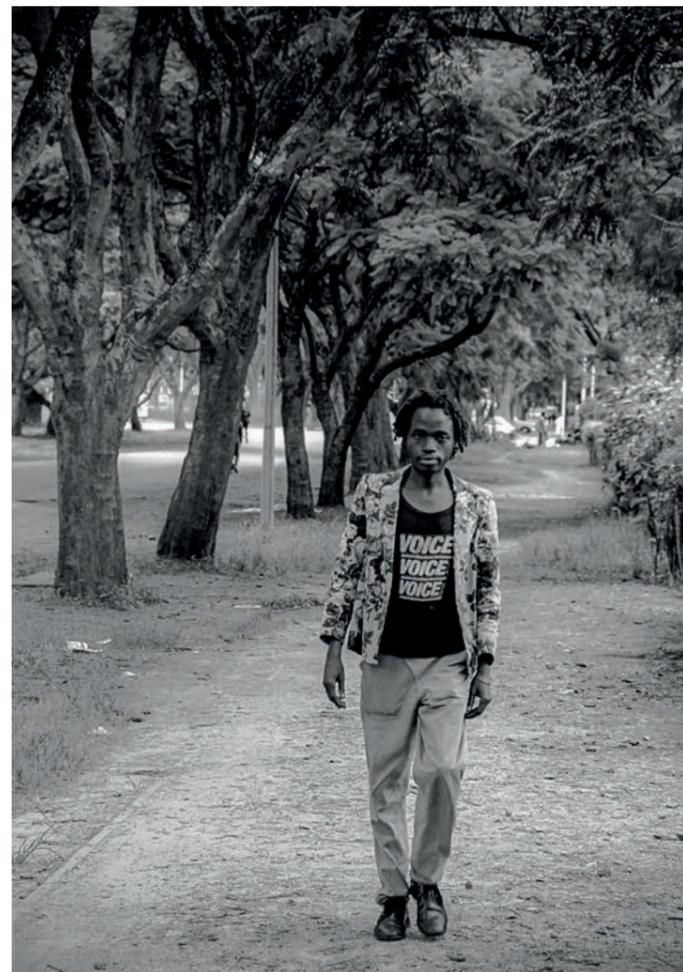
It was not intentional, actually, but each of the books I am reporting on today is about an icon who died young. *Dambudzo Marechera* was a Zimbabwean writer—for most of his life, a Rhodesian writer—who burst on the African literary scene in 1978 with a book called *The House of Hunger*. Marechera was brilliant and irascible and very often drunk, confrontational both physically and verbally, and nearly perpetually broke. He was a sort of trickster figure, one of the great hecklers of the age, prone to disrupt literary and political events with no regard for propriety—he even disrupted his own awards ceremony, tossing dishware at the chandeliers, when the *Guardian* gave him its fiction prize for his first book. (He was the first African ever to receive that award; he rebelled against the dubiousness of that distinction.) His iconoclasm was boundless—around the same time, he was thrown out of an event at the University of

London for heckling Robert Mugabe, who was at that time still very much the Pan-African hero, a living symbol of the struggle against Ian Smith's colonial regime. Marechera's writing had very little in common with the sorts of resistance literature that were being produced in Southern Africa at the time. He was, in many ways, out of sync.

Marechera is an incredibly compelling figure, sympathetic and also maddening, perhaps a bit mad, himself. I suspect it is easier to admire him at a distance. He had an eye for farce, and often engaged in what we would now call trolling—like the time he showed up to a party celebrating Zimbabwean independence dressed like an English lord on a fox hunt, *in a complete riding outfit with jodhpurs, black jacket, boots, and a bowler hat*, one attendee remembered. He was satirizing both the English and the African attendees, most of whom had come wearing “national dress.”

In the years after his death in 1998 from AIDS-related complications, Marechera's legacy was in the hands of *Flora Veit-Wild*, a German woman who'd met him during his last years, when he was living rough in Harare, at odds with the new postcolonial state. Veit-Wild became the executor of his estate—he was estranged from most friends, family, and publishers—and proceeded to organize the publication of several books of material posthumously, in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, and edited a collection of essays. Veit-Wild also produced an unconventional biography, the book I want to share with you, *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on His Life and Work* (1992, 2004), which is actually both a chronicle of his life and a quite capacious presentation of his archive itself. The book has two tables of contents, one that charts his life in its broad outlines—from his immiserated childhood to mission school to the University of Rhodesia in Salisbury, later Harare, where he was expelled, to New College, Oxford, where he was expelled again, to the squats of London, where he wrote the books that would be published during his lifetime and then back to Harare, where he died—and another that lists the 124 documents that Veit-Wild reproduced in whole or in part, which include official records of his interactions with various institutions, press clippings and interview appearances, unpublished writings, correspondence with publishers, and transcripts of oral histories that Veit-Wild recorded with people who interacted with him at various points. It sounds dry when I put it like this, but it's actually a strangely affecting way to learn about someone's life, alternating between the author's deliberate narrative and the diverse voices that emerge from the documents, each illuminating the other.

My favourite things, I think, are the several examples of the minor and strangely intimate literary genre of the “reader's report”—recommendations to the publisher about the quality and commercial prospects of the book, which can be candid in a way that published reviews rarely are. In Marechera's case, you see the mess of contradictory feelings and emotions his writing provoked in readers, whether African or European. Recommending against publishing the manuscript that will become *The House of Hunger*, the Kenyan editor Esther Kantai bemoans a style [...] *comparable to the modern art of circles and shades, etc., with a weird eye looking out of each circle. The unifying force of the story, like the eye in the painting, is fatalism and bitterness, adding that these stories are damaging to the morale of a world bent on liberation.* The Canadian detective novelist John Wyllie—one of Marechera's most ardent admirers—observes, of a draft of the novel *Black Sunlight*, that it *would be possible, I think, to cut out most of the blood, snot, and references to fucking and still have an interesting book. It would not, however, be a book 'of the age' as it is now or anything Marechera would want to put his name to.* The Kenyan literary critic Simon Gikandi vacillates on whether *Black Sunlight* belongs in Heinemann's prestigious African Writers Series. Gikandi admits that he finds it *extremely difficult to form a singular opinion about the book*, and conflictedly questions its *Africanity (how I hate using the word)* while noting that Marechera has created a *novel without any relatives in African creative writing.* A literary orphan. Although with the benefit of hindsight, we might call it a mutant—a hopeful monster, suggesting future evolutionary developments.



Dambudzo Marechera, Fife Avenue, Harare, photo by Ernst Schade, 18 February 1986. Courtesy Ernst Schade, www.ernstschade.com

Marechera is someone who in an almost unimaginable way lived and died for his writing, and he somehow comes to life in a particularly vivid way in the welter of unpublished but well-circulated writings, by and about him, that appear throughout Veit-Wild's book.

I will note that for me as I think for Kodwo and some number of others, *Black Sunlight* is Marechera's most interesting book. And I bring it up just because the figure of the “black sun” is so evocative of so many things, from the logo of the legendary Moroccan magazine *Souffles* to the sun-wheel, an occult symbol purportedly representing an esoteric tradition within German Nazism that is linked to alchemy and mysticism and—well, to the next book I want to talk about ...

(Note that I used to be a college radio DJ and I have structured this talk like a set of songs, which hopefully make sense or seem to make sense when heard alongside one another, and also themselves tell a kind of story.)

Children of the Sun

So now we come to the least likely or furthest afield of the books I want to share with you, a historical novel that is also one of the most formally interesting—indeed, elaborate—attempts to present the outcome of a many-years research.

Children of the Sun (2010) by *Max Schaefer* is a novel about *Nicky Crane*, a British skinhead who was infamous in the UK in the 1980s for his involvement in the neo-Nazi British Movement. He was literally a poster-boy for white British racism. Crane designed album covers and provided security for Screwdriver, the white power band who were also a big part of the far right's youth outreach. This period was marked by bloody battles between fascists and anti-fascists, and between fascists and regular people, in immigrant neighborhoods, at political marches, and at concerts organized by rival solidarity organizations like Rock Against Racism (on the left) and Rock Against Communism (on the right). Nicky Crane was terrifying, six-foot-two and solid—a vicious street-fighter, prone to violence, with an enormous intimidating head.

At the same time, unbeknownst to his comrades, Nicky Crane was gay. He was a regular at Heaven, the biggest gay club in London; he was known to frequent certain pubs; he even volunteered as a steward at a pride march. At some point he starred in amateur gay porn. He was living a particularly improbable double life. He finally came out in 1992, on a television program, in which he renounced his neo-Nazi past, and died of an AIDS-related illness two years later. As it happened, there had been rumors about Crane for years—the radical movements kept close tabs on each other, and an antifascist magazine called *Searchlight* was on to him. That he was able to fend off those rumors for so long was a testament to his impeccable credentials as a racist thug, and to the fear he inspired even among his own comrades.



Nicky Crane in: Jon Kelly BBC News Magazine, Nicky Crane: The secret double life of a gay neo-Nazi, 5 December 2013 Last updated at 06:51 GMT, <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/the-secret-double-life-of-a-gay-neo-nazi.289982/>.

As I was saying, fairly far afield. But then *Children of the Sun* is a book about being far afield—about the dangers and pleasures of getting lost in your research. Because for Schaefer, the intersections of Crane's double life ran off in endlessly diverting directions. While the story is fictional—more on its structure in a minute—it is full of historical personages, including one Savitri Devi, a French far-right propagandist and theorist whose many books promoted vegetarianism, deep ecology, and a mystical union of Hinduism and Hitlerism. Devi was on a speaking tour of the UK in 1982 when she died, at the age of 77. Her appearance at a British Movement meeting is one of the most harrowing scenes in a book that is no stranger to horror.

In interviews, Schaefer has described how he'd originally set out to write a short story about Nicky Crane, which after months and then years in the British Library, had evolved into a disjunctive novel. Chapters alternate between eras, Crane's heyday in the 1980s and (what was then) the present day, the 2000s, each with its own dop-pelgänger-ish protagonist. One is Tony, a closeted gay skinhead, through whom Schaefer can chart Crane's rise and fall through the universe of the radical right from the inside out (or vice versa). The other is James, a young filmmaker in the early 2000s—a stand-in for the author—who becomes consumed with Crane's story. His over-research leads him into precincts of contemporary fetish culture where sadomasochistic scenes are enacted by men dressed like Crane: shaved heads, shaved torsos, Doc Martens laced just so, jeans cuffed just so, suspenders (“braces” in British English) *worn up to exaggerate the width of the shoulders, worn down to emphasize the curve of the bum.*

Schaefer discussed his struggle not to put everything into the book. (The James character was originally a writer, and the book included several of his long articles on aspects of fascist eclectica.) As those bits were shorn away, he improvised a space-saving solution, making use of primary sources to bookend each chapter. So now—shades of the Marechera book—*Children of the Sun* is punctuated with facsimiles of screaming tabloid headlines (NAZI NICK IS A PANZI), album covers, gig reviews, recruitment flyers, classified ads in skinhead zines, and, finally, Crane's death certificate, of bronchopneumonia, in 1993.

There's an image at the heart of James's obsession, a quest that drives his narrative. It's an obscure detail on one of Crane's tattoos, barely visible in photos and videos, which James is convinced has occult significance, and which, if deciphered, might tie all the strands of his interests together. So then at the end of the book, he reaches out to a scary guy he's met on the internet—profile name arealnazi, *Nazi skinhead thug, fat, middle aged, tats, will abuse worthless scum*—who James believes must have known Crane back in the day. The man comes over to James parents' house while they're away on holiday, and he gets his answer—and the answer turns out to be obvious and banal, the key to nothing in particular. The aged skinhead, in the flesh, is less monstrous than pathetic.

END NOTE

On Una Marson and the archive as collaborator

and complexity of Jamaican language. The two of them had pushed hard for Jamaican to be considered a language. I went in search of her feminism, but found myself chasing after her nationalism.

So I found myself having a transformative encounter with the archive—the archive as collaborator, the archive as teacher. And one of its suggestions was to not yet write about Una Marson, but to begin writing about the things that interested her. Therefore I started thinking about what it might mean to go to the archive interested in a person or idea, but open and ready to move along the pathways suggested by the nature of the archive. To look closely at the archives and decide not to write about the person directly, but instead give my attention over to the things that she was invested in, and write with the spirit and sensibility that she possessed.

Caribbean Voices, a weekly BBC program begun in the early 1940s which provided a prominent, supportive forum for some of the most remarkable Caribbean writers in the world—Sam Selvon, Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Kamau Brathwaite, George Lamming, Gloria Escoffery—was produced by Marson, and was an extension (of sorts) of her advocacy of national literature in the 1930s. In 1935, she was Jamaica's representative at the International Alliance of Women's Suffrage and Equal Citizenship; the only black woman there, she challenged the white women in attendance to stand in solidarity with black women who were fighting against racial and gender discrimination. (As she wrote in a poem, titled "To the I.A.W. S. E. C.," later published in her collection, *Towards the Stars: For lands can only reach the greater good/When noble thoughts inspire true womanhood.*) She fought to have the Caribbean acknowledge and celebrate its rich cultural variety, and to liberate its cultural expressions from the confining, reductionistic caricatures imposed on it.

As I dug for the history of *Caribbean Voices*, I brought up fascinating details about Marson's fight for the dignity and recognition of Caribbean writers, some of whom would eventually give birth to the Caribbean Arts Movement in the UK, others who would go on to have a massive influence on many peoples' careers. And I discovered a woman who fought for so much for so long with far too little reward. I stumbled upon archives that begged to be examined on the terms by which they were assembled—or, put it differently, archives whose pathways deserved to be travelled as if I were walking alongside Marson...

Garnette Cadogan

to be continued

I have begun to think of the archive as [a] character. My earlier forays into archives did not go particularly well. I kept treating the information in them like raw material, rather than think of the collection of evidence as a character with its stories—including the story of how it was assembled; the source of your sources, the history of your histories, is a fascinating record that is instructive for how we ought think about and employ the archives. Especially if you're looking at the archives of a single person, what you are encountering is [often] a fashioning of the self. Indeed, preservation of the self is presentation of the self. As I came to see the archive as a character shaped to reveal its best self, my relationship to it changed. I no longer aspired to mastery. Rather, I went to the archives cognizant that they were full of mystery, and that exploring an archive might entail giving yourself over to its mysteries, listening to see what kind of stories it tells.

Consider Una Marson, who I've recently taken an interest in. When I began to think about archives as characters, it became clear that I didn't have to write a monograph on Una Marson, but an encounter with her archive and think of the archive as a personality. I found not only a pioneer of cultural programs for people of Caribbean heritage, but also discovered a self deeply invested in what it meant to speak in her native vernacular. Someone in constant conversation with Louise Bennett, the folk poet who affirmed the beauty and playfulness

but under her own name, providing her friend with this margin of distance or safety. Mallouk doesn't have to talk about it in public; it's not her responsibility. But it is her book; their book. The hybrid text with the doubled voice is a testament to a friendship; *Widow Basquiat* is their love story, too.

There are many unforgettable moments in the book, certain scenes and motifs that emerge as part of Mallouk and Basquiat's relationship, which you realize are literally depicted in Basquiat's canvases. Both of them knew too much about their bodies. Mallouk's father beat her. *Suzanne knows her skeleton*, Clement writes. *She knows where every bone is and which one hurts most. She knows the bruise from falling on ice is different from a bruise from a belt. She has studied the length of her tibia and the width of her femur. The pull of hair from the nape of the neck is different from the pull of hair from the forehead.* Whereas Jean-Michel was hit by a car while riding a bike when he was eight and his mother gave him a copy of *Gray's Anatomy*, which he memorized. They removed his spleen; he had a scar the length of his chest. And we see this as part of their conversation, see how their conversation plays out in his art.

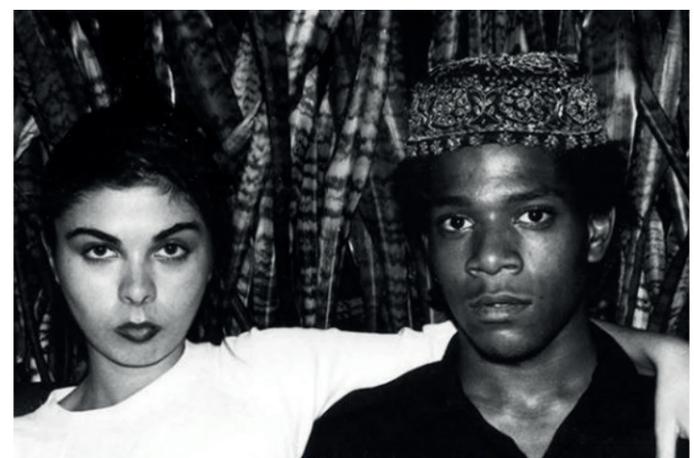
It's a short book, a hundred and forty pages. It's harrowing and funny and beautiful and depressing. It manages to be extremely poetic and extremely informative at the same time:

One of the hardest things to describe about Jean is his elegance. There was something so beautiful about the way he moved and spoke. This partly had to do with his drug use, which kept him very slim and childlike. But it was innate also. I was also very slim and waiflike. We looked twelve years old.

What most people don't understand about Jean-Michel was that his crazy behavior had nothing to do with being an enfant terrible. Everything he did was an attack on racism and I loved him for this.

Widow Basquiat isn't a model, exactly—not for anything that I am presently working on, at least, or that I can currently imagine. And yet it illustrates the power of sideways approaches. I don't think Jennifer Clement set out to write one of the most exquisite books on New York in the 1980s—not directly at least. But by telling the story of this seemingly marginal or unknown figure who happened to be a person she knew and loved, that is what she did.

There are many people I've met and grown close to over my years of research, and it is interesting to think about this book as a writing that is also a reading of the affective reservoir of a friendship. This is somehow related to what Garnette was saying about archives having personalities, being characters; the converse of which, maybe, is that our interactions with people might themselves constitute a kind of archive. Anyway, I think we're late for lunch?



Suzanne Mallouk and Jean-Michel Basquiat, photo (detail) Courtesy of Shearsman Books.



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"VOICE"—the monthly radio magazine programme in the Eastern Service of the B.B.C.
(Left to right, sitting) Venu Chitale, J. M. Tambimuttu, T. S. Eliot, Una Marson, Mulk Raj Anand, C. Pemberton, Narayana Menon; (standing) George Orwell, Nancy Barratt, William Empson.

There's something that I love about the anticlimax of James's quest, again as a sort of analogue to that stage in your research where everything looms with world-historical significance and then suddenly what you believed to be the holy grail or whatever appears and it's not what you thought. So much of this is lonely work, in which you assemble this mass of material, worry at it, forge connections both real and imagined, producing outlines and mind-maps and multiple chronologies ... and then try to figure out what from all that is worth sharing with others, and what form with which to do it. *Children of the Sun* captures the range of emotional states—fascination, amusement, wonder; paranoia, disappointment, anger—that the search and the research can induce.

I should add, in case it is not clear from the foregoing, that Schaefer's novel belongs to a lineage of transgressive writing that would include Jean Genet and Dennis Cooper, which might be said to dwell in a place of abjection. Above-average abjection, in that it tries to depict this particularly noxious world and its inhabitants intimately though not sympathetically. No doubt I was initially disposed toward the book because I am, like Schaefer, fascinated by subcultures, especially musical ones; by secret societies and avant-garde art and radical politics and the occult. The fulsome praise on the cover from the Marxist fantasy writer China Mieville didn't hurt. But *Children of the Sun* has stayed with me as an allegory of obsessive interest, and as an ingeniously schizoanalytic solution to that all-too-familiar problem.

Widow Basquiat: A Love Story

So we had the collagist group portraiture of oral narrative, we had biography as a sort of finding aid to an anthology of primary sources, and we had a historical novel about obsessive research. And now, finally, we come to *Widow Basquiat: A Love Story* (2000). The widow in question is Suzanne Mallouk, a half-Palestinian Canadian who came to New York in 1980 to be an artist, desperate to escape an abusive home and inspired by poetry and by seeing Iggy Pop live in concert. Mallouk became one of Jean-Michel Basquiat's first girlfriends; they were about the same age. The poet and actor Rene Ricard—Eddie Sedgwick's co-star in Warhol's film *Kitchen*—called Mallouk "the widow Basquiat" long before the artist's death, evoking the tempestuousness of their relationship.

Widow Basquiat is possibly the most successful hybrid text I have ever encountered. It is hybrid in presentation and authorship. The book is credited to Jennifer Clement, a poet and novelist who also makes an appearance as a character in the book. But each chapter of the book is presented in two voices: a third-person author-narrator who relates Mallouk's life in a poetic fashion, in roman type; and then another voice, which cuts in in italics and tells the same story—or a slightly different one—in the first person. Each chapter is short, with titles that are also, in many cases, the titles of Basquiat paintings. This contrapuntal structure, and the intimacy of both voices, makes it difficult to categorize. *Widow Basquiat* has been called a *memoir*, a *novel*, an *art biography*; many remember it as having been written by Mallouk herself. I like that its genre is so ambiguous. But I also think that its genre is actually right there in the subtitle—it's a love story, and like all love stories, some amalgam of fiction and nonfiction.

Anyway, my sense of how *Widow Basquiat* came to be—and I will confess that for all that I am in love with this book, I have read very little about it, so this is just a surmise based on certain facts and repeated readings of the text itself—is that everyone always thought that Mallouk should tell her story, because it was beautiful and tragic and because it captured so many things about that era. But that she preferred not to, not least because of all the work it had taken her to move on after Basquiat's death. They'd all been addicts, living this particular vision of Bohemian New York, awash in (always) drugs and (sometimes) money, struggling not to go under. Mallouk moved away for a while. She went to medical school, became a psychiatrist; among her clientele are other refugees from that time and place, people marked with similar traumas and scars, who still wanted her to tell her story. Finally, one of them is like: *I'll do it*. Jennifer Clements doesn't ghostwrite the book or present it as an as-told-to; she tells her friend's story in both of their voices



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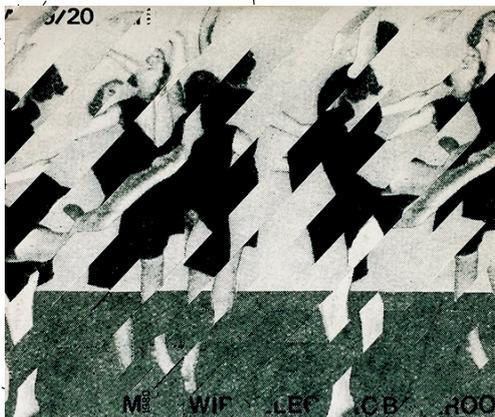
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