

WOMEN AND MIGRATION(S) II



EDITED BY KALIA BROOKS, CHERYL
FINLEY, ELLYN TOSCANO AND
DEBORAH WILLIS

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*Edited by Kalia Brooks, Cheryl Finley,
Ellyn Toscano and Deborah Willis*



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Contributor Biographies

Sama Alshaibi (b. 1973, Iraq) situates her own body as a site of performance in consideration of the gendered and social impacts of war, migration and environmental demise. Alshaibi has participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions including the 55th Venice Biennale, State of the Art 2020 (Crystal Bridges Museum of Contemporary Art, Arkansas), the 2019 Cairo International Biennale, the 2017 Honolulu Biennial, MoMA (NY), the American University Museum, Washington, D.C., the MARTa Herford Museum (Germany), the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art (NY), the Arab American National Museum (Michigan), the Institut Du Monde Arabe (Paris), and the Ayyam Gallery (UK/UAE). Alshaibi has been the recipient of a 2019 Artpace San Antonio residency, an Arab Fund for Arts & Culture Visual Arts Grant, and a Fulbright Scholar Fellowship to Palestine. Her monograph, *Sand Rushes In* (New York: Aperture, 2015), features her Silsila series. Alshaibi is Professor of Photography, Video and Imaging at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Esther Armah is Executive Director at The Armah Institute of Emotional Justice, a global institute implementing the visionary framework for racial healing by providing emotional education in the context of race, gender, and culture. The AIEJ does this via projects, training, thought—leadership. Armah leads a global team in Ghana, Chicago and London. She is an international award-winning journalist, a writer, a playwright and an international speaker who has lived and worked in New York, London, Washington, D.C., Accra, Lagos, Nairobi, and Johannesburg.

Nohora Arrieta is a Ph.D candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Georgetown University, where she specializes in Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies. Her dissertation, *Bittersweet Poetics: Aesthetics and Politics of the Sugar Plantation in Brazil and the Caribbean (1990-2018)*, discusses works of visual art about the sugar

plantation produced by Afro-descendant artists in Brazil and the Caribbean.

Nohora is co-translating into English the poetry of Afro-Colombian poets Romulo Bustos and Pedro Blas. She is also working on two writing projects: *How to Look at Silence* examines family archives, memorabilia and contemporary works of art to discuss the migrations of Black and Indigenous women in the continental Caribbean (Venezuela-Colombia). *I have been here for a while* is a collection of narrative profiles of Black artists from the Spanish Caribbean, Colombia and Brazil. Her research and writing have been funded by ACLS/Mellon and Fulbright

Firelei Báez (b. 1981, Dominican Republic) received an MFA from Hunter College, a BFA from the Cooper Union's School of Art, and studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. In 2020, Báez was shortlisted for Artes Mundi 9, and will be the subject of a solo presentation at the ICA Watershed (Boston, MA) this summer. In 2019, she had solo exhibitions at the Mennello Museum of Art (Orlando, FL), the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam, the Netherlands), and the Modern Window at the Museum of Modern Art (New York). Her major 2015 solo exhibition *Bloodlines* was organized by the Pérez Art Museum Miami and traveled to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh.

Gabriella N. Báez is a queer documentary photographer based in San Juan, Puerto Rico covering stories across the Caribbean region. Her personal projects focus on intimate topics about family, migration and self-portraiture. Gabriella as a young practitioner has already been published in Reuters, Bloomberg, *The New York Times*, CNN, and *The Nation*. In 2020 she became a Magnum Photography and Social Justice fellow, an IWMF Howard G. Buffett Fund grantee, and a Women Photograph + Nikon grantee. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram as @gabriellanbaez.

Kalia Brooks, Ph.D, is the Director of Programs and Exhibitions at NXTHVN. She is responsible for the design and delivery of curatorial exhibitions, public programs, artist projects, community engagement initiatives and the learning environment for the fellowship and apprenticeship programs. Her academic research covers art from the nineteenth century to the present, with an emphasis on emergent

technologies and African American, trans-Atlantic and diasporic cultures of the Americas. Brooks holds a Ph.D in Aesthetics and Art Theory from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA). She is co-editor of *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History* (Open Book Publishers: Cambridge, 2019). She has served as a consulting curator with the City of New York through the Department of Cultural Affairs and is currently an ex-officio trustee on the Board of the Museum of the City of New York.

Jennifer Clement is the President of PEN International and the first woman to be elected since the organization was founded in 1921. Clement grew up in Mexico City, Mexico. She studied English Literature and Anthropology at New York University and also studied French Literature in Paris, France. She has an MFA from the University of Southern Maine. From 2009 to 2012, Clement was president of PEN Mexico and her work focused on the disappearance and killing of journalists. Human rights issues have motivated her writing. In 2014 she was awarded the Sara Curry Humanitarian Award for her novel *Prayers for the Stolen* that involved over ten years of research on the stealing of young girls in Mexico.

Patricia Cronin is Professor of Art at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York. She is an interdisciplinary conceptual artist whose work examines issues of gender, sexuality and social justice through painting and monumental sculpture. In 2002, Cronin created *Memorial To A Marriage*, the first and only Marriage Equality Monument in the world. Cronin's work has been exhibited widely in the US and internationally, including a solo exhibition *Shrine For Girls*, an Official Solo Collateral Exhibition of the 56th Venice Biennale (Venice, Italy, 2015), and has travelled to The FLAG Art Foundation (New York, 2016) and the LAB Gallery (Dublin, Ireland, 2017). Additional solo exhibitions were presented at the Capitoline Museum's Centrale Montemartini Museum (Rome, Italy); the Newcomb Art Museum (New Orleans); the Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn, NY); and the Tampa Museum of Art (Tampa, FL). Cronin received the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome and a Civitella Ranieri Fellowship, among other awards. Major artworks by Cronin are included in the collections of the National Gallery of Art and Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, both in Washington, D.C.; the Pérez Art Museum Miami; the Tampa Museum

of Art; Woodlawn Cemetery (Bronx); and Kelvingrove Art Galleries and Museum (Glasgow, Scotland).

Arlene Dávila is Professor of Anthropology and American Studies and founding director of The Latinx Project at New York University. She is the author of many books on the topic of latinx cultural politics.

Von Diaz is a writer, documentary producer, and author of *Coconuts & Collards: Recipes and Stories from Puerto Rico to the Deep South*. Born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico and raised in Atlanta, GA, she explores food, culture, and identity. She is a self-taught cook who explores Puerto Rican food, culture, and identity through memoir and multimedia. She teaches Food Studies at UNC Chapel Hill, and works as a writer, documentarian, and audio storyteller. Her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, NPR, *Food & Wine Magazine*, *Bon Appétit*, *Eater*, and *Epicurious*. She has also been a reporter for NPR, StoryCorps, The Splendid Table, American Public Media, WNYC, PRI's *The World*, The Southern Foodways Alliance, Colorlines, and Feet in 2 Worlds. In spring 2020 she was the Lehman Brady Joint Visiting Scholar at The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and UNC Chapel Hill. Von holds a dual MA in Journalism and Latin American and Caribbean Studies from New York University, and a BA in Women's Studies from Agnes Scott College.

Brandy Dyess is a multi-disciplinary artist and writer. Her art explores the contrasting nature of the human condition, always keeping an eye out for the joyful and the absurd. She is interested in themes of multiracial identity, representation and place, individualism, isolation, performance, and groupthink. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Northwestern University where her research focused on Latin American and Women's History. She lives in the Mojave Desert.

Bryn Evans (she/her) imagines, looks, and moves in Decatur, Georgia. Her breathing comes by, through, and with her kin's. Bryn situates her scholarship and creative work within Black feminist theory and visual culture studies. Her forthcoming senior thesis engages abolitionist praxis and its relationship to Southern geographies, the built environment, memory, and poetics of Black vernacular. Bryn's writing and creative projects have appeared in *The Columbia Review*, *Quarto Magazine*, and *Hoot Magazine*. These appearances, fleeting and archived,

occasionally transpire online when she is in a generous mood. Transpire as emergence, but also as breath, if Bryn were a color, she would be a scattered sky. Address your next poem to her. Make it taste like bread pudding. Twitter/IG @brynevans_.

Ana Teresa Fernández, born in Tampico, México in 1981, received her MFA from The San Francisco Art Institute. Fernández has exhibited at institutions including the Arizona State University Art Museum (Phoenix, AZ); the Denver Art Museum (CO); the Grunwald Gallery at Indiana University (Bloomington, IN); the Nevada Museum of Art (Reno, NV); the Palm Springs Art Museum (CA); the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (AZ); and the Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro, NC), among others. Her work has been collected by institutions including the Denver Art Museum, the Kadist Foundation, San Francisco and Paris, the Nevada Museum of Art, and the Weatherspoon Art Museum, among others.

An award-winning author, scholar and teacher, **Cheryl Finley** is the Director of the innovative Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective, strategically poised to prepare the next generation of Black museum and art industry leaders.

Terri Geis is an art historian, independent curator, and museum educator. She is a specialist on women artists affiliated with Surrealism and the intersections between Surrealism and the Americas. Past projects and publications include “In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States” (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with Ilene Susan Fort and Tere Arcq) and “‘My Goddesses and My Monsters’: Maria Martins and Surrealism in the 1940s”, in *Debates on Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto* (Getty Research Institute). Geis’s work has also investigated Surrealism’s connections with Afro-Caribbean art and culture, with essays including “Great Impulses and New Paths: VVV, Surrealism, and the Black Atlantic” (*Revue Miranda*). Other recent publications include an essay for the retrospective exhibition *Leonora Carrington: Magical Tales* (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City), and multiple essays for *The International Encyclopedia of Surrealism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic). With Manthia Diawara, Geis has been awarded the 2021

senior fellowship through the Dedalus Foundation for a book project on the surrealist Ted Joans.

Dr. Bettina Gockel holds the Chair for History of Fine Arts at the Institute of Art History at the University of Zurich. She has been a Fellow at the Max-Planck-Institute for the History of Science in Berlin (Germany), and a Member at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton (USA). Her research interests are the history of art and photography, with a special focus on the history of perception, psychology, and the history of science.

Hande Gurses, originally from Istanbul, is a displaced scholar of comparative literature. She holds a Ph.D in Literary Studies from University College London. Her primary research interests include contemporary world literature, cosmopolitanism, ecocriticism, and critical animal studies. She is also interested in inclusive pedagogies and contemplative practices in higher education. She has taught courses on the international short story, migration, dystopian literatures, and ecocriticism. Most recently she has co-edited a volume on ecocritical approaches to contemporary Turkish literature titled *Animals, Plants, and Landscapes: An Ecology of Turkish Literature and Film* (Routledge Press, 2019). Currently she is working on a book manuscript titled *Reframing Bridges and Borders in the Fictions of Orhan Pamuk*, under contract with Lexington Books. She has held positions at UMass Amherst, the University of Toronto, and Ryerson University. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of World Languages and Literatures at Simon Fraser University.

Allison Janae Hamilton (b. 1984 in Kentucky, raised in Florida) has exhibited widely across the US and abroad. Her work has been the subject of institutional solo exhibitions at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) and Atlanta Contemporary. Select recent group exhibitions include *there is this We*, Sculpture Milwaukee; *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (traveling); *Shifting Horizons*, Nevada Museum of Art; *Enunciated Life*, California African Art Museum; *More, More, More*, TANK Shanghai; and *Indicators: Artists on Climate Change*, Storm King Art Center. Work by the artist is held in public collections

such as the Hood Museum of Art, the Menil Collection, the Nasher Museum of Art, the Nevada Museum of Art, and the Speed Museum of Art, among others. Hamilton has participated in a range of fellowships and residencies, including at the Whitney Independent Study Program, New York, NY; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; and Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain. She is the recipient of the Creative Capital Award and the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant. Hamilton holds a Ph.D in American Studies from New York University and an MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University. She lives and works in New York.

Arielsela Holdbrook-Smith is a Ghanaian-American second-year graduate student in the NYU School of Global Public Health working towards a Master in Public Health, with a concentration in Community Health Science and Practice. Prior to NYU, she worked as a Research Assistant on domestic and international projects primarily geared toward linkage to resources for community organizations and gender-based violence intervention. A graduate from the University of California, San Diego Department of Global Health, Arielsela has focused her work on addressing social inequities, tackling structural violence, and dissolving the disconnect between academia and marginalized communities. Arielsela's broader interests include: storytelling and narrative medicine; social disparities impacting Afrodiasporic communities; Black feminist and queer theory; migrant health; community engagement and culturally-responsive practice; implementation science and quality improvement of social services; mental health, collective trauma, and community healing; and the incorporation of arts and media into public health practice.

As a media artist, photographer and scholar, **Roshini Kempadoo** re-imagines everyday experiences drawn from historical legacies and memories by Caribbean persons and the Caribbean diaspora. Central to her work as photographs, fictional writings, and sounds as interactive and online artworks are the urgent issues of extraction, sustainability and ecological activism associated with work by black, indigenous and women of color. Contributions include: *Life Between Islands – Caribbean-British Art 1950s – Now*, Tate Britain, London (2022); *Fragments of Epic Memory*, Art Gallery Ontario (AGO), Toronto (2021); *Thirteen*

Ways of Looking, Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry (2020); *Like Gold Dust*, Artpace International Artist-in-Residence (IAIR), San Antonio (2019); *Itinerant Imaginaries* (2021), a seminar series by Creating Interference, a network investigating artworks as responses to memories and histories; “Imagining Activism, Black, Gold, Dust” in *Kunstlicht* 42/3-4, 2021; and the monograph *Creole in the Archive: Imagery, Presence and Location of the Caribbean Figure* (2016).

Sarah K. Khan, multimedia maker/scholar, writes and creates content (paper, books, prints, photography, films) about food, culture, women, and migrants. Her research has taken her to live with Bedouins in the Middle East, document the plight of Indian women farmers, traverse the world of Queens NY, and film women cooks and farmers speaking about their foods and ways in Fez, Morocco. Khan has degrees in Middle Eastern history (BA), public health and nutrition (MPH, MS), and traditional ecological knowledge systems/plant sciences (Ph.D). A two-time Fulbright scholar, Khan is the recipient of multiple residencies, grants, and fellowships. She continues to expand her projects on US and South Asian women farmers, Migrant Kitchens/The FoodCraftProject, The Cookbook of Gestures, and the Ni’matnāma—The Book of Delights. @sarahkkhan | www.sarahkkhan.com

Leslie King-Hammond is Professor Emerita, Founding Director, Center for Race and Culture, Dean of Graduate Studies, Project Director, Ford Phillip Morris Artist of Color, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA); Senior Fellow, Robert W. Deutsch Foundation; Director, Motor House Gallery; Board of Directors, Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture; Board of Directors, Baltimore Arts Realty Corporation; Girls of Baltimore Arts Collaborative, Past President, College Art Association; Board of Directors, Creative Alliance at the Patterson; former Board of Trustees, Baltimore Museum of Art; Juror, NAACP-ACT-SO Initiative; exhibiting artist of “Migrations”, Decker Gallery, MICA; “Artist/Scholar,” Smithsonian, Arts and Industry; as well as group exhibits at Museum Of Biblical Art, New York Historical Society, Galerie Myrtis, James E. Lewis Museum, Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, Howard University Gallery of Art; curated numerous exhibitions at MICA and the Motor House Galleries; *Ashe’ to Amen—African Americans and Biblical Imagery*, Museum of Biblical Art; “Black Printmakers and the

WPA", Lehman College Gallery of Art; co-curated with Lowery Sims, "Art as a Verb", MICA, MetLife Gallery, Studio Museum in Harlem; "Global Africa Project", Museum of Art and Design; co-curated with Tritobia Benjamin, "Three Generations of African American Women Sculptors", Philadelphia Museum of African American History and Culture.

Michelle Lanier is an AfroCarolina folklorist, museum professional, filmmaker and educator, passionate about memory and land. Raised in South Carolina, with deep roots in North Carolina, Michelle's ancestral geographies guide her work on Blackness, diaspora, and the American South. A faculty member at the Center for Documentary Studies (Duke University), Michelle has lectured at Spelman, Harvard, UCLA, and in Beijing and Cape Town. As a "Documentary Doula", Michelle supports the birth of films, most notably the award-winning "Mossville", a story of resistance to environmental racism. "Mossville" has been translated into five languages, screened on six continents, and chosen by the United Nations to raise awareness of climate justice and people of African descent. In 2008, Michelle advocated for legislation creating the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission, which she led as founding executive director. In 2018, Michelle became the first African American director of North Carolina's twenty-five state-owned historic sites.

Melvina Lathan has pursued a dual career as a fiber artist and as a professional boxing judge. In 1991, she became the first African American female licensed as a professional boxing judge in the state of New York where she currently serves as the Commissioner of the New York State Athletic Commission. She has judged for all of the major world and international sanctioning organizations and received many boxing-related honors. Lathan was invited to join a consulting team which contributed to the earliest stages of planning and development for the Muhammad Ali Center, now located in Louisville, Kentucky. When not at ringside, Melvina is an exhibiting artist and photographer. As a mixed media artist, Lathan has worked with fiber art for over thirty-five years. Through fiber art she uses a whimsical approach to create and explore the images of America's multiculturalism by interjecting pattern and dimension, often incorporating natural and semi-precious stones, hand carvings and other natural raw materials and objects. She has

exhibited her work in galleries and museums throughout the world. She also constructs sculptural and glass assemblages. Bold in color, texture and symmetry, her sculptures offer a daring contemporary contrast to the “old world” stained glass. As a costume designer she has created costumes for New York Off-Broadway Theater, and has served as design consultant for numerous MTV music video productions. Melvina is a graduate of the Franklin College of Science and Arts.

Nashormeh N.R. Lindo, artist, educator, consultant, curator and arts activist, was born in Philadelphia, PA. She earned a BA in Art from the Pennsylvania State University and a MS in Museum Leadership from Bank Street College of Education. Her work as a printmaker, photographer, and painter has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. She is currently an independent museum consultant, lecturing and writing about the impact of African-American history and heritage on contemporary visual culture, as well as its musical and literary counterparts. She has previously held the titles of Manager of Educational Programs for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library and Coordinator of Community Services at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Recently, she completed serving six years, three as Chair, on the California Arts Council. She is looking forward to continuing her art practice and her work as an advocate for the arts.

Dr. Ifrah Magan was born in Mogadishu, Somalia. She lived in Egypt for nearly ten years prior to arriving in the United States as a refugee. Dr. Magan currently serves as an Assistant Professor at the Silver School of Social Work. A qualitative researcher and social worker, Dr. Magan incorporates storytelling as a method for understanding the lived experiences of refugee and immigrant populations, particularly with regard to faith and culture. Dr. Magan takes an intersectional approach to research in vulnerable communities, focusing particularly on race, religion, gender, and class. She has extensive experience working with Somali, Rohingya, Iraqi, and Syrian refugee populations in the United States. Dr. Magan received her doctorate from the University of Illinois at Chicago, Jane Addams College of Social Work, where she received the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship and the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Service Award. She is fluent in English, Somali, and Arabic.

Tsedaye Makonnen is an artist, curator, researcher and cultural producer as well as a Black American mother, Perinatal Community Health Worker & Doula and daughter of East Africans. Her studio practice primarily focuses on intersectional feminism and migration. Her intention is to create a spiritual network around the world that aims to re-calibrate the energy towards something positive and life affirming. Tsedaye is the current recipient of a permanent large-scale public art commission for Providence, RI. In 2019 she was a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow and in 2021 her light sculptures were acquired by the Smithsonian for their permanent collection. This Fall she will be performing at the Venice Biennale for Simone Leigh's Loophole of Retreat and she is also the inaugural Clark Art Institute's Futures Fellow. In 2023, Tsedaye will be exhibiting at The Met. She is currently represented by Addis Fine Art. She lives between DC and London.

Muna Malik is a multidisciplinary artist based in Los Angeles, CA. Her current work focuses on creating poetic imagery around the narratives of women of color and refugees using abstract paintings and interactive sculpture. Muna's work has been exhibited at Northern Spark Arts Festival, MCAD, Artworks Chicago & the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs. She was the billboard artist for North Carolina for the 'For Freedoms 50 State Initiative.' She recently completed exhibitions at the Band of Vices Gallery, LA, the Annenberg Space for Photography, LA with Photoville, the International Center for Photography with For Freedoms and MOCA Geffen in LA. She also currently has work on view at the Somaal House of Art in Minneapolis, MN for the *Ilaa Shalay\Since Yesterday* exhibition.

Carolina Mayorga is a Colombian-born and naturalized American interdisciplinary artist who has exhibited her work nationally and internationally for the last twenty years. Her work is part of national and international collections and has been reviewed in publications in South America, Europe and the US. Mayorga's artwork addresses issues of social and political content. Comments on migration, war, and identity are translated into video, performance, site-specific installations, and two-dimensional media in the form of photography and drawing. During her second participation in the Women and Migration(s) panel, Mayorga shared insights about Maid in the USA, an endurance performance art piece that comments on stereotyped views of roles played by women of

Hispanic origin. The artist lives and works in Washington, DC. For more information visit: <http://carolinamayorga.com/>.

Video and installation artist **Shirin Neshat** (Iranian, b.1957) explores the political and social conditions of Iranian and Muslim life in her works, particularly focusing on women and feminist issues. Neshat was born in Qazvin, Iran, and left the country to study art in the United States at seventeen; she graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with an MFA in 1982. When she returned to her home country in 1990, she found it barely recognizable from the Iran before the 1979 Revolution, a shocking experience that incited the meditations on memory, loss, and contemporary life in Iran that are central to her work. Her work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, the Istanbul and Johannesburg Biennials, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Tate Gallery in London, among other institutions. Neshat currently lives and works in New York

María Elena Ortiz is Curator of the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), where she is spearheading the Caribbean Cultural Institute (CCI). At PAMM, Ortiz has organized several projects including *Allied with Power: African and African Diaspora Art* from the Jorge M. Pérez Art Collection (2020); *The Other Side of Now: Foresight in Contemporary Caribbean Art* (2019); *Latinx Art Sessions* (2019); *william cordova: now's the time* (2018); *Beatriz Santiago Muñoz: A Universe of Fragile Mirrors* (2016); *Ulla von Brandenburg: It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon* (2017); *Firelei Báez: Bloodlines* (2015); and *Carlos Motta: Histories for the Future*. Her writing has been published globally. A recipient of the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros (CPPC) and Independent Curators International (ICI) Travel Award for Central America and the Caribbean, Ortiz's curatorial practice is informed by the connections of Latinx, Latin American, and Black communities in the US and the Caribbean.

Heike Raphael-Hernandez is Professor of American Studies at the University of Würzburg, Germany and Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Maryland Global Campus. With Cheryl Finley and Leigh Raiford, she was an ACLS Collaborative Research Fellow for the project "Visualizing Travel, Gendering the African Diaspora." She is one of the general editors of the forthcoming *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia*

of *Visual Culture*; she will be responsible for “Global Diasporas and Visual Culture.” Among her publications are *Migrating the Black Body: The African Diaspora and Visual Culture* (with Leigh Raiford, 2017) and a special issue (with Pia Wiegink) for the journal *Atlantic Studies* about “German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery” 14.4. (Fall 2017). She is editor of *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (2004), and co-editor of *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (with Shannon Steen, 2006). She is author of *Contemporary African American Women Writers and Ernst Bloch’s Principle of Hope* (2008) and *Fear, Desire, and the Stranger Next Door: Global South Immigration in American Film* (forthcoming).

Bronx-born curator, and interdisciplinary artist **Yelaine Rodriguez** received a BFA from The New School (2013) and her Masters from NYU (2021). Rodriguez’s curatorial portfolio includes *Afro-Syncretic* at NYU (2019), *Resistance, Roots, and Truth* at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (2018) and *(under)REPRESENT(ed)* (2017) at The New School. Rodriguez participated in the Bronx Museum of the Arts’ AIM Fellowship Program (2020), the Latinx Project Curatorial Fellowship (2019), the Wave Hill Van Lier Fellowship (2018), and the ICA Fellowship from the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (2017). She has exhibited at the American Museum of Natural History, Rush Art Gallery, El Centro Cultural de España, and Centro León Biennial. Her works feature in *Hyperallergic*, *Vogue*, and *Aperture Magazine*.

Hannah Ryan is currently the Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at St. Olaf College, in Northfield, Minnesota, having completed her Ph.D in Art History at Cornell University in 2019 with Dr. Cheryl Finley, researching maternal and lactation imagery in transatlantic visual culture. Hannah’s areas of research include modern and contemporary arts of the African diaspora, photography, intersectional feminism, and women artists. With a decolonial and feminist perspective, her work engages with issues of race and gender through theories of consumption, labor, recuperation, and care, particularly as they intersect with maternity. With a background in the museum field, Hannah has served in outreach positions at the Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, the Norton Museum of Art, and

the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, and curates exhibitions on contemporary artists, including the subjects of her contribution to this book: Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun.

Sirpa Salenius, Ph.D, originally from Helsinki (Finland), lives in Florence (Italy) and teaches American Studies at the University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu, Finland). Her publications include *An Abolitionist Abroad: Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2016) and *Race and Transatlantic Identities* (Routledge, 2017), co-edited with Elizabeth T. Kenney and Whitney Womack Smith. She is presently conducting research on nineteenth-century African American women in Italy as 2020-2021 Terra Foundation for American Art Senior Fellow at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C.

Gunja SenGupta is a Professor of History at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center. She has authored the books *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas*, and *From Slavery to Poverty: The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York*; as well as articles in journals like the *American Historical Review*, *Journal of Negro* (now *African American*) *History*, and *Civil War History* among many others. Her latest book, co-authored with Awam Amkpa, and titled *Sojourners, Sultans and Slaves: America and the Indian Ocean in the Age of Abolition and Empire*, is forthcoming from the University of California Press in Spring 2023. This work mines multinational archives to connect and compare stories from the African diaspora in the North Atlantic with those from societies along the Swahili coast, through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, into the Indian subcontinent, among other themes.

Summer Sloane-Britt is a third year Ph.D student at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. As the Elizabeth A. Josephson fellow, she studies global photography, representations of race in mid-twentieth century art of the United States, and visualizations of labor and landscape. She is currently researching the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) photography projects during the 1960s. Previously, she served as the Emily K. Rafferty Intern in Museum Administration at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Community Cluster Fellow at the Free Library of Philadelphia.

Debora Spini is currently teaching at NYU Shanghai. Her research interests focus on religious groups in the public sphere, secularization/postsecularization, monotheism and violence, and the rise of xenophobic populism with a focus on gender issues. Among her most recent publications are the following essays and book chapters: “Civil religion, uncivil society. A reflection on Baba Sahib Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s conception of a ‘religion for civil society’” in *B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Justice*, ed. by A. Rathore Singh (Oxford: OUP, 2020); “The price of liberty. On republicanism democracy and non domination” in *Republicanism, theoretical and historical perspectives*, ed. by F. Ricciardelli and M. Fantoni (Rome: Viella 2020); “Decolonizing Postsecularization”, *Annali di Studi Religiosi*, 21 (2020), 167-179; “Post-secularizzazione e regressione politica. cosa possiamo imparare dal casodel populismo di destra”, *Iride – Rivista Italiana di Filosofia*, Gennaio 2020, 369-381. Spini has lectured and participated in conferences on these themes in Europe, the US, India and Brazil.

Ellyn Toscano is the Executive Director of the Hawthornden Foundation, a US foundation supporting contemporary writers and literary arts through residential fellowships in Scotland and Italy. Previously, Toscano was NYU’s Senior Director for Programming, Partnerships and Community Engagement, where she fostered partnerships at the intersection of technology, new media and the arts. Before that, as Executive Director of NYU Florence, she directed Villa La Pietra, a fifteenth-century villa, garden and art collection and founded and produced *The Season*, a summer cultural festival. Before NYU, Toscano served as Chief of Staff to Congressman Jose Serrano of New York for two decades and directed his work on the Appropriations Committee. Toscano also served as Counsel to the New York State Assembly Committee on Education for nine years. A lawyer by training, Toscano has an LLM from New York University School of Law in International Law.

Hồng-An Trương uses photography, sound, video, and performance to examine histories of war and immigrant and refugee narratives. Her work has been exhibited widely including at the International Center for Photography (NY), Art in General (NY), Fundación PROA (Buenos Aires), Istanbul Modern (Istanbul, Turkey), Nhà Sàn (Hanoi, VN), The

Drawing Center (NY), the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University (NC), The Kitchen (NY), and the Phillips Collection (Washington, D.C.) among many others. In 2018, she exhibited in Prospect.4 New Orleans: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp, and her collaborative work with Hương Ngô was included in Being: New Photography 2018 at the MoMA. She was a Guggenheim Fellow in Fine Arts in 2019-2020 and is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Art & Art History at UNC.

Deborah Willis, Ph.D, is University Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. She is the recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship and a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. She is the author of *The Black Civil War Soldier: A Visual History of Conflict and Citizenship* and *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present*, among others. Professor Willis's curated exhibitions include: "Framing Moments in the KIA", "Migrations and Meanings in Art", "Let Your Motto Be Resistance: African American Portraits" at the International Center of Photography; "Out of Fashion Photography: Framing Beauty" at the Henry Art Gallery and "Reframing Beauty: Intimate Moments" at Indiana University.

Paulette Young, Ph.D, is a New York-based cultural anthropologist, curator, writer and independent scholar in the visual arts and artistic cultural practices of communities in Africa and the African Diaspora. Her research centers on the historical and contemporary roles of global dress, design and style as an expressive artistic and cultural form. She examines the ways that people of African descent articulate power and meaning through the visual and verbal arts, particularly as presented in photography. Paulette is an educator and advisor in the visual and performing arts for a diverse range of universities, museums, galleries and community-based organizations. She lectures and provides ethnographic and archival research for local and international cultural, educational, and business institutions. Young is Director of the Young Robertson Gallery in New York, NY. The gallery specializes in fine arts from Africa and the African Diaspora, focusing on traditional African fine art, textiles and photography.

Introduction

*Kalia Brooks, Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano
and Cheryl Finley*

The Women and Migration(s) Working Group is an interdisciplinary project based at New York University that set out to examine the role that photography, art, film, history, and writing have played in identifying and remembering the migratory experience of women. The collection that follows features different types of writing styles, namely, memoir, artist statement, and journalistic and critical essays. Women have been part of global and historical movements of people, to escape war, to avoid persecution, for work, for security. Women have been uprooted, stolen, trafficked, enslaved; they have been displaced from land despoiled of resources and habitats lost to extreme weather patterns and climate change. Women have moved and migrated for deeply private and personal reasons—to reach their potential freely, to lead meaningful lives, to secure a future for themselves and their families. They have sailed, flown, driven and walked. Some have not survived the journey.

We seek to capture the breadth of experience: an account of the migration of women is the totality of many stories. Ultimately, we leave it to our contributors to respond to the term as they are inspired, hoping that diverse perspectives will enhance our collective understanding.

This research group, supported by NYU's Global Institute for Advanced Study, first convened on the campus of NYU Florence in June 2017. A book resulted, published in March 2019, that was a compilation of the contributions of forty-two women scholars, authors and artists. The essays in the first book charted how women's profound and turbulent experiences of migration have been articulated in writing, photography, art and film. As a whole, the volume gives an impression of

a wide range of migratory events from women's perspectives, covering the African diaspora, refugees and slavery through the various lenses of politics and war, love and family. The contributors, a combination of academics and artists, offer both personal and critical points of view on the artistic and historical repositories of these experiences. Selfies, motherhood, violence and Hollywood all featured in this substantial treasure-trove of women's joy and suffering, disaster and delight, place, memory and identity. This collection appealed to artists and scholars of the humanities, particularly within the social sciences, though there is much to recommend it to creatives seeking inspiration or counsel on the issue of migratory experiences.

The group convened again in Abu Dhabi in 2019. In both instances, scholars, artists, and writers from each national community were included. Our convening in Washington, D.C. was scheduled for March 2020, but had to be postponed and reorganized as a virtual gathering due to the restrictions generated in response to COVID-19.

The Women in Migration(s) Working Group perspective on migration crosses boundaries of discipline, geography, law, politics, history and temporality. In this second volume, we seek to capture the breadth of intersectional experience: we include diasporas, internal displacements, and international and transnational migrations. The public policy lens through which the current crises are analyzed is one vantage point, and an essential one to be sure. We hope that the contribution of artists and writers will help us to understand the lived experiences of home and loss, family and belonging, isolation, borders and identity—issues salient both in experiences of migration and in the epochal times in which we find ourselves today. These are stories of trauma and fear, to be sure, but also stories of the strength, perseverance, hope and even joy of women surviving their own moments of disorientation, disenfranchisement and dislocation.

Today, in the midst of a global pandemic, protests against anti-black racism, and collective action around environmentalism, we are living through a moment of profound disorientation, dispossession and dislocation and, as in most crises, women are affected disproportionately. These global crises are aggravating and intensifying the injustice, marginalization and insecurity experienced by women and other exploited people. Women are unequally in low-paid, high-risk, insecure,

“essential” employment, on the front lines of the health care, social justice, food services, home care, emergency, and all other services sustaining the social distancing and sheltering in place that secure the general population.

What is happening to women already displaced by war, racism, famine, globalized climate change and nationalist governments? Migrant workers, who travel long distances for work, including across borders, already precarious and marginal, are losing jobs. With borders slamming shut, people can neither stay put, nor return to the places from which they have fled.

Violence against women, whether in domestic settings or the temporary and communal living arrangements in which women and girls in migratory situations are sheltered, is on the rise during this health crisis. The World Health Organization, drawing on UN data, states that “reports of domestic violence have tripled around the world, not even counting the many ‘invisible’ cases where women have no way to ask for help.” As in any other global crisis, women who are displaced, refugees and living in conflict areas are particularly at risk. Women compelled to stay home during the quarantine requirements of this public health crisis are trapped inside with their abusers, often without access to help. This is a time when women across the demographic spectrum are learning to be allies in the pursuit of social reform on a global scale. Through a wide interdisciplinary lens, and a diverse set of voices, we examine the experience of women and migration through art, history, crises, protest, memoir, narrative, and joy.

The goal with the second volume is to broaden commensurately the conversations begun previously with the circumstances of our current time, in order to deepen understanding, and encourage space for ongoing reflection in service to building a more just future.

PART ONE

MIGRATIONS AND MEANINGS IN ART

The artists' statements, essays and images in this part are both creative and cultural responses to a range of migration experiences. These works are shaped by historical references and personal reflections exploring a range of experiences from artists living in, or hailing from the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, the Americas, and Asia. The section is arranged to uncover and examine motives for migration. It also explores how identities are realized, rejected, performed, and desired by artists considering these experiences in their work. It foregrounds varied perspectives on migration from concepts of dislocation, border crossings and storytelling. The artwork challenges various narratives on identity through migration practices and looks at their impact and reception. These projects address questions and concerns raised by each artist in the hopes of expanding perceptions of migration while exploring identity and family life through the creative process.

Sama Alshaibi combines photography, nineteenth-century printmaking and installation with her narrative about women leaving home. Alshaibi, an Iraqi-born multimedia artist, explores absence and what happens when women's stories are lost or not preserved. In considering migration, she imagines and explores questions such as 'what do you carry with you?' and, centering these in her work, Alshaibi expands upon her own family's narrative of migration, one that is full of love, longing, and trauma. By doing so, she memorializes the struggles of migrating women globally. Firelei Báez's paintings and installations explore Afro-Latina and Afro-Caribbean women and migration. In this volume she creates a painting of Marie Louise Christophe, the first Queen of Haiti, which gained independence from France in 1804, and who was eventually forced into exile, moving to Pisa. New media and performance artist Tsedaye Makonnen's work consists of photography, sculpture, and installation focusing on experiences of forced migration globally. Through her installations she often uses her body to channel self-identifying Black women or girls who died from state-sanctioned

violence in the US or while migrating to Europe from East Africa across the Mediterranean. Carolina Mayorga is a Colombian-born and naturalized American interdisciplinary artist whose work explores identity and migrant domestic workers. Through her performances she explores stereotyping of immigrant women of Hispanic origin.

Shirin Neshat's *Rapture* series image reflects on the role of women and fashion in Islam. The image replicated in this book is a still from her thirteen-minute film of the same title, and shows veiled women in black attire moving through the desert. In the photograph, the women stand in the sand, facing away from the camera. Neshat is suggesting that even as the women face unknown restrictions, they also form a bond based on their gender, allowing the viewer to ponder freedom and movement. Muna Malik's work consists of imagery and installations based on the narratives of women of color and refugees, using a boat as a vessel to share stories and preserve messages about their experiences. Gabriella N. Báez's *Island Putas* is an ongoing photographic documentation of queer sex work in the Caribbean, following their economic decline in the aftermath of natural disasters and the pandemic. She is responding to the popular notion of sex tourism in the Caribbean as heavily tied to migration.

Leslie King-Hammond's "Barbadian Spirits—Altar for My Grandmother" is an homage to women who have migrated from the Caribbean and further afield. This altar reflects her personal memories. What emerges from King-Hammond's installation is a sense of joy and respect for the women's creativity through foodways and craft art. Brandy Dyess's portfolio is a composite of photographs of migration in California as she moved from the Midwest to the East Coast and eventually to the Mojave Desert, which foreground her desire to redefine intimacy and beauty in a desolate area. Ana Teresa Fernández resists borders. She actively crosses boundaries by creating work that challenges the complexity of migration. Her work is performance-based and shows the plight of migrants encountering border walls. *Of Bodies and Borders* explores the hopes and despairs of the thousands of people who have crossed a border. Maria Elena Ortiz writes that "she is committed to questioning stereotypical female gender roles; heels and her own body are central motifs in her performances and paintings. Her practice is indebted to performance art. Through her visual metaphors,

Fernández's works explore the relationship of life, politics, and poetics, inspired by ideas of magical realism, surrealism, and contemporary complex realities." Allison Janae Hamilton's photography explores memory, mythology, and the Southern landscape in Tennessee and Florida. Hamilton's relationship with these locations forms the foundation of her artwork in this volume, providing a context for an exploration of history, memory and the impact the Southern landscape has had on black bodies.

Patricia Cronin's *Shrine for Girls* is a site-specific installation and meditative experience depicting loss. Cronin's images document a space where clothing is stacked high to allow visitors to mourn and recognize the dignity of those women and girls who were denied it in life. Hồng-Ân Trương's *From a Hot Border* (2001) considers Trương's childhood and her family's migration to the United States from Viet Nam during the tumult of the mid-1970s. Layering photographs of herself playing and riding a bicycle along with images of war, she creates a background of tension, pleasure and terror. Nashormeh Lindo's tapestry for her father's family lineage, entitled *NormanNamesake: First Generation North*, is a reflection on belonging and longing for her grandfather, who migrated with his family from South Carolina to Philadelphia by way of the Underground Railroad route that led to Mother Bethel AME Church in South Philadelphia. The artists in this section offer distinct perspectives on the themes of migration that shift our understanding of the ubiquity of national and global movements in our current cultural and socio-political environments. They contemplate the idea of migration as it intersects with personal narratives, self-invention, issues of cultural identity, sexuality, social justice, leisure culture, the discourse of domination, and global freedom struggles. In a society where stories of migration are often stigmatized and excluded, this section locates these diverse stories at the forefront, expanding the discourses of migration and the processes of identifying oneself and one's community in the context of social and cultural transit.

I. Carry Over

Sama Alshaibi

Photography plays a historic and burdensome role in the construction of how the Middle East continues to be imagined. My work explores the impact that images of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) women have had. In my photographs, I aim to disrupt the Western cultural paradigm through a strategy of assigning power to the MENA female body and the sets of the photography-studio scene. By using albumen and photogravure print processes of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in my project *Carry Over*, I am evoking a not-too-distant century in which the West controlled the Middle East and North Africa.¹ Photography studios were largely run by Western photographers, and their portrayal of MENA women sought to express the region's inferiority. Their photographs constructed a singular narrative of the Orient's female subject—isolated, lacking social context, docile and sexually consumable. Women were repeatedly depicted carrying vessels on their heads and lounging with 'oriental' props that, along with veiling and nudity, staged a non-ambiguous formula of otherness. *Carry Over* recalls and subverts these images and their legacy: contemporary Western media continue to subject MENA women to a flattened visual representation.

The traumatic burden of such enduring representations is made tangible in *Carry Over* through the placement of a physical sculpture, absurd in scale and function, on the subject's head. In *Mashrabiya*, the Arabesque latticework of carved wood normally found on the windows

1 *Carry Over* was funded in part by the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, The Arizona Commission on the Arts, Artpace International and the CENTER 2019 Project Development Grant.

of Iraqi or Egyptian homes is substituted with a latticework of laser-cut wood shaped as barbwire and framed within a box reminiscent of the mashrabiya found across the region. This traps the subject's face in a cage formed from a water-pipe hookah, an object found in most historical portraits of 'Oriental' women. Not only is she objectified by the studio prop, but her body also distorts into a physical object itself. In *Gamer*, the looming stack of pans forms a ladder, resembling an escape route out of the frame. In *Water Bearer*, the once compulsory ceramic water jug found in Oriental portraits is referenced by a vessel shaped like a massive grenade or a wooden wasp's nest, and hoisted high up towards the sky—exhibiting the subject's Herculean effort in surviving conflict. *The Harvest* depicts empty jute baskets, and *Eternal Love Song*, a hollowed-out travel trunk. Both of these objects contain a spatial void, reminding us of their former purpose and function, which has been amputated by forced migrations. These images challenge the invisibility of MENA women's suffering in conditions from which they cannot escape.

While the social, economic and psychological dimensions of war and displacement are referenced by the sculptures, *Carry Over* also implicates Western imaginings of MENA women's actual struggles as obscured behind a singular preoccupation with the hijab. MENA women's well-being is often related to the politics of veiling, and inversely correlated to how covered up we are. Instead of visualizing women's freedom and empowerment in terms of social, political, and economic rights—such as access to jobs, education and health care, or the critical importance of their physical security in accessing those rights, Western photographs perpetuate notions of women's oppression through their focus on how much skin and hair are revealed. As such, *Marjanah* and *Justice* depict the female figure as the personification of a water fountain or an electricity pole. The implication in both works is that through her isolation, the subject is transformed from a passive object into an empowered, dynamic body that sustains and delivers herself. She is the embodiment of transport, hauling and moving in her diasporic and migratory reflection. She is the vehicle of her own resistance, displacing the internalization of a Western and Eurocentric social order. As a site of refuge and regeneration, these images inscribe mechanisms of survival through the woman's body.



Fig. 1 Sama Alshaibi, *Mashrabiya*, 25x20", photogravure print with blind embossing and transparent ink relief rolled, 2019 © Sama Alshaibi.



Fig. 2 Sama Alshaibi, *Gamer*, 21x14", albumen print, 2018 © Sama Alshaibi.



Fig. 3 Sama Alshaibi, *Water Bearer*, 21x14", albumen print, 2019 © Sama Alshaibi.



Fig. 4 Sama Alshaibi, *The Harvest*, 21x14", albumen print, 2019 © Sama Alshaibi.



Fig. 5 Sama Alshaibi, *Eternal Love Song*, 25x20", photogravure print with blind embossing and transparent ink relief rolled, 2019 © Sama Alshaibi.



Fig. 6 Sama Alshaibi, *Marjanah*, 25x20", photogravure print with blind embossing and transparent ink relief rolled, 2019 © Sama Alshaibi.



Fig. 7 Sama Alshaibi, *Justice*, 25x20", photogravure print with blind embossing and transparent ink relief rolled, 2019 © Sama Alshaibi.

2. Marie Louise Christophe

Firelei Báez

My recent paintings and installations explore the histories of Afro-Latina and Afro-Caribbean women that have been overshadowed by—albeit absolutely foundational to—dominant Western narratives about migration. More specifically, within the scope of Haitian history, for the past five years I have centered my research on the life of Marie Louise Christophe, the first queen of Haiti, which gained independence from France in 1804. Following the death of her husband King Henri I of Haiti in 1820, and the fall of the Kingdom of Haiti, she was forced into exile, ultimately settling in Pisa. My ongoing series of portraits of Marie Louise and her two daughters Améthyste and Athénaire, which I have been developing since 2017, serves as a testament to their importance within the larger narrative of the Haitian Revolution. By reclaiming their story from the margins, celebrating their resilience in the face of unrest and migration, and presenting them as symbolic of the rising of a new people and culture, I aspire to encourage a more complex view of the independence movements that occurred throughout the Americas during this period.



Fig. 1 Firelei Báez, *Sans-Souci (This threshold between a dematerialized and a historicized body)*, 2015, acrylic and ink on linen, 108x74", courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York. Photo: Orriol Tarridas. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York.



Fig. 2 Firelei Báez, *for Marie-Louise Coidavid, exiled, keeper of order, Anacaona*, 2018, oil on canvas, 320x430". Installation view: 10th Berlin Biennale, Akademie der Künste (Hanseatenweg), Berlin, June 9–September 9, 2018. Photo: Timo Ohler. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York.



Fig. 3 Firelei Báez, *roots when they are young and most tender*, 2018, site-specific installation, two paintings, four to six hand-painted papier-mâché sculptures, 40x30" hand-painted blue tarp, chicken wire and foliage, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York.



Fig. 4 Firelei Báez, *For Améthyste and Athénaïre (Exiled Muses Beyond Jean Luc Nancy's Canon), Anacaonas*, 2018, oil paint on canvas and wood panel, hand-painted frames, 120x252". Installation view: *The Modern Window: Firelei Báez*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2018–19. Photograph by Kurt Heumiller. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York.

3. Astral Sea

Tsedaye Makonnen

My light sculptures and mirror textiles are an extension of my work on transhistorical forced migration of Black communities across the globe. The light sculptures consist of a large-scale installation made up of light towers that are described as obelisks (an ode to Ethiopia's *Axum*, created during the 4th century CE), monuments and totems. Each tower is formed of lightboxes stacked on top of one another, with each lightbox being named after a self-identifying Black woman or girl who has died from state-sanctioned violence in the US or while migrating to Europe from East Africa across the Mediterranean. Each lightbox is inscribed with Ethiopian/Eritrean Coptic crosses that are derived from pre-Christian symbols indigenous to that region. Accompanying the light sculptures is a guide that lists all of the womxn's names assigned to them, as well as the meanings of their names, the date and their age when they died. The most recent light installation is named after Senait and Nahom Tadesse (whose names mean "Peacemaker" and "Comforter"), a nineteen-year-old Eritrean mother and her six-month-old child who died in a German detention center in 2018, in events reminiscent of the 1856 story of Black American mother Margaret Garner. Another lightbox is dedicated to Miriam Carey, an unarmored thirty-four-year-old Black mother who was brutally murdered by US Capitol Police in Washington, D.C. in 2013 in front of her one-year-old baby, and whose name means "Sea of Sorrow", "Rebellion", "Wished-for Child", or "Mistress of the Sea".

The *Astral Sea* textile works are adorned with hundreds of mirror pieces laser cut from the East African Coptic cross designs from my light sculptures. These reflective pieces are "the negative space of the sculptures", encoded with messages of protection and healing.

The abstract designs I intuitively compose on the fabrics are inspired by various Black symbols that have themselves migrated across bodies of water and borders, i.e. Kongolese Cosmograms, Haitian Veves and emblems of other African spiritualities and cosmologies. The fabrics represent water and the mirrored patterns memorialize bodies that have drowned. Wearing these works in performance spiritually activates them, embodying and evoking the womxn and honoring the many lives lost while crossing the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

Astral Sea has been used internationally in several performances including in response to Christoph Buchel's *Barca Nostra* at the 2019 Venice Biennale. My performance was to protest the Biennale and Buchel for putting Black death on display as an object. For Park Avenue Armory's *100 Years | 100 Women*, I created *Astral Sea II* in collaboration with musician Cecily Alexa Bumbray. The performance took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and BLM protests in Washington, D.C. in front of the US Capitol and Monument, and reflected on the 19th Amendment, intersectional feminism, the US-Mexican border and the Black womxn who have been at the frontline of major societal shifts, movements, and revolutions in this country and internationally, yet who have not been recognized as Visionaries.



Fig. 1 Tsedaye Makonnen, *Aberash | አበራሽ | You Give Light*, 2018, performance & sculpture. Photographer: Joey Kennedy. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2 Tsedaye Makonnen, *Senait & Nahom | ሰናይት ፡፡ እና ፡፡ ናሆም | The Peacemaker & The Comforter*, 2019, sculpture. Photographer: Dawn Whitmore. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 3 Tsedaye Makonnen, *Astral Sea I*, 2019, sculpture, textile, performance.
Photographer: Ashley Rosas. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 4 Tsedaye Makonnen, *Astral Sea III: Buckingham Palace*, 2020, sculpture, textile, performance. Photographer: Adeyemi Michael. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 5 Tsedaye Makonnen, *Astral Sea II*, 2020, sculpture, textile, performance. Photographer: Tirop Kituur. Courtesy of the artist.

4. Maid in the USA

Carolina Mayorga

It begins with Blanca coming to live with our family. I was seven years old; I was twenty-two when she left. Blanca and I listened to the radio together and played with Barbie dolls. She also made my dinner, washed my clothes and cleaned my room. Late at night, I'd ask: "Blanca, can you make me a plate of radishes and vinegar?" Around the same age, I met Cleotilde at La Tienda de Doña Paquita, our family stay in the town of El Espinal. Cleotilde lived on the property with her mother Inés and Doña Paquita's daughter, La Señorita Lucila. I'd become so bored watching Cleotilde clean that I'd offer to help so we could play. "Do you want to play, Yax?" "Sure, after I finish sweeping the kitchen." *Maid in the USA* is a performance art piece in which I sweep floors dressed in traditional Colombian attire. The seven-hour piece, first presented at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, comments on stereotyped roles played by immigrant women of Hispanic origin. Largely, the public found the performance informative and compelling. Occasionally members of the Latino community, mostly Colombians, saw it as a misinterpretation of our cultural traditions, while others chose to ignore my presence altogether. My interest in addressing issues of migration and identity comes from my Colombian/American experience, but ultimately from the need to understand a puzzling relationship that favored my position over others. "Blanca, can you make me a plate of radishes and vinegar?"



Fig. 1 Promotional image for *Maid in the USA*, a performance art piece by Carolina Mayorga. Photo credit: Craig Garrett. Courtesy the artist.

5. Rapture

Shirin Neshat



Fig. 1 *Rapture* series, 1999. Courtesy Noirmontartproduction, Paris, Gladstone Gallery, New York.

Consistent with the visual and conceptual approach that Neshat adopted in *Turbulent* (1998), *Rapture* (1999) is another narrative that explores the topic of gender in Islamic cultures, but here it relates specifically to ideas around nature and culture. Highly stylized, the work removes its female subjects from their customary urban setting and places them in rural environments. Also designed as two projections installed facing one another, *Rapture* requires the viewer to shift his or her attention between two images in order to follow the action. What Neshat ultimately

presents is an allegorical duel between a group of white-shirted men occupying a fortress and a group of black-veiled women outside in a natural landscape. The fortress represents a typically masculine space in which individuals are confined by an endless and absurd series of walls and barriers. By way of contrast, the women are depicted first praying in the barren desert, then migrating to the seaside where they commence pushing a heavy boat and sail away, as a kind of escape to an unidentifiable destination. Whether this departure signifies an act of suicide or one of liberation, it certainly embodies an idea of courage and self-determination.

6. Blessing of the Boats

Muna Malik

Our society is grappling with the question of how we can make a better world to serve us all collectively and equally.

Muna Malik's current work uses abstract paintings and interactive sculpture to create poetic imagery concerning the narratives of women of color and refugees. "Blessing of the Boats" is an ongoing art project focused on a series of large, illuminated sculptural boats made of metal and reflective surfaces. The project prompts interaction with the public by encouraging viewers to create small paper origami boats with personal messages for the future. The messages are then collected and added to each installation, allowing it to grow over time.

The first installation of "Blessing of the Boats" was featured at the Northern Spark Arts Festival in Minnesota in 2016. This installation invited festival-goers to take an artist-led journey across the historic Stone Arch Bridge in Minneapolis. On the walk, they experienced music, poetry, and stories performed by local artists with a direct connection to the ongoing refugee crisis. The journey culminated in a silent vigil surrounding the "Blessing of the Boats" installation to commemorate refugees who had lost their lives on their journey for safety.

"Blessing of The Boats" has evolved, by expanding its focus and appearing in new public and private spaces around the country. Building on the initial topic of global migration, the project now asks: how, together, can we create a better society? Audiences respond to prompts such as, "What messages would people leave if they knew it would have a large impact on someone anywhere in the world?" and, "If we had the opportunity to sail towards a new future, what society would you build and how would we get there?"

Reimagined for NYC audiences, *The Blessing of the Boats: River to River*, a 2020 installation, invited viewers to carefully consider their role as individuals within our greater community. The sculpture was constructed to evoke an uplifting feeling of opportunity, and guests were asked to think about sailing towards an improved society: “what would you build and how would you get there?” Our imagination is only limited by the scope of the questions we ask, and this project inspires a “commitment to the rebuilding of a more just, equitable, and sustainable future.”

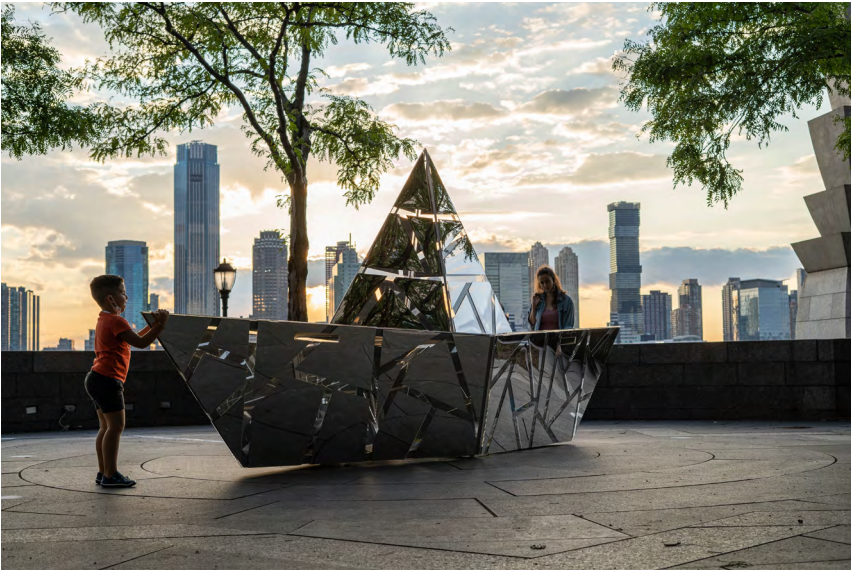


Fig. 1 Location: Battery Park City, Belvedere Plaza, NYC. Photo courtesy of the artist © Muna Malik.

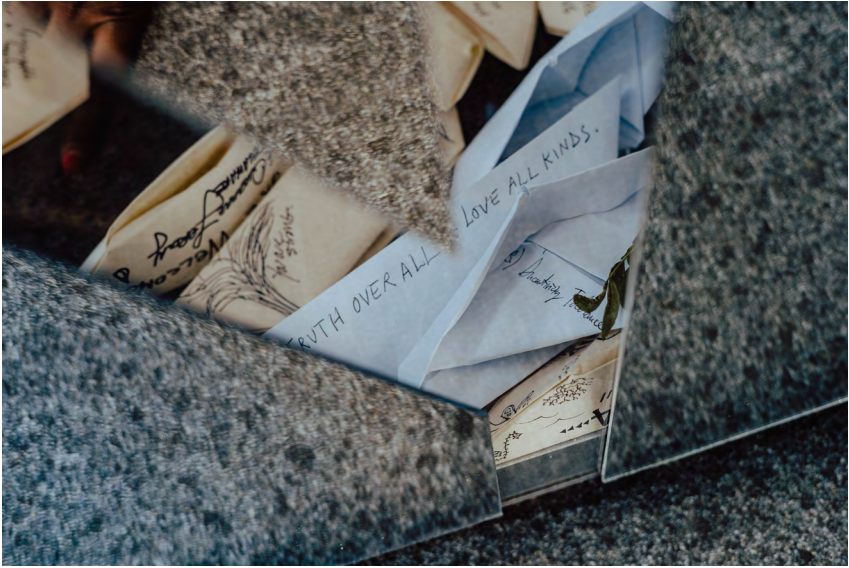


Fig. 2 Location: Battery Park City, Belvedere Plaza, NYC. Photo courtesy of the artist © Muna Malik.



Fig. 3 Location: Battery Park City, Belvedere Plaza, NYC. Photo courtesy of the artist © Muna Malik.



Fig. 4 Location: Battery Park City, Belvedere Plaza, NYC. Photo courtesy of the artist © Muna Malik.

7. Island Putas

Gabriella N. Báez

Sex work is one of the world's oldest professions and among the most stigmatized. Yet in countries with declining economies, like Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands, more women, queer, and non-binary folk opt to make sex work the primary means of earning their livelihood. Despite Caribbean popular culture being classified as 'hyper-sexual'; misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia continue to play a role in the marginalization of sex workers.

Island Putas is an ongoing photographic documentation of queer sex work in the Caribbean, following economic decline in the aftermath of natural disasters. In the wake of hurricanes and earthquakes, poor economic infrastructures amplify poverty. The project explores how sex workers in the Lesser and Greater Antilles cope with economic hardship and create community to support and protect each other from humiliation, violence, and even, trafficking.

Sex work in the Caribbean is heavily tied to migration, with individuals crossing territorial lines for sex tourism and dancing in strip clubs a few islands over. While the first chapter of this project focused on sex workers navigating online platforms to continue their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project also aims to explore migration patterns between Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, both colonial territories of the United States, albeit with different demographics.

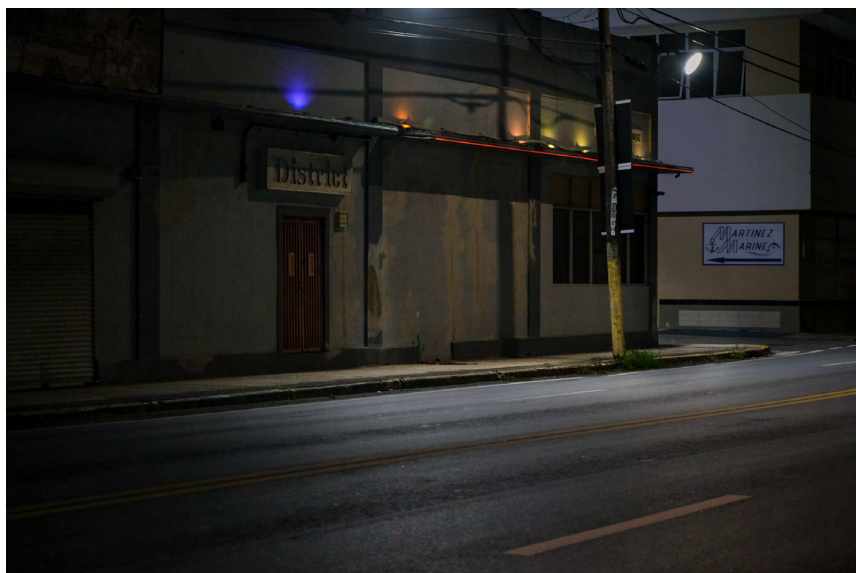


Fig. 1 The empty road and front doors of the adult entertainment club District in Santurce, Puerto Rico, closed due to COVID-19 shutdowns and curfew. Created 23 April 2020. Copyright: Gabriella N. Báez 2021 ©.



Fig. 2 Gala (she/they), twenty-four, is a stripper from Bayamón. She began dancing at the beginning of the year and was making a steady weekly income. When COVID-19 arrived, Gala found herself in a tough spot. "A lot of my colleagues have started selling digital content to maintain relationships with their clients and to have income, but unfortunately, because my family doesn't know that I am a sex worker, that is not a possibility for me right now. I've been trying to figure out how to go about my work since the pandemic because I need to make money. Some of my colleagues have regular clients, but they've been working at the clubs way longer than I've had, and they've been able to negotiate and do business with them over the course of quarantine and social distancing orders. In my case, I'm new to this, I'm new to the club. I don't have regular clients yet." Created 24 April 2020. Copyright: Gabriella N. Báez 2021 ®.

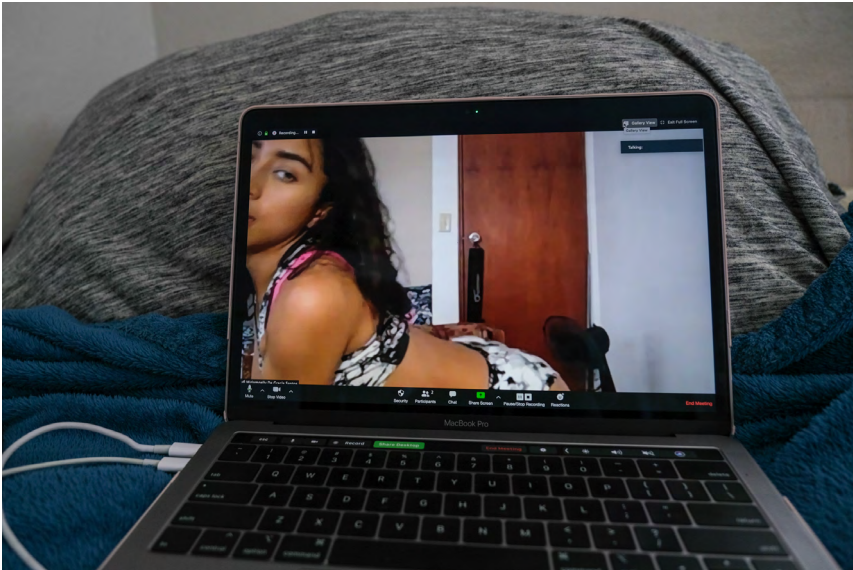


Fig. 3 Nairobi (she/her), twenty-five, is a sex worker from San Juan. Before the arrival of the coronavirus, she had already thought of opening up an OnlyFans page to sell content digitally. The pandemic only heightened her determination. "Before the pandemic, I was already selling digital content and it was like a side hustle. I could make some \$135 in a single day just selling pictures, but now that everyone is in quarantine there's been more clients. There's a lot of men that are single, that are alone, and they constantly ask for pictures. But again, it was never my main income and not being able to dance at the club has impacted me economically a lot. Working as a stripper is super hard now, almost impossible, unless you are one of the girls that has an OnlyFans page where they post their dances and get paid for that. A lot of girls are also not willing to go digital because they can't expose themselves like that." Created 25 April 2020.

Copyright: Gabriella N. Báez 2021 ®.



Fig. 4 Teresita and Akila, sex work advocates, discuss establishing a mutual aid network that members of the sex worker community can use to protect themselves and each other against the coronavirus. "I imagine it as an organization based on solidarity," one of the advocates explains, "to help build support networks between people that understand and live these experiences." Created 3 June 2020.

Copyright: Gabriella N. Báez 2021 ®.

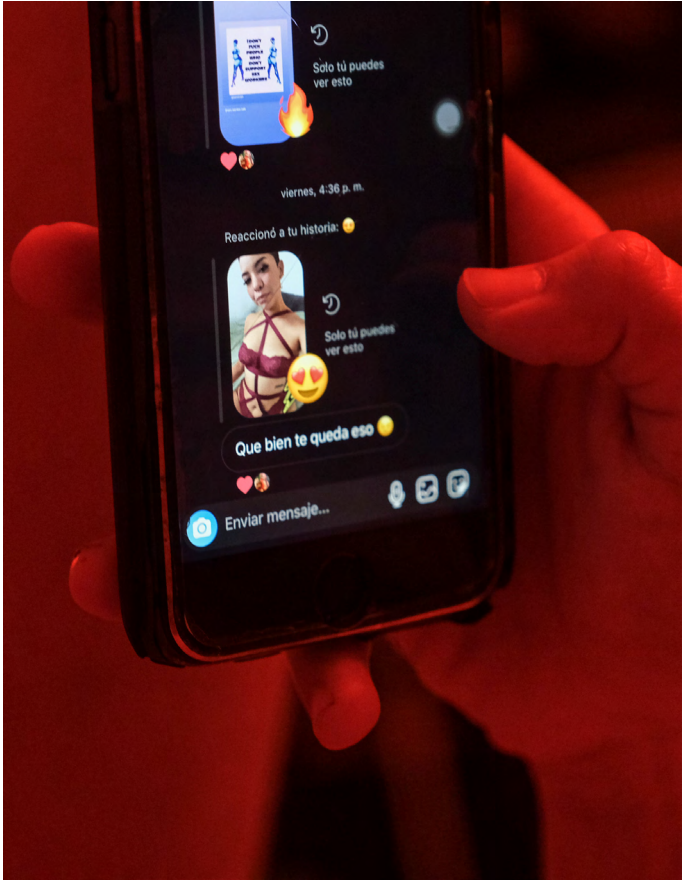


Fig. 5 Akila exchanges messages with one of her clients. The client's image has been blurred to protect their identity. Created 27 March 2020. Copyright: Gabriella N. Báez 2021 ®.

8. Barbadian Spirits—Altar for My Grandmother (Ottalie Adalese Dodds Maxwell, 1892–1991)

Leslie King-Hammond

My family was blessed to be ‘makers’ with a vast range of skills and materials. My mother, Evelyn Alice Maxwell King, was a healer who spent her professional life as a registered nurse and made her own medicines. My father, Oliver Curtiss King, was trained as a master carpenter whose skills were engaged as a shipfitter, tasked to assemble the huge components of warships in the Navy Yards of Brooklyn and Philadelphia. There was literally nothing he could not make from tissue paper: Japanese kites, war ships or a house. Otallie Adalese Dodds Maxwell, my grandmother (Mama) was taught to be a master seamstress, who migrated from the island of Barbados, West Indies to New York City around WWI—during the Great Migration (1925–45) as African Americans moved en masse to urban northern cities in the United States in search of a better life—even as the Great Depression wreaked havoc on the world. Mama settled in the East New York community of Brooklyn, which became home for thousands of African diasporic people from the Caribbean Islands and South America. Her career was spent making upscale clothing in the garment district of New York City for more than thirty years. Everything my family had or needed was often handmade, repurposed from salvaged ‘hand me downs’ or Goodwill items. However, it was the profound impact of my grandmother’s unconditional love, technical skills, determination and deep spirituality that made an indelible imprint on my own need to

make art. She also sparked my relentless curiosity about the roots of African American history—with a special emphasis on women—given the limited conversations we had about her life in Barbados.

As an infant it was discovered that I had cancer—devastating news for a first-born child with only a 5% chance of survival. After my surgery, a special bond occurred between my grandmother and me—she was overjoyed with the success of my treatments. My grandmother remained relatively quiet on the subject of her early life experiences in Barbados but expressed them outwardly, through her masterfully designed clothing, delicious island cuisine and devoted commitment to St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, located in Brooklyn, New York. For almost forty years she was responsible for creating all the altar cloths, drapes, regalia for the priests, altar boys and choirmaster—as well as dressing the altar for weekly, holiday and special services. She also made all the clothing for my mother, sisters and me—until I was old enough to sew and made clothes for the family. Mama then only made clothes for me. I still have the first and the last dress she made for me.

My artmaking began as a process of osmosis. I was immersed in the ‘maker’ routines of my family, learning to harvest and repurpose scraps from Mama and my father’s projects, cutting, pasting, stitching, beading, embroidering, designing and assembling utilitarian objects—for my needs—or just out of a desire to experiment with materials. My grandmother and father were most patient with my projects, while my mother had some doubts, especially after I became fascinated with the desire to become an archeologist. I was a different child who was the first generation—born, raised and educated in the United States—while my Mama was born in Barbados and my parents were born in the States and sent back to Barbados to live with their grandparents. I was raised between what my brother called “island-diffic” and Depression-culture values that stress the economy of materials and an emphasis on ‘literacy and pride.’

My youth was spent as a child of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. I lost my innocence seeing an open casket photograph of Emmett Till and reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. My love of the arts did not wane but became a mechanism and means to maintain my sanity during times of extreme racial tension and segregation. I kept on making stuff to center my energies, anger and frustrations. The 1970s and 1980s began the thrust of the Black Arts Movement, then the advance of feminism, followed by the culture wars of the 1990s. I had

given up hope of becoming a trained archeologist and had opted to get a doctorate in art history so that I could reclaim the stories of African American artists lost, ignored, erased and denied a place in the annals of American history. My home had become the site of mini-installations as I continued to work as a Graduate Dean and Art History lecturer at the Maryland Institute College of Art. It was not ever my primary aspiration to be an exhibiting artist, in spite of earning a BFA in painting from Queens College... As long as I was making my own work in the studio of my townhouse, I was fine! Yet, Deborah Willis was researching the role of the Artist/Scholar for a Smithsonian exhibition and did not allow me to stay cloistered away with my thoughts and installations.

Instead of being the curator, which had become a familiar role due to my professional and academic experiences, I was now being curated! *Barbadian Spirits—Altar for My Grandmother* (Ottalie Adalese Dodds Maxwell, 1892–1991) was an important revelation for me. Components I had created over the decades, and personal objects left to me by my grandmother were combined with needleworks of her sister, or her cousin, and numerous laces—made by anonymous women—were added to these to create an altar to honor the potent essence of my grandmother's impact on my life. The bricolage installation uses a nineteenth-century wooden mantel from a demolished Baltimore row house as the centerpiece. The top shelf of the mantel has a variety of jars, bottles, and containers that contain references to medicinal elements used by African peoples throughout the diaspora to heal all manner of ailments and illnesses. The center shelf functions as a sacred space for elements such as a cross, cups, saucers and teapots which, when with my grandmother, we would use for tea and her homemade coconut bread. Each shelf is dressed with handmade vintage laces.

The use of reclaimed, repurposed elements embodied the energies of past lives, functions, and memories that now have a safe and sacred space, a home, a resting place, and more importantly a site of purpose and meaning as defined by the artistry and intellect of women.

The floor in front of the altar is filled with rice and dried pigeon peas which is one of the staple dishes in Caribbean diets. Scattered across the rice are dried hibiscus flowers—the national plant of Barbados—used for aromatics, healing medicines and herbal teas. In the fireplace sits a traditional clay Barbados Monkey Pot, which was usually placed on the doorstep of the home, to provide cool water for visitors—one of the

few memories my grandmother shared with the family. Surrounding the Monkey Pot are Eucalyptus leaves, also native to Barbados and used for medicinal purposes. Many of these herbs were used by my mother and grandmother to treat illnesses and ailments in a manner known to be economical, effective and accessible. These plant dynamics were part of a vast knowledge system that was highly developed throughout the African diaspora of the Caribbean and are still used today. The creation of *Barbadian Spirits* opened the door to a vast body of research about the origins and lives of my immigrant family. A recent analysis of my DNA confirmed more than 80% African ancestry, with an emphasis on Nigeria. In addition, the remaining origins point to Northern Europe and confirm the revelation that my great grandmother, Alice Dodds, was from England. So many questions haunt me—how/when/why did she get to Barbados, was she part of the forgotten history of Britain’s white slaves in America, what was her occupation, how did she meet my great grandfather...? Their marriage was blessed with eight children, of which my grandmother, Ottalie, was the fourth child. My work has only just begun to really locate the stories and narratives of my family, and all my Barbadian Spirits are yet to become known, in the light of day.



Fig. 1 Leslie King-Hammond, *Barbadian Spirits—Altar for My Grandmother* (Ottalie Adalese Dodds Maxwell, 1892–1991).

9. Notes from an Undisclosed Location

Someplace in the Mojave Desert, California,
United States

Brandy Dyess

I was born in a place in the middle (Wisconsin) and have explored places on both ends (New York, Los Angeles). I now call a place in the Mojave Desert home.

And I have discovered myself in desolation.

In this place, watching the sunset is an event. My ritual is to stop whatever I'm doing and behold the experience. I can spend an entire day watching the clouds glide across the sky. And at night, I'm granted a front row seat for seemingly endless showers of meteors, backlit by the Milky Way.

It was in this place that uniquely creative spirits like Marta Becket, Mary Hunter Austin, Noah Purifoy and Leonard Knight constructed their own alternative worlds. I honor the outsiders. The people who don't fit into the world as it is—and they've no other choice but to build a place for themselves.

Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) are found only in this very particular geographic location. There's unique soil here. Perhaps unique soil nourishes unique souls.

In this place, there is a delicate balance to things. And vast contrasts.

A heightened sensitivity develops. There's a harshness—intense heat, bitter cold. And a softness—the cactus flower that opens to reveal a fine, delicate fur.

I try to show you the things I feel.

Silence becomes your favorite sound. On a warm, calm, autumn day, I sat outside and listened to the wind carry in the Winter.

I try to show you the things I hear.

Change is always happening. After weeks of brown and gray heaviness, one brilliant morning there is nothing but blooms and butterflies. A bee mistakes the tip of my purple pen for a flower.

I try to show you the things I see.

It is here that I have been the most alone. And the least lonely.

An isolated individualist. A cult of one.

In the solitude and space, there is quiet anarchy. Gentle revolution. Calm resistance. Fierce existence.

Perhaps I'll hear the (police) Siren call of a place in the city once again—the shared spaces and forced intimacies—but for now, I'm selfish about my solitude.

I am home in this place. Let me show you...



Fig. 1 *Rain Dance*, 2019 © Brandy Dyess.



Fig. 2 *Magic Bus*, 2018 © Brandy Dyess.



Fig. 3 *Take Your Seat*, 2019 © Brandy Dyess.



Fig. 4 *The Portal*, 2018 © Brandy Dyess.



Fig. 5 *To The Future*, 2019 © Brandy Dyess.



Fig. 6 (E)Merge, 2019 © Brandy Dyess.

10. Of Bodies and Borders

*Essay by Maria Elena Ortiz on the work of Ana
Teresa Fernández*

In her artistic practice, Ana Teresa Fernández questions borders, citizenship and immigration, issues central to her own biography. She explores contested sites, like the Mexico-US border, using several recurring symbols to create elegant compositions that appear both fantastical and real. Fernández features bodies of water as frequent characters in her works, where she has attempted to swim while wearing stilettos, or tame a horse. She is committed to questioning stereotypical female gender roles; heels and her own body are central motifs in her performances and paintings. Her practice is indebted to performance art. Her two- and three-dimensional works emerge from site-specific performances, which are documented, edited, and result in videos. The paintings are images extracted from these performances, thus serving as another interpretation of the themes at hand. Through her visual metaphors, Fernández's works explore the relationship between life, politics and poetics, inspired by magical realism, surrealism, and complex contemporary realities.

In this body of work, *Of Bodies and Borders*, Fernández focuses on one of the world's most deadly borderlands, the Mediterranean Sea. Her intentions were to encounter the site firsthand, bringing forth real human issues through art. She traveled to Greece to create a performance on the Greek coast, in which she would go into the water for a couple of hours in the mornings and evenings, wearing a black dress, black heels and a 6 kg (13.23 lb) belt. She covered her body with a white piece of fabric that resembled a burial shroud. Fernández submerged herself underwater, in cold and ungovernable currents.

The Mediterranean Sea is the site of a massive exodus of people fleeing wars, environmental and economic hardships in impoverished boats. In 2015, over 3,000 deaths were reported in the Mediterranean. Like the US, immigration in Europe is a complex issue involving religion, race and racism, and heavily contested ideas of what it means to be European. In Europe, immigration principally involves Africans and Middle Easterners, while the US is experiencing significant immigration from Latin people.

Ana Teresa Fernández explores the complex dynamics of border sites to question the social barriers that affect human beings. Known for creating works addressing the complexities of the Mexico-US border, Fernández represents the unsettled issue of immigration, borders, and bodies at a global scale, pointing to how borders are politicized in contemporary Western society. She is interested in using the political to create poetics that can help us connect with situations that seem far away from our realities, but share similar dynamics.



Fig. 1 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 1* (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea), 2017, oil on canvas, 54x94". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.



Fig. 2 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 2* (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea), 2017, oil on canvas, 60x72". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.



Fig. 3 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 5* (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea), 2017, oil on canvas, 54x94". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.



Fig. 4 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 6 (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea)*, 2017, oil on canvas, 60x72". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.

II. Sweet Milk in the Badlands.

Allison Janae Hamilton

Sweet milk in the badlands. looks toward ritual, storytelling, and trance in search of the connections between landscape and selfhood, place and disturbance. It invites an uncanny cast of haints to lead the viewer through the beginnings of an epic tale that animates the land as a guide and witness. Allison Janae Hamilton is a visual artist working in sculpture, installation, photography, and video. She was born in Kentucky, raised in Florida, and her maternal family's farm and homestead lies in the rural flatlands of western Tennessee. Hamilton's relationship with these locations forms the cornerstone of her artwork, particularly her interest in landscape. Using plant matter, layered imagery, complex sounds, and animal remains, Hamilton creates immersive spaces that consider the ways that the American landscape contributes to our ideas of 'Americana' and social relationships to space in the face of a changing climate, particularly within the rural American South.

In Hamilton's treatment of land, the natural environment is the central protagonist, not a backdrop, in the unfolding of historic and contemporary narratives. Through blending land-centered folklore and personal family narratives, she engages haunting yet epic mythologies that address the social and political concerns of today's changing Southern terrain, including land loss, environmental justice, climate change, and sustainability. Each work contains narratives that are pieced together from folktales, hunting and farming rituals, African-American nature writing, and Baptist hymns. Drawing from all of these references, she envisions what an epic myth looks and feels like in rural terrain. In this vein, Hamilton's art practice centers on imagination in order to meditate on disruption and magic within the seemingly mundane rituals of natural and human-made environments.



Fig. 1 Allison Janae Hamilton, *Scratching the wrong side of firmament*, 2015, archival pigment print, 40x60". Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Allison Janae Hamilton.



Fig. 2 Allison Janae Hamilton, *Fencing mask on the bank of a flatwoods lake*, 2015, archival pigment print, 40x60". Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Allison Janae Hamilton.



Fig. 3 Allison Janae Hamilton, *The Hours*, 2015, archival pigment print, 40x60".
Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen.
© Allison Janae Hamilton.



Fig. 4 Allison Janae Hamilton, *Dollbaby standing in the orchard at midday*, 2015,
archival pigment print, 40x60". Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky
Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Allison Janae Hamilton.



Fig. 5 Allison Janae Hamilton, *Metal tambourines in churchyard covered in snakeskins.*, 2015, archival pigment print, 40x60". Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Allison Janae Hamilton.

12. Shrine for Girls

Social Justice and Aesthetic Responsibilities

Patricia Cronin

Shrine For Girls is a series of site-specific sculptural installations reflecting on the global pandemic of violence against women and girls that debuted as an Official Collateral Solo Show of the 56th Venice Biennale. Curated by Ludovico Pratesi, inside the sixteenth-century Church of San Gallo, I focused on three horrific events in Nigeria, India and Ireland, all resulting in the deaths of thousands of women, and created a shrine in their honor.



Fig. 1 Patricia Cronin, *Shrine For Girls*, Venice (2015), Chiesa de San Gallo, Venice.
© Patricia Cronin, photograph Mark Blower.

Shrines, part of every major religion's practice, provide a space for contemplation, petition, and rituals of grieving and remembrance. Inside the deconsecrated church, I gathered hundreds of girls' clothes from these countries and carefully composed them on three stone altars to act as relics of these young gender martyrs. Each sculpture was accompanied by a small photograph related to the event, off to the side.



Fig. 2 Patricia Cronin, *Shrine For Girls, Venice* (2015), Chiesa de San Gallo, Venice.
© Patricia Cronin, photograph Mark Blower.

By creating an installation with the remnants of what the missing bodies would have inhabited, the materiality of the fabric reminds us of who is missing and publicly acknowledges their suffering. This site-specific installation is a meditation on the incalculable loss of unrealized potential and hopelessness in the face of unfathomable cruelty; juxtaposed against the obligation we have as global citizens to combat this prejudice. I attempt to restore some of the dignity these women and girls were denied in life.

On the High Altar, I have arranged a pile of saris representing a specific event in Katra, a tiny village in Uttar Pradesh, India.



Fig. 3 Patricia Cronin, *Shrine For Girls (Uttar Pradesh)* (2015), Chiesa de San Gallo, Venice. © Patricia Cronin, photograph Mark Blower.

On 27 May 2014, two teenage cousins, Murti and Pushpa were gang raped and lynched, hanging from a mango tree.



Fig. 4 Patricia Cronin, *Shrine For Girls (Uttar Pradesh)* (2015), Chiesa de San Gallo, Venice. © Patricia Cronin, photograph Mark Blower.

The villagers surrounded the tree to show everyone what had been done to their children. It was just enough time for people to take photographs with their cell phones and circulate them.

On the altar to the left,



Fig. 5 Patricia Cronin, *Shrine For Girls (Chibok)* (2015), Chiesa de San Gallo, Venice.
© Patricia Cronin, photograph Mark Blower.

I have arranged a pile of hijabs representing 276 students kidnapped from their secondary school in Chibok, Nigeria on 14 April 2014 by terrorist group Boko Haram, sparking global outrage and inspiring the hashtag #bringbackourgirls. A few girls escaped, others were trafficked, or married off to Boko Haram fighters. Journalists think only 15 out of the 112 still missing girls are still alive.



Fig. 6 Patricia Cronin, *Shrine For Girls (Chibok)* (2015), Chiesa de San Gallo, Venice.
© Patricia Cronin, photograph Mark Blower.

And the altar to the right has a huge pile of cotton, wool and linen aprons symbolizing girls imprisoned in the Magdalene Laundries—forced labor institutions predominantly run by Catholic Sisters of Mercy in Ireland. Females perceived to jeopardize a family’s moral reputation—orphans, the precocious, those with low mental capacity, unwed mothers, or prostitutes—were delivered there by their families or law enforcement. No legal sentence with an end date. They were starved, deliberately not educated and worked washing laundry for the government, clergy and wealthy from dawn until dark, and their babies were sold to rich Americans. The last laundry closed in Dublin in 1996, with women still living there through 2008.

I believe empathy is at the core of all great art. Art can humanize the shock of violence and transform trauma into a shared experience. Collapsing symbolism into reality, Art can be a call to action *and* a form of healing.

13. From a Hot Border

Hồng-Ân Trương

In *From a Hot Border* (2001), the artist juxtaposes *Time* and *Life* magazine images and headlines featuring stories about the American invasion of Việt Nam during the 1960s and 1970s with photographs from the artist's family album from the first few years of their lives as refugees in the US. By putting seemingly disparate elements in tension with each other, this series of photographs question the gaps and contradictions in US narratives about the American War in Việt Nam. In a simple gesture, these photographs create a kind of cognitive dissonance by calling attention to the narratives that have been sedimented through institutional racism in American popular culture and the media.



Fig. 1 Hồng-Ân Trương, *Florida 1979 (love miss you a lot)*, 2001, toned gelatin silver print, 20x24". Courtesy of the artist.

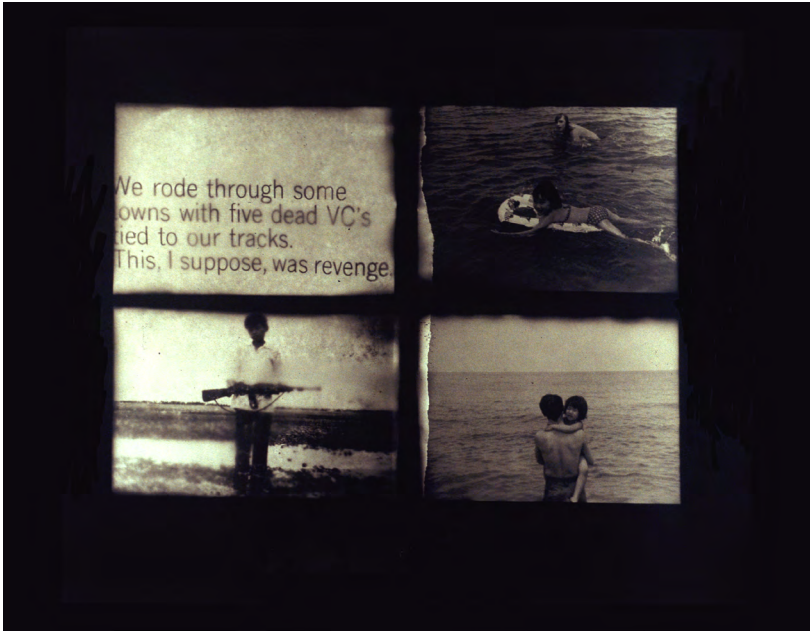


Fig. 2 Hồng-Ân Trương, *Florida 1979 (Revenge)*, 2001, toned gelatin silver print, 20x24". Courtesy of the artist.

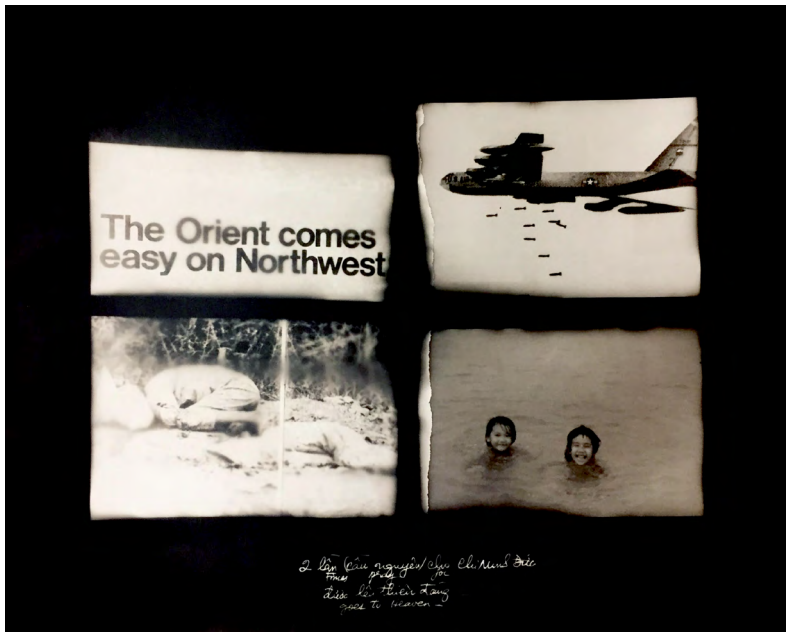


Fig. 3 Hồng-Ân Trương, *Florida 1978 (goes to heaven)*, 2001, toned gelatin silver print, 20x24". Courtesy of the artist.

14. NormaNamesake/The Choice

Nashormeh N. R. Lindo



Fig. 1 *NormaNamesake*, 2006, jacquard tapestry, mixed media. Courtesy of the artist © Nashormeh Norma Lindo.

This tapestry is about my paternal grandfather, my father and myself. The title, *NormaNamesake*, refers to the fact that my father was named after his father, Norman Kendrick Wilkie (1880–1939) and named me, Norma, after himself, Norman Leodius Wilkie (1912–2002). The medallion photograph is of my grandfather, whom I never knew except via the stories my father told. I first saw this picture hanging on the living room wall of the family home. The quartet of photos are of my

father and the small picture of me is my high school graduation picture. This work is also about the migration of my father's family from the rural South to the urban North at the end of the first Great Migration and the beginning of the Great Depression, in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

This image began as a collage, made up of small paintings, family photos, drawings and disparate symbolic objects, referencing that journey and those stories. The tapestry form itself is representative of the weaving together of the narratives, the history and the personal family connections between myself and my forefathers. In this work, I am reimagining the past and the motives my family had for migration. In the tradition of the griot, my father always told us stories about his childhood, his family and his early days in Philadelphia. The memories of stories repeated by my father over and over at dinner, when we were a captive audience, drive the narrative. They are also based on oral histories, interviews and conversations I had with my dad, and other family members. As a woman artist and daughter, I wanted to find a way to represent that narrative and the ideas it evoked for me about personal identity, family, history and how relationships are impacted by the changes migration brings.

Daddy always said that his father was a "master mathematician." He could do problems in his head without writing the numbers down. I include a mathematical formula in the work to represent his legendary genius. He always carried a fountain pen and a pencil in his top pocket and a knife in his back pocket. There is a heart at the top of the composition, signifying the love underlying it all. A map of South Carolina indicates where they came from. My grandfather worked, along with other men in the community, at a sawmill, but he also taught at a school for Negro children. There is a drawing of a red pony, named Colette, which he rode to work, to school and to church. There is also a picture of Mother Bethel A. M. E. Church which is in Philadelphia.

My Dad and his family were originally from a small town called Ashton, South Carolina, in Colleton County. Walterboro was the county seat. We never visited my father's home. He had an aversion to the South. He hated the idea of it. My grandfather's brother, Charlie, had to be spirited out of town in the dark of night, to avoid lynching after shooting a white man. But Daddy also had fond memories. He often spoke of his paternal grandmother, Caroline, who was part Native American.

In keeping with the flow of the Great Migration, the family headed north, following the well-travelled route established by the Underground Railroad. On Palm Sunday, in the spring of 1924, my grandfather's eldest sister, Millie Connelly, and her family reached Philadelphia. They dropped off their bags, headed to Mother Bethel Church and became members that same day. In 1926, my Dad's uncle, James "Bubba Jim" Wilkie, arrived with his wife and children. They had initially migrated to Uniontown, where Bubba Jim worked in the coal mine. They too, eventually, joined Mother Bethel. In 1929, my grandfather, his wife Daisy and their family arrived. My grandfather got a job as a fireman. He wanted to teach, but, coming from the South, his credentials were deemed inadequate. He heard that the Post Office paid better, and he was studying for the test when he sent for his family. They too joined the church and became active members. The church was walking distance from their home and became the center of their civic and social lives. My Dad was almost seventeen. Unfortunately, one Sunday, my grandfather got sick in church. They carried him to Pennsylvania Hospital, where he died a few weeks later. It was ten years after he migrated to Philadelphia.

Migrations are characterized as voluntary or involuntary. Most people voluntarily move around the planet seeking a better life, to find the means for basic survival, to find family members or friendlier environments. Most early Africans who found themselves in the Western hemisphere came here involuntarily, by forced international migration, on slave ships over the Middle Passage. During the time my parents migrated, this interregional movement north was both voluntary and involuntary. For them, though, mostly, it was necessary. Some stayed behind. Some left willingly, seeking their fortunes or following love. Others had to leave quickly, in the dark of night. For most, this domestic migration was related to industrialization, and social and political prejudice. The same was true of my family. They came from South Carolina and Georgia to Philadelphia. For them, it was a logical choice. There was community there, cultural traditions, educational and employment opportunities. They wanted to do more with their lives than pick cotton, work in the sawmills and constantly be on guard against the virulent racism of the Jim Crow South. They wanted better lives and new experiences. They chose to leave, and my father and grandfather never returned.

PART TWO

RESPONSES IN ART HISTORY AND ART CRITICISM

The poetry and essays in this section center art and exhibitions that model new modes of recognizing migration as it relates to the self, relationships with others, the prospect of new social, political and economic forms, geographic and cultural mobility. The art writing in this section is essential to broadening the discourse of the artists' endeavor to represent the experience of social and political identification as a combination of factors related for example along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class, citizenship and religion.

Ifrah Mahamud Magan's poem, *Refugees*, describes the existential complexity of the refugee as she contemplates homeland, memory, and language. Kalia Brooks examines the artwork of Jennifer Ling Datchuk as an exploration of race and gender that contemplates themes related to identity, otherness and belonging, which are rooted in her mixed Chinese and White American heritage. Hannah Ryan uses a series of conversations with New Orleans-based artist Chandra McCormick to explore how motherhood affected her displacement during Hurricane Katrina. Deborah Willis investigates the role of travel in Carrie Mae Weems's practice of connecting historical references from the Middle Passage to forced and voluntary migration today. Arlene Dávila's critical review of the exhibition *Latinx Abstract* debates the political possibilities and constraints of abstraction for artists and communities of color, in particular Latinx artists. Cheryl Finley's essay on photographer Joy Gregory's series *Cinderella Tours Europe (1997–2001)* considers notions of home and belonging, race, gender and nation. Yelaine Rodriguez argues that the symbol of the Black Madonna is connected to various demographics and geographical locations in her attempt to uncover the origin of this depiction.

The transience of the migratory experience is often made tangible through the aesthetic contribution of artists. The writers in this section

capture not only the formal quality, but also the materials, ideas and sensibilities that push boundaries, affirming that art comes from and extends into the world at large. These writers emphasize the notion that difference, as expressed in poetry and art practice, creates a productive opportunity for disparate resources, communities, regions, techniques, and origins to discursively express the plurality of the human experience that will serve as the model for the future.

15. Refugees

Ifrah Mahamud Magan

refugees. without lands. no longer a place to call home. ocean waters calling, but shores afraid to receive us.

refugees because borders define citizenship. humans don't *just settle* in this world, unless, they destroy your home.

refugees. blues skies and full moons we gaze upon, wondering when we can finally feel the breeze. breeze and ease, waiting for some peace of mind. waiting to accept and be accepted by others we never met.

waiting. we do a lot of waiting and thinking until thoughts turn into dreams. dreams we dream to stay alive. to stay hopeful and faithful. faithful we are to our deen. to our Lord Who Sees Us even when we can no longer see. ourselves. our own heart aches. soul drifts away to a land where only angels live. we remain alive. listening to the stories of a land we don't remember, but yet our memory encapsulates every pavement we missed to touch.

our memory tries to hold on to memories never made. of a past without pathways—to futures unknown and presents wrapped like gifts never opened. but every time i search, i find this land so strange yet close to me. i hear the words of my father as he prayed in early hours before dawn.

i hear the tears of my mother as she wonders how we'll make home of a land so foreign, so far away from the place she calls home.

home was her birthplace and places she found familiar faces. she belonged, felt belonged to. home was the pieces made together with my father.

she now wonders what happens to the pieces shattered. by pain and diasporic tales of being a Black Muslim mother. to Black Muslim children in a land where their identities serve as threats to national security. a land where she found peace, yet is difficult to embrace as home. because home is a place where she's embraced without question. where she can speak in her eloquent speech, trilingual but her intelligence reduced by the mere fact that she doesn't speak the language of this land. english is expected to be spoken, but english is never expected to be traded for languages called "foreign", but what if the foreign is familiar and the familiar is foreign. what if we never negotiate with deals not made by us. what if we let go of things not meant for us. what if. what if we define our truth to counter every lie against us. what if we come together as family, in a land unfamiliar to us, but in hopes of making it our home. our home is every place we built bricks made out of strength and survival and patience. our home is every place we encountered beautiful souls, people so different from us, but who we felt like we've known. our home is always with us, deep down in our souls, because we are the bricks needed, and God is the reason why we still stand tall.

16. Blue and White Forever: Embodying Race and Gender in Clay¹

Kalia Brooks

The Orient [...] is the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.

Edward Said

Jennifer Ling Datchuk's exploration of race and gender in her recent bodies of work, *Dark and Lovely* (2014), *Blackwork* (2016), and *Girl You Can* (2017), contemplates themes related to identity, otherness and belonging rooted in her mixed Chinese and White American heritage. She uses porcelain as a material and metaphor to visualize the intersection between cultural appropriation, global economy and the commodification of the human body. Her artwork challenges the authenticity of identity narratives that are distributed through commodities, and the impact that has on the reception and appearance of the human body.

Datchuk is familiar with living in an identity space of in-betweenness. Although this transient state may be familiar, it is also a site of contestation. It is the zone she draws upon to inspire her artistic practice. As such, her work is charged with critiquing the rigid

1 This essay was originally published by F&M Projects, a nonprofit branch of French & Michigan. Kalia Brooks, "Blue and White Forever: Embodying Race and Gender in Clay", in *Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Half* (San Antonio: F & M Projects, 2019), pp. 9–13.

social and cultural boundaries of race and gender. Not only in how the parameters of race and gender are constructed, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how the appearance of race and gender affects physical bodies by enacting power over standards of beauty, the division of labor and the consumption of goods. Datchuk shows us that these power dynamics take place on a global scale. They are embedded in an international system of exchange that moves through circuits of immigration, commerce and trade, and are rooted in the history of colonialism and imperialism.

Porcelain and the body (Datchuk's specifically) reoccur in each of these bodies of work. She uses her Chinese American experience to intervene in the metaphor of 'pure whiteness' that porcelain symbolizes. She uses her body in relation to the material in performance, installation and digital documentation to subvert the expectation of perfection. In addition to the signification of whiteness, Datchuk similarly extends her investigation to human hair—a product largely exported from China to fuel the billion-dollar hair care industry in the United States. She is concerned with the way the straight texture and length of Chinese hair has been appropriated in African American hair styling as an expression of beauty. In so doing, she brings to the foreground the manufactured elements of identity that mediate the arbitrary, yet reified, cultural distinctions between White, Black and Other.

In the series entitled *Dark and Lovely* (2014), Datchuk uses hair to challenge the dichotomy of prescribed identity categories. Using photography, porcelain, video, performance and installation, she visualizes the imposed duality of her subjective position. She establishes a set of comparisons between her body and the porcelain object that focus on hair as the thread that connects the self to identity and beauty. In a series of diptychs entitled *Blue and White* (Fig. 1), Datchuk plucks her eyebrows to make room for porcelain prosthetic eyebrows that, as an absurd exercise, attempt to make her 'look' more Chinese.



Fig. 1 *Blue and White: Bold Beauty*, 2014, porcelain, blue and white pattern transfer from Jingdezhen, China, digital photograph. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

In another work entitled *Pretty Sister, Ugly Sister* (Fig. 2), the viewer is encouraged to consider the value imbued in hair, in terms of its length and color, to determine cultural standards of beauty.



Fig. 2 *Pretty Sister, Ugly Sister*, 2014, porcelain, black Chinese hair bleached blonde and dyed blue. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

Datchuk reminds us in the artwork entitled *Making Women* (Fig. 3), that these standards are not simply a matter of personal preference, but a reflection of more insidious social and cultural conditioning that is fueled by a billion-dollar hair care industry.



Fig. 3 *Making Women* (series), 2014 (ongoing), porcelain, human hair. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

The title of the series *Dark and Lovely* is appropriated from a line of African American hair care products of the same name. By titling her series this way, Datchuk is able to point to the dynamics of the global hair care industry, namely the Chinese women who provide the majority of hair for wigs and extensions sought after in the American and European markets, the African American consumer base which accounts for over \$2 billion of the hair care market, and the latent (yet pervasive) beauty standard of white-ness that is upheld by the labor and consumerism of the Other.

Datchuk does well in establishing a parallel between the African American and Chinese American experiences as they relate to the global beauty industry. There is an economic closeness (if not a social one) that creates proximity among African Americans and Chinese Americans in response to the supply and demand of the beauty industry. Both sets of bodies have been historically and discursively subject to colonial authorship, and as such share a cultural indoctrination to a standard of beauty that is grounded in validating the ideal of white-ness.

One of the more compelling aspects of Datchuk's practice is the way she converts hair into textile. Her series entitled *Blackwerk* (2016) reframes the term traditionally used to describe the painstaking work of embroidery into a metaphor that emphasizes the slowness of hair growth, and as a means to compare the women's work that embroidery most often is to the labor of women who grow their hair for a living. In this body of work, Datchuk returns to her diptych motif. Instead of appending porcelain eyebrows, she wears wigs of different textures, lengths and styles that are typically found in American beauty supply stores targeting African American consumers. These wigs, fashioned from Chinese hair, serve to further destabilize the expectation of her appearance, and the perceived instability of her image becomes a site where representations of authenticity are contested and reformed.

In the piece entitled *Blackwerk* (Fig. 4), Datchuk is investigating the similarity between Chinese hair and Chinese porcelain as lucrative exports for American and European markets.



Fig. 4 *Blackwerk*, 2016, porcelain, ceramic decals, blue and white pattern transfers from Jingdezhen, China, Asian human hair. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

The porcelain signifies a Chinese-ness that is manufactured primarily for export, a marker of the collectability and the acquisition of culture through commodities. Human hair, as a commodity, however, is not an indicator of Chinese cultural production. Rather, it is a material that is

processed, treated and manipulated to market an aesthetic idea of Blackness. The porcelain and the hair are objects that represent an idea of perfection that is manufactured in China by and for the international consumer.

These commodities in an American and European market are the objects by which we learn to perform and identify race and gender in the commercial pursuit of beauty. The lucrative and longstanding economic network between China and the United States specifically is masked by the social pathology of racism. This is evident in the artwork entitled *Sampler of an American Born Chinese* (Fig. 5), where Datchuk uses porcelain and hair, again alongside the language of embroidery, to spell out xenophobic epithets that are an unfortunate part of the American lexicon of racial categorization that undermine the long history of cultural, social, and economic exchange between the United States and China.



Fig. 5 *Sampler of an American Born Chinese*, 2016, slip cast porcelain shower drains, collected hair. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

Datchuk contextualizes the appearance of Chinese-ness and Black-ness within a broader economic framework that is rooted in the history of European and American colonialism and imperialism. Additionally, she subverts the limited expectations of racial or ethnic appearances by embracing the plurality of subjective experience. Because she uses her

body in her work to explore the transmission of race, gender and identity, she is aware that her 'look' will read differently in different contexts. There is a level of interpretation involved in deciphering aesthetic language that is determined by culture and geography. Datchuk writes about how her Chinese-ness was more dominantly legible to people in Germany in a way she had never known before in the United States or Asia.

This new awareness granted her an opportunity to conceive of her identity as whole rather than fractured, and to view the position of the Other as the dominant gaze by which to critique American culture. The result is the series entitled *Girl You Can* (2017). In this body of work Datchuk makes apparent the pathologies of racism and stereotypes that function to serve the agenda of inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside, as well as the myopic gender roles that are embedded in the ideology of nationalism.

With this series Datchuk opens up to incorporating more media, for example, neon signs, 3D prints and jacquard textile. She also obscures her body as a direct point of reference. In the photograph entitled *Money Honey* (Fig. 6), Datchuk focuses on the hands, which are adorned with ornate acrylic nails and 3D printed porcelain rings.



Fig. 6 *Money Honey*, 2017, image of 3D printed, slip cast porcelain, blue and white transfers from Jingdezhen, China; blue and white nails by GLAZE Nail Lounge, San Antonio. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

The image calls out the artifice of beauty ideals represented by the fake nails and ‘impurely’ produced porcelain rings. The composition also calls to mind the stereotypical adornments of African American street culture, which has recently crossed over into White or popular culture. Latent in the image is the historical and contemporary flow of Chinese labor, which has expanded from the tradition of porcelain making in China to nail salons across the United States.

Datchuk’s use of technology, namely with the 3D prints and neon signs, becomes a way to explicate the artifice of race and gender stereotypes—as well as commentary on the persistence of these images within the contemporary moment. Her neon installation entitled *Ching Chong* (Fig. 7) appropriates the typeface invented in the United States to signify ‘Chinese’, or more appropriately for this context, the American understanding of the Oriental.

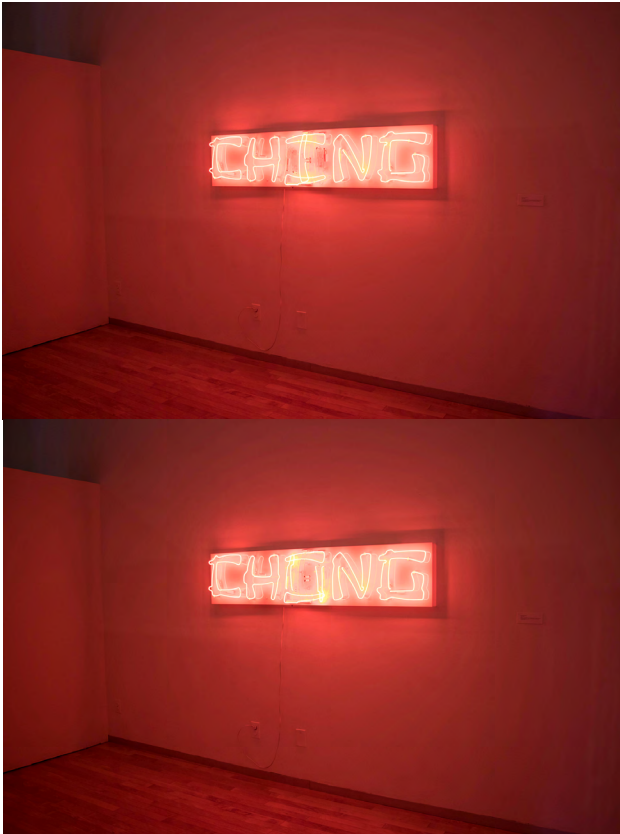


Fig. 7 *Ching Chong*, 2017, neon, acrylic, typeface designed by Jamie Stolarski. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

It is most recognizable in the signage of Chinese restaurants marketing to an American consumer. Even without the direct apprehension of a body, Datchuk exposes that stereotypes manifest through the subliminal messaging of graphic design where the coupling of text and image become a tool for constructing the viewer's perceptions of the Other. In the video entitled *Whitewash* (Fig. 8), Datchuk returns to her analysis of porcelain as a symbol of White-ness valued as beautiful in both Chinese and American culture.



Fig. 8 *Whitewash*, 2017, video stills. © Jennifer Ling Datchuk. Courtesy of the artist.

She creates a double channel display where the images are played side by side. On one side the viewer sees porcelain dishes being exposed to water until they return back to the original clay form, while on the other side Datchuk applies the porcelain clay to her face in an attempt to become the perfect white object. Her performance also calls to mind the beauty rituals of women who mask their faces with clay beauty products in an effort to purify, cleanse, and detoxify the skin. In this way, the clay is the resource by which the body becomes an object, creating and lending its properties to the objectification of the female form.

Datchuk's critical approach to exposing the way race and gender are marketed and sold to the public through the economic systems of trade, labor and commerce creates space for new possibilities in the practice of representation. Her artwork shows the viewer that there is a fertile terrain that exists beyond the boundaries of prescribed identity

positions. And, when one becomes aware that their understanding of the world and the people in it has been manipulated by the motivations of industry, then we can begin to conceive of a society that recognizes difference as a value for community rather than consumption.

By debunking the myth of the homogeneous subject and undermining the notion of purity that is held in relation to national identity, especially in countries that have emerged from colonial pasts,² Datchuk is able to call attention to the substructural forces that divide and subjugate humanity for the purposes of global domination. It is often misunderstood that the image we hold of the Other is a result of free will; on the contrary, Datchuk's artwork uncovers the social conditioning that successfully (yet pathologically) informs our apprehension of identity. This information is assimilated into our consciousness through the things we buy, which become surrogates for the human body—a process of externalization (or objectification) that provides the content for who we are.

The traditional expressions of race and gender are mass-produced articulations of identity. They do not take into account for example the natural order of difference that maintains the diverse, productive and abundant ecosystem of the earth. Datchuk exposes the unnatural mechanisms of the beauty industry and cultural production that create the illusion of the Other. In turn she reveals how Othering works in a global economy to produce a framework for White-ness that the Other is consistently striving to emulate through consumption.

2 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 4.

17. Radically Sustained Care

Chandra McCormick's Katrina Displacement as a Mother and an Artist

Hannah Ryan

An idea weaves through the Women and Migration series—a state of being, a component of identity—much as it weaves through our lives, minds, memories, bodies, and souls: motherhood. How does motherhood define one's experience of migration and its permutations? Based on dialogues with New Orleans photographer Chandra McCormick, this essay explores how motherhood informed every stage of her displacement during Hurricane Katrina and its wretched aftermath.¹

In August of 2005, Katrina struck the Gulf Coast and became one of the worst disasters in the history of the United States. The Mississippi Gulf Outlet, a channel constructed to support the growing shipping industry, took the place of and ruined the wetlands that protected the city, allowing for a massive storm surge, funneling the water straight in, rather than dissipating it, as the wetlands would have done. The Army Corps of Engineers acknowledged that the levees would not protect the city from storms higher than Category 2, but took no action. Further, the areas most vulnerable were those occupied by African American communities, like the Lower Ninth Ward. While the hurricane caused wind damage and minor water

1 This material is derived from an interview between the author and Chandra McCormick on 29 July 2020.

damage in the city, within a day the levees failed and the city flooded, causing unthinkable devastation. Today scholars agree that Katrina was *not* simply a natural disaster, but a catastrophe wrought by the exploitation of natural resources, corruption, neglect, and systemic racism. Over 2,000 people died, 700 were considered missing, and over one million were displaced from their homes, many never to return.² These overlapping losses irrevocably altered one of the world's most unique cities, one with a remarkable retention of African cultural traditions. The city, and the rural spaces surrounding it, have unwaveringly remained McCormick's subjects through it all.

In 1978, nineteen-year-old McCormick sought out twenty-two-year-old photographer and fellow Ninth Ward resident Keith Calhoun to take her portrait. She expressed such sincere interest in the process that he invited her to learn more in the darkroom. Soon she was his mentee, then assistant, and by 1980, she was a photojournalist. They married, had two sons, and have spent the last forty-three years as partners in life and work. Together, they have steadfastly documented Black life in the Lower Ninth Ward, generating an incredibly vast and important body of work. Deborah Willis has recently written, "The couple's photographs are not passive—they are active. They animate and record. They enlarge and make visible life in this city. They attest to notions of public consciousness [...] Love and respect of community motivate them to tell visual stories about their beloved birthplace."³

Dedicated to social justice, they have focused on key themes of labor, agricultural work, the prison industrial complex, Black familial joy, the rich culture and music of their city, and most recently, protests against police brutality and the many ways the COVID-19 pandemic is again changing the city, once again disproportionately impacting its Black residents. They are almost always addressed and discussed as a duo, one inextricable from the other. But in the spirit of The Women and Migration Working Group, I take the opportunity here to center

2 Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 22–24.

3 Deborah Willis, 'Foreword', in *Louisiana Medley: Photographs by Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick*, ed. by Kathryn E. Delmez (Nashville, TN: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2018), p. 8.

McCormick and her longstanding commitment to capturing moments of loving intimacy between mothers and children, interwoven with the story of her displacement.



Fig. 1 Keith Calhoun, *Abstract (Portrait of Chandra McCormick)*, 1988 and 2010.

This is a portrait that Calhoun took of McCormick early in their partnership. The original negative, along with the vast majority of their lives' work, was damaged when the levees a few blocks from their home and studio failed, the second floor blown away and eight feet of water flooding the first. In a process I shall describe, in recent years McCormick and Calhoun have been mining this altered archive, reprinting images with eerily beautiful results.⁴ In this case, the damage has resulted in jewel tones alighting the surface, while an extra layer of delicate patterns covers her dress, a dress that she loved because it belonged to her mother. Her steady gaze imbued with warm confidence, she touches her camera, which she believes is more powerful than any weapon.

4 These works are the focus of an exhibition I curated at St. Olaf College's Flaten Museum of Art in 2020, "We No Longer Consider Them Damaged: The Abstract Photographs of Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun." The exhibition can be viewed online here: <https://wp.stolaf.edu/flaten/we-no-longer-consider-them-damaged/>.



Fig. 2 Chandra McCormick, *Oaklawn Plantation, Franklin, Louisiana*, 1987.

Regardless of shooting location, McCormick finds mothers and children. When I commented on her lovingly intimate images of motherhood, McCormick replied, “I love to see the nurturing. There are families who are living in poverty, but that nurturing is always there.” In this image, a young mother on the Oaklawn Plantation sits on the porch while four children cannot seem to get close enough to her.



Fig. 3 Chandra McCormick, *Untitled* (from *The Sugar Cane* series), 1987.

In this second image from *The Sugar Cane* series, a mother tends to two children, holding one and minding another with her eyes. Watching, paying attention—these actions are central to mothering. “I’m watching

you." "I see you." "Watch out." These are the words we use to assure our children we are paying attention to them.



Fig. 4 Chandra McCormick, *Helping Mama Fold Clothes, Lower Ninth Ward*, 1992.

Back in the city, McCormick captures a little girl helping her mother fold clothes, the mother teaching and the daughter helping. In simple tasks, how do we pass down generational knowledge? This piece demonstrates McCormick's brilliant use of framing: the girl is framed by the dark trim, while another pairing of mother and daughter pass by on the sidewalk, framed by the window.



Fig. 5 Chandra McCormick, *Family, Uptown New Orleans*, 1984.

I asked McCormick how mothering is unique in her community. She reflected, "Well, at one time, lots of people were your mother. Miss Doreen next door. Miss Audrey across the street. Miss Maggie around the corner. Because parents allowed their children to be disciplined and monitored by others—it was different, and I guess that comes down to a level of respect."

When McCormick was eight years old she barely survived Hurricane Betsy, which struck New Orleans in 1965. She says, "It was really horrific, especially for me because I almost drowned, and [then] when Katrina was coming, my youngest son Malik was [almost] eight years old. And, so it was kind of like a reaction from me—it kind of felt the same."

As Katrina barreled into the Gulf, McCormick watched on as people from other low-lying wards were instructed to evacuate, and wondered why that wasn't the case in the Lower Ninth. She and Calhoun drove around and told their neighbors to leave, especially those who hadn't been acquainted with Betsy. While some said they planned to leave, others had decided to ride it out. She told them, "It doesn't look too good and y'all should get out of here because there is a lot of water that's going to come, a seventy-five-foot surge." She recalls, "Some stayed because they wanted to, but a lot stayed because they didn't have the means to get out."

McCormick steadies herself to share her journey.

We planned to leave that Saturday morning and I was going to take my mom, our two kids, Keith and I, and my niece, who was going to school in New York and had come down to visit and got caught up in the hurricane. So we told her to follow us, and we all went to Texas at the last minute. I told my mom to pack up her insurance information, her medicine, five days of clothing, and I did the same for my kids. When I went to pick her up, my brother said, "I'm taking her with me." So I asked her if she wanted to go to Florida with my brother or to Texas with us, and she decided to go with him to Florida.

So we left. It took us nineteen hours to get to Texas. On the road, it was so sad... because I saw people on bicycles trying to get out of town. And you know, the traffic was gridlock, so some people got out of their cabs and they were walking with their suitcases. At first I thought they were on their way to the airport, but every gas station was loaded with cars that were out of gas and the gas stations had run out as well.

It was just crazy, so Keith said, "We gotta get out of this traffic, and we're going to take the river road." The authorities were trying to make

everyone stay on the interstate but it was gridlocked. So Keith took a little cut and got back to the levee, and we just stepped on the gas and rode until some of them stepped out on the road and told us we had to go back on the interstate. But we did gain a lot of miles by doing that. It took us nineteen hours to get to Texas.

En route, McCormick called a young woman from their community darkroom to check on her. The woman reported that her mother had come to pick her up and had taken her back home to Houston. In surprise, McCormick said she was also heading to Houston and the young woman asked if they had anywhere to stay.

I said, we don't know anyone in Houston. We're just going to go and see if we can find a place. She said, well my mom and dad live in Houston and they have a house. You can go [stay] there because they have a back house. I said, I have my family which is four and I have three other people. And she said it doesn't matter. Everybody come.

After a few days, the hosts connected with other friends who owned properties in Houston. They asked McCormick what she wanted for her family. She replied, "I want a house." Her family had never lived in an apartment, and her children needed space. The man told her that he and his wife were living alone in a five-bedroom house and invited them to move in.

And we did. We stayed with Dave for about four weeks while I was looking for a place.

McCormick's maternal labor of research led them to a home in a subdivision in Spring, a suburb of Houston, where they remained for two and a half years.

She says, "We went to Spring because we were looking for the best school district for our kids. Spring is in North-West Houston. And most everybody else that I knew went to the East side." As people fled Katrina they went to resource centers to find housing, and frequently ended up in dilapidated apartment complexes, many rampant with mold. McCormick learned that she needed to watch out.

Where they gained better housing and education, they lost a sense of familial community. From Spring, she lamented, "We miss the people

the most, just the feeling of a neighborhood. It was a more close-knit community there. Here you have cars. In New Orleans, you had people.”⁵

Suburban Houston paled in comparison to the vibrant life of the Lower Ninth Ward, where they enjoyed chatting with friends and family outside and strolling along the levee. McCormick missed the emphasis on culture, and that extended to her children’s education. Their new school was under 15% Black and lacked enrichments they had worked hard to establish for their children. McCormick says, “We [had been] so active in school and [through] so many programs; we had so much going on, but when [we were displaced] I couldn’t put all that back together.” She explains sadly, “All the things we were trying to strive for and the programs he was in, all of that was diminished.”



Fig. 6 Chandra McCormick, *Mother and Child in Houston Convention Center*, 2005.

They connected with family and friends exiled in Houston, visiting the George Brown Convention Center to take photographs and conduct interviews. Here, a displaced mother curls around her infant protectively in one of hundreds of beds in the convention center.

For five years, McCormick and Calhoun rebuilt their home and studio while she managed their younger son Malik’s education, which was bungled by bureaucratic missteps, a lack of resources, the firing of

5 Allan Turner, “New Orleans Photographers Make New Start Here”, *Houston Chronicle*, 27 December 2005, <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/New-Orleans-photographers-make-new-start-here-1919290.php>.

their certified teachers, and the influx of untrained educators through Teach for America. These inexperienced teachers were unfamiliar with the community and regularly called the police on students. Back in New Orleans she was free to work, while her mother and Keith's mother enjoyed spending time with their grandsons.

It was Malik, then a young child, who insisted that they keep the damaged negatives, saying *try freezing them*. And we have this son of artists to thank for the ensuing images, for the rescue of this critical archive that now has new life.



Fig. 7 Keith Calhoun, *Mother and Child*, 1988 and 2010.

Here, a mother tenderly cradles her snoozing child in church, the image itself cared for over time. Mold encroached across the picture plane, and froze just before it reached the vulnerable baby, as if this brilliant act of saving the image has saved the future itself. Dealing in tenderness can be an act of bold resistance; McCormick and Calhoun strategically capture scenes of love among Black parents and their children as a tool

to subvert dominant, pervasive stereotypes that simply do not reflect the relationships that surround them.



Fig. 8 Chandra McCormick, *Daydreaming in City Park*, 1989 and 2015.

Here, boys play in a wooded park, while the mother watches on, holding everything, as we do. “Chandra,” I say, “you’re taking unthinkable damage and making beautiful images, even this week. It seems like... radically sustained care. You keep caring for these images over and over again. How does that translate to your experience of motherhood, continuing to care and care?”

She calls to Malik, who is working on a project in her studio. She and I are talking on FaceTime. My mother watches my children downstairs.

She thinks a bit and says, “Yes, it does, because it’s the same: you care for your family, and your things, and take care of them, that’s the same loving care that I put into my work too. Because I wouldn’t have it if I didn’t. Early on, before the hurricane, we talked about preserving our work. We would archivally sleeve our work. Those sleeves are what saved that work. If they hadn’t been in there everything would have been washed away.” It was this early belief in themselves, that they were chronicling their community crucially from within and that they would amass a critical archive of Black life, that ultimately saved the work. How are foresight, self-assurance, and steadfast dedication central to care? How is paying attention central to love?



Fig. 9 Chandra McCormick, *Mother Combing Hair*, 2020.

McCormick and Calhoun have recently turned their lenses toward the changes wrought by the pandemic. Despite the city evolving again, she pays continued attention to the affective labor and love of mothering, the small but meaningful actions, the fleeting but intentional gazes, that amount to motherhood. When considered all together, McCormick's longstanding devotion to maternal affection signals radically sustained care, as an artist and a mother.

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18. Carrie Mae Weems—Making Points and Changing Views

Deborah Willis

The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.

Ida B. Wells

I am a storyteller and therefore an optimist, a firm believer in the ethical bend of the human heart... from my point of view, your life is already artful—waiting, just waiting, for you to make it art.

Toni Morrison

Inspired by the broad history of beauty in art, photography, architecture, and fashion, New York-based conceptual artist Carrie Mae Weems enacts a moment of pleasure and imagines worlds of abundance that encourage interiority of mind and a spirit of contemplation in her work focusing on Mary J. Blige (Queen B). Weems has received critical, global attention for her photographs and her performativity in photography and video that focuses on black life globally. In the fall of 2020, Weems created a work for the Vienna State Opera House Safety Curtain and it reads as an ideal setting for this large-scale portrait as concepts of stage and staging codes of beauty are performed in this photograph that simultaneously explores treasured moments, and literal and symbolic treasure.

Beauty in opera often comes as much from the performances presented on the stage as from the set design, dramatic scenes, attire, and the actors themselves. Beauty is enacted in this photograph with the centering of iconic singer Mary J. Blige, the black American female subject adorned in fur, diamonds, and pearls, as she surveys and affirms

her beauty in an oval-shaped mirror, with a red velvet backing. I imagine that viewers in the opera house were amazed with the monumentality of black beauty on the global stage as they sat in their seats looking at objects of beauty in Weems's photograph, which is printed on the safety curtain.

Weems is well aware of representations or codes of desire, from the arrays of fresh peonies and pink roses to the oval-shaped frames with crown and tiara, which reflect the mirror, to the marble busts by artist Kehinde Wiley that recreate artworks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in miniature. Metaphors on history, linkages, and connections abound through the use of a Bamana Ci Wara headdress from Mali, which honors prosperity and success of people who cultivated the land for harvest. A seated figure carved in ebony from Nigeria rests on the mantel of the ornate fireplace. Weems signals opulence through the use of crystal, silver, and gold trimmings on pillows, upholstered chairs, and decorated marble walls. Beauty and grace are denoted in this image by the appearance of a 'stuffed' white swan. In framing this interplay between history and metaphor, Weems considers the narrative of the ballet *Swan Lake* as it explores notions of mobility and of elegance, translated in this image through style and lavishness. Weems appreciates the power of architectural and interior spaces and the viewer is invited to enter into a space of power.

Weems is cognizant of what it means to create an environmental portrait that offers the viewer space for dreaming, of new identities and re-envisioned potential, the license to both preserve and remake the world. By placing the large globe on the table Weems explores the idea of controlling/mapping new spaces to reimagine beauty in the Global South. Weems conjures the imaginary of both viewer and Queen B by visualizing pleasure and progress, desire and possibility, through jewelry, a designer sweat suit, and a swept-up hairstyle that accentuates her beauty. The formal table setting with its lavish meal of succulent fruits, cheeses, berries, and loaves of bread placed on colorful tablecloths provides the structure of this staged scene, disrupting a history of denying black beauty.

Weems's image is infused with the nostalgia and romanticism of classical art, a broad history of culture, race, and gender as told through iconic references to global conquest and engagement. Weems challenges

both historic and contemporary visual narratives that privilege others by highlighting race, class and style in the symbolic context of the opera house. In focusing our gaze on this depiction of black wealth and black beauty, Weems establishes a presence and place for black women throughout the world and throughout history. The richness and complexity of this evocative photograph conveys a body politic that intersects with popular culture and aesthetics. In the image, theater, fashion, and art are restaged to invoke new histories and reimagine present-day narratives. In Weems's glamorous and idealized portrait, the black female body occupies a prominent place in art history as she does in music.

Weems continues to receive critical attention for her performance art and art installations focusing on black life in the low country of South Carolina, sea islands off the coast of Georgia and southern Louisiana, New Orleans, as well as cities in the United Kingdom, Germany, Cuba, Senegal, Ghana, and Italy. Weems's 2006 *Roaming* series also consists of large-scale photographs created in cities in Europe as they reference imperial and colonial power. She explores the complexities of representation in contemporary art practices that inform and translate views on gender and race. By creating a visual memoir that looks at freedom and migration, Weems's *Roaming* series is a search for a counter-memory. Weems focuses her lens on her own ability to roam freely and to see the building of empires. She considers and reflects on the past and the lack of free will of women who were forced to migrate and travel to work on foreign soil.

Roaming is about seeing and being seen. It is about mobility and freedom. It forces the viewer to see *race*, often obscured or erased in museum exhibitions; *beauty*, denied or accepted when considering the black female body; and the *potential* of the black robed figure that guides us through rugged landscapes, pristine city views, and forbidden class structures. Weems's project begs the question, "What did early travel photographers see during the colonial periods?" Weems challenges us to see what travelers in the past saw, and the *hope* of the traveler of today. Weems is aware of what it means to critically evaluate images from the picturesque to the environmental portrait and how types of images are viewed in art and popular culture. She grasps the absence of black women in art institutions and cultural space as she migrates.

Weems explores *absence* as she travels the world. We see Weems looking at historical sites, landscapes, and monuments. As curator Franklin Sirmans so aptly states, with *Roaming* and the related *Museum Series*, Weems combined her interest in the structures of history (its monuments, museums, and other institutions) with herself in the landscape. Now she is no longer acting but is functioning as an omniscient observer, suggesting either a dominance of the landscape by humans or the puny insignificance of humanity in nature. In both the photographs taken in front of classical structures in Rome and in the *Museum Series*, Weems stands like a monumental sculpture to be reckoned and dealt with in the confines of those structures on which she stares down.¹

The power of her images is informed with nostalgia and romanticism, both intriguing aspects of the *Roaming* series. She explores the mysteries and challenges of historical narratives that privilege other alternate stories. She is her own muse as she poses questions within the frame of history and as she restages and projects a new visual order through the ground glass. Throughout her explorations in *Roaming*, Weems is both witness and interpreter.

Weems is also known for her photographic series and multi-screen projections relating to family, beauty, and memory. In the past, she has constructed a series of works interrogating black women's presence in popular culture as well as architecture and art history. An artist concerned about iconicity, she problematizes the icon by standing and facing historical sites. Noting and contesting inequities, Weems establishes a presence and place for black women throughout the world and throughout history. In the images of her erect body dressed in a black gown, she leads us through vast landscapes with confidence and ease—we are assured that we will be guided on a difficult but necessary journey.

In the 1990s the spoken word (the sonic) became central to her art making, which revealed a new range for Weems as she could broaden her work by performing abstracted memories. Weems is a passionate

1 Franklin Sirmans, 'A World of her Own: Carrie Mae Weems and Performance', in *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video*, Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts in association with Yale University Press, 2013, p. 53.

researcher and incorporates diverse narratives to reflect the past and the present.

As she positions herself in the global landscape, Weems reflects on the contemporary narrative of migration, combining and connecting historical references from the Middle Passage to forced and voluntary migration today. By using her own body to recall and locate the social imaginary found in history and in the current news, her images gain in intensity as we see her as an eyewitness to past and contemporary violence. *Roaming* for Weems is about pondering and disrupting injustices. Her journey considers the plight of not only women, but of men and children as well. Current debates on migration oftentimes invoke the violence suffered by women and men who have lost children in the wake of war and displacement. Weems offers us a contemplative moment to consider the inequities experienced by mothers and women who moved, under the threat of intimidation and death, to some of the landscapes that she shares with us in her images. In my view, Weems's compassion is demonstrated as she evokes mourning cloth in her black gown.

Carrie Mae Weems's "When and Where I Enter—*Mussolini's Rome*" (2006) is a large-scale photograph from her *Roaming* series. Its title is based on the memoir of the nineteenth-century black woman educator, Anna Julia Cooper. Current debates on migration are oftentimes violent and intimidating; many women have lost children in the wake of war and displacement. Weems acts as witness to these events. By embodying these women and re-enacting their journey, Weems becomes a messenger who not only helps the viewer visualize the experiences and heightens our senses, but also provokes us to want to do something. Weems's presence is strong and is the hidden witness that incites action. Weems stands in front and behind a medium and large format camera to produce work that critiques both social history and the history of photography, even as she uses the photograph to visualize and inform. The richness found in these striking photographs and the memories invoked convey a political consciousness of the tragedies at sea and in cities around the world.

Roaming builds on Weems's earlier series. I believe it is her intention to require her viewers to rethink and question their understanding of social justice. Using the photograph as an object of memory, Weems

reworks and restages images to construct narratives that explore the experiences of those anonymous women in history who have been subjected to the camera's gaze—specifically the gaze that dehumanizes and obscures. Weems adds to the visual representation of the current politicized environment for black migrating bodies with subversive photographs that explore new ways of expressing memory and opening opportunities to transform and make visible a complex history of beauty in history. Weems offers distinctive points of view on migration that shift our understanding about the ubiquity of global movement in our current cultural, economic and socio-political environments. She contemplates the idea of migration as it intersects with personal narratives, self-invention, issues of cultural identity, race, gender, sexuality, political activism, social justice, leisure culture, the discourse of domination, and global freedom struggles. In a society where stories of migration are often stigmatized and excluded, Weems puts these diverse stories at the forefront of her art practice.



Fig. 1 Carrie Mae Weems, *When and Where I Enter — Mussolini's Rome* (2006), digital c-print, 73x61" (framed). © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Fig. 2 Carrie Mae Weems, *Queen B (Mary J. Blige) (2020), Safety Curtain*, museum in progress, Vienna State Opera (2020/2021), large scale picture. © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo Credit: Andreas Scheiblecker, Copyright: the artist and museum in progress

19. Nuyorican Abstract

Thinking through Candida Alvarez and Glendalys Medina

Arlene Dávila

Womxn contemporary artists have historically faced greater challenges in obtaining art historical and market recognition. This is even more the case for womxn and non-binary artists of color, and those working in genres that are most typically associated with male white artists, like abstract art. To date, we know very little about Latinx abstract art, while abstraction remains racialized and so firmly associated with whiteness that, despite generations of internationally-renowned artists of color working in abstraction, it is still difficult to summon the Latinx abstract.

These issues are brought to the fore in *Latinx Abstract* (2021), an exhibition at BRIC in Brooklyn exploring abstraction as an important aesthetic in Latinx artists' diverse repertoire. The exhibition forces a consideration of the racial politics of abstraction, an unavoidable topic when discussing a genre so tied to a Eurocentric history tracing its origins and best representation to European and Anglo-American artists in the mid-twentieth century (Ferrer 2021). Think here of the "abstract expressionist" masters canonized by the Museum of Modern Art from the 1940s and 1950s. As the exhibition's curator Elizabeth Ferrer notes, for decades now, art historians and curators have challenged and rewritten this canonical view, uncovering the many excluded histories of abstraction, to little avail. For instance, anthropologists have shown abstraction to be a transcultural artistic manifestation found in cultures across time and space throughout the world (Borea 2017). For their part,

art historians have examined the globality of abstraction, showing its development across regions in simultaneity or with anteriority to the “abstract expressionist masters” that dominate the Eurocentric canon (Karmel 2020). Then, there are the many philosophical arguments questioning the distinct nature of abstractionist aesthetics. This is the view that, insofar as all art operates in a “denaturalizing and reformative fashion”, it is definitionally always abstract (Harper 2015).

Still, the pervasive conception of abstraction as extraneous to people of color endures, buttressed by the stereotypical assumption that one is supposed to “see” identity in their art (English 2007). Abstraction, conceived in strict opposition to some equally static conception of realist art, troubles this dictum, hence the many debates preoccupying African American artists and critical race theorists for generations in regards to what constitutes black art and how it should look (Cahan 2015, Harper 2015). Related to this issue are debates on the political possibilities and constraints of abstraction for artists and communities of color. While some question abstraction’s political stakes, others praise its “freedom” from the representational risks of evoking “positive” and negative images and stereotypes (Harper 2015). In fact, in a context where black and brown bodies are increasingly coveted in a contemporary art market dominated by primarily white collectors, we can understand why some artists of color may purposefully choose abstraction to avoid their fetishization and commodification. At the same time, abstraction’s whitewashing tendencies endure in its use as the chosen aesthetic to contain and erase ethnic and racial difference. For instance, Johana Londoño documents the use of abstraction as a tool to sanitize, whitewash and accommodate racial difference in urban design, by reducing it to color or a style that lessens and contains the threat of difference and its political significance (Londoño 2020).

In sum, to think about abstraction and artists of color is to necessarily engage with identity and politics, and while neither works in a silo from the particular contexts in which they play out, we can at least strive for more textured and expansive considerations of abstraction that ease some of these representational predicaments. We can start by questioning the racialization of the genre, and how much its continued association with whiteness has historically rendered any abstract artist who is not white either suspect or derivative. Second, we could

challenge formalist distinctions between ‘realism’ and abstraction in art history and MFA training parlance, which sees them as opposites and irreconcilable aesthetics.

For sure, Latinx artists are ready to move past seeing abstract art as a bounded, identifiable aesthetic that is more “legitimately” Anglo European. My interviews with Latinx artists showed that they were tired of fielding irritating questions whenever they work in abstraction (Dávila 2020). Some felt pressure to move away from figurative work to abstraction, which they felt was favored by their MFA mentors as “qualitatively” better. Others experienced pushback against doing abstract work in the form of accusations that they wanted to whitewash their work, or of blatant and subtle biases favoring work that could be “seen” as Latinx, displaying an expectation that brown and black artists painting brown and black figures would be more commercially viable. Many also bemoaned the art market’s limiting pressure to decide between branding themselves as “figurative” or abstract artists, as though this were a strict and irreversible choice. In other words, abstraction was seen as a highly contested terrain loaded with meanings and issues, beyond artists’ control, or their intentions. All of this made abstract art extremely political—because to do abstract art often involved battles to assert the right to produce work free of imposed expectations, constraints, or assumptions.

Yet one key lesson from reviewing the history of African American artists and abstraction is the importance of claiming space in all types of exhibitions as a way of transforming and troubling its dominant meanings and uses. To date, an archive of important exhibitions of African American art have canonized abstraction in African American art, in ways that make early questions around the authenticity or the politics of abstraction in African American art seem almost passé, at least when considered from a historical perspective. These include the well documented *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition at the Whitney Museum (1969) and the *Deluxe Show* (1971), early solo shows of abstract artists, *Al Loving* (1969) and *Frank Bowling* (1971) at the Whitney Museum, as well as numerous group-shows featuring abstract artists at the Studio Museum. Many more exhibitions have seamlessly highlighted black abstract artists in major museums across the US from Houston to Baltimore, as well as exhibitions of international recognition

such as *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, which highlighted their political and revolutionary aesthetics. To date, African American abstract artists such as Mark Bradford and Sam Gilliam remain some of the most successful African American contemporary artists—both of them males—which raises the specter of male dominance in contemporary art, and considerations around gender, abstraction, and commercial success.

With Latinx abstract art, however, we are far from achieving a more complex and rounded representation where abstraction is presented as a widespread aesthetic, rather than one that is rare or politically charged. Indeed, stereotypes of Latinx art and visual culture as mostly figurative, didactic and political stem from the scarcity of representations that exist. Here Ferrer's exhibition is revolutionary for powerfully signaling the scarcity of exhibitions featuring abstract artists with vigor. Ferrer points to the 2013 exhibition at the American Art Museum of the Smithsonian Institution curated by Dr. E. Carmen Ramos, *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art*, which featured a number of artists working in abstraction such as Olga Albizu, Teresita Fernández, Jesús Morales, Paul Henry Ramirez, and Freddy Rodríguez, as well as to the solo exhibition by artist Virginia Jaramillo, in fall 2020 at the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas as two foundational exhibitions foregrounding Latinx abstract artists. Coincidentally, Jaramillo's show marks the fiftieth anniversary of her inclusion as the only woman and Latina in the Menil's groundbreaking *The De Luxe Show* (1971), one of the first abstract contemporary art exhibitions to feature artists of color in the United States (Moya Ford 2020). Then there is also the Carmen Herrera solo show, which catapulted her to market success, though as I note elsewhere, the tendency to brand her Cubanness has lessened her recognition as a Latinx artist (Dávila 2020). Still, the number of exhibitions featuring Latinx abstract artists that get national attention are few and far between.

Thus, I want to end by considering two of the artists in the exhibition in order to contribute to improving the scarcity of knowledge about abstract Latinx artists. I purposefully focus on Candida Alvarez and Glendalys Medina, two Afro Boricua artists born and raised in New York, because we do not tend to associate Nuyorican art with abstraction, even though there are many examples of Nuyorican artists past and present

working in abstract art, such as Carlos Osorio, Marcos Dimas, and José Morales. I also seek to challenge the hegemony of male Nuyorican artists in all types of genres. The artists I chose represent different generations and experiences. Born in Brooklyn in 1955 and now living in Chicago, Candida started her art career in New York City in the midst of multiculturalism, at the height of ‘Hispanic’ art. In fact, she was one of the artists interviewed by Coco Fusco in her critical 1988 essay “Hispanic Artists and Other Slurs”, which exposed the stereotypical homogenization of Latinx and Latin American artists. Glendalys, twenty-four years younger, was born in Puerto Rico and raised in the Bronx, and is working at a moment of growing recognition of Latinx artists. Their inclusion in a show like *Latinx Abstract* would have been unimaginable for Alvarez in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Latinx artists were seldom the subject of an exhibition spotlight of their own, much less a focus on their abstract art.

The artists’ generational difference also affects their personal racial and ethnic identification. Coming of age at a time when ‘Black’ was simply equated with African American, Candida prefers to identify as Boricua, Puerto Rican or Nuyorican, while Glendalys also self-defines as Afro-Puerto Rican, or Afro-Caribbean, as well as non-binary, like many Latinx of her generation. Of note is Candida’s recent coming of age despite her long and productive career. Alvarez had her first major institutional survey in 2017 in the Chicago Cultural Center, considerably late for an artist of her caliber, and on the heels of a sudden turn to uncover neglected contemporary female artists. She has also been recently ‘discovered’ by the art market. After facing a sporadic relationship with the market amidst a growing favor for artists of color doing representational work—which left little room for a female Puerto Rican abstract painter—she is currently represented by Monique Meloche Gallery in Chicago (2019–present) and Gavlak Gallery in Los Angeles (2018–present). For their part, Glendalys experienced speculation from gallerists interested in their work as a younger artist, but less so now when they are savvier and more adept at maneuvering the art market.

Finally, each of these artists has long challenged categorizations and narrow definitions of her work, warning us against the tendency to pigeonhole Latinx artists within particular genres. For instance,

during a conversation with artist Kay Rosen, Alvarez refuses to pick sides between abstraction and representation, pointing to the work of Gerhard Richter, who did not “have to pick a side”, to insist that her work happens between the two: “What happens between them both? It’s called L-I-F-E. For me, that was my answer” (Alvarez 2020).

Candida eschews these boundaries and techniques constructed in the history of modernism, recognizing that while they may be integral to how art is written about and taught, they have little to do with artists of color who have had to “fight for our freedom.” As she asked: “How dare you tell me that because of the color of my skin, I have to fit your stereotype. They think that if you see a woman of color, you have to give them a brown figure—Artists should be given permission and freedom to invent.” On this point, Candida echoes the will of so many Latinx artists to challenge the deterministic ideas around her body, gender and color: “I am always the body first—it never leaves, that’s why I had to go to a place I would be mysterious.”

In fact, Candida’s work can be seen as a long trajectory to fight for her imagination and her paintings as a mysterious space in which to be free, to create, and invent. Candida’s colorful Vision Paintings, exhibited in *Latinx Abstract*, are a perfect example. These paintings were influenced by the frescoes and paintings of Piero de la Francesca when she visited Umbria and was amazed by their color and brilliance, despite their age. Candida takes color seriously; she considers it magical, but also the product of science and experimentation. She also sees herself as a poet or writer in the process of creation and describes her paintings as the product of expression, imagination and conversations with multiple imaginary interlocutors that visit her whenever she paints. While creating the Vision Paintings, her visitor was Puerto Rican Impressionist painter Francisco Oller (1833–1917), the artist that most influenced her to become an artist, and more specifically, a painter. She tells me that “He came into the room” when she was thinking about his famous painting “El velorio” (*The Wake*, 1893), which she deconstructs formally in the Vision Paintings.

Indeed, in a recent Artnews interview Candida describes her paintings as “chatty”—alluding to the endless conversation her work inspires. “I feel like my paintings are talking back to me”, she says.

"I love that they're very chatty. They give me peace. They give me memories. And sometimes, they're just distractions." Abstract work is usually considered to lack narratives in relation to figurative art, yet Candida's work encourages us to appreciate the narratives involved in the actual process of creating the work, halting the impulse to seek overarching narratives in artworks, which fail to take into account the interiority of the artist or their method. As she describes, *Vision Paintings* communicate but in ways that writing or speaking cannot. In fact, they communicate beyond the visual, if one considers Candida's blurry, troubled vision and her tendency to work without glasses: "it is really my imperfect vision that leads the way through the painting."



Fig. 1 Candida Alvarez, *Vision Painting: No. 6* (2020), Acrylic on linen, 20x20".
Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery. Photo Credit: Tom
Van Eynde, Chicago.

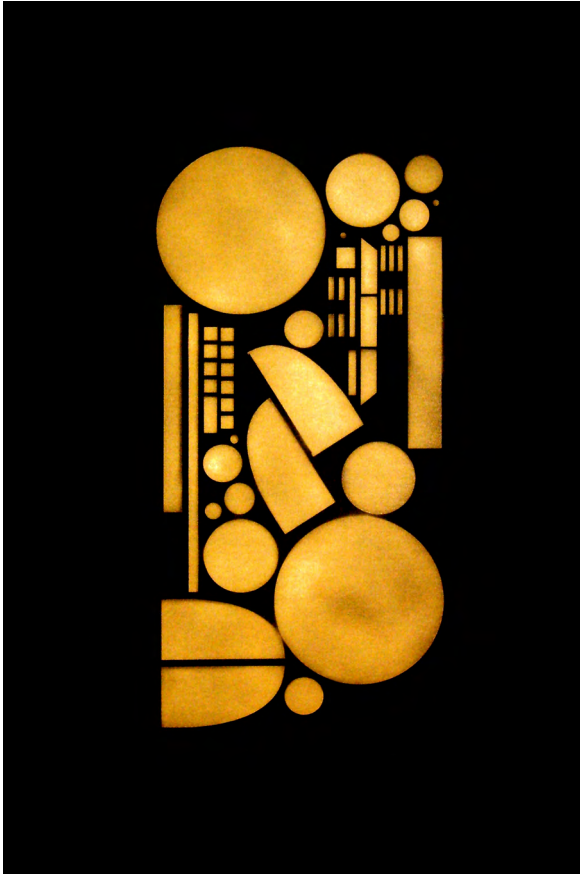


Fig. 2 Glendalys Medina, *BlackGold* (2012), Spray paint on paper, Edition of 50.

Glendalys's works in *Latinx Abstract* echo a similar quest to challenge the imposed limits and meanings of abstraction. In fact, as one of many Latinx abstract artists I met who has faced accusations of producing work that is "too white", or, in particular, of seeking to emulate Sol LeWitt, this goal is both political and personal. "It's not easy to swallow a person of color doing abstract work", they tell me, marveling at why white artists remain the key public reference available for accessing abstraction, entirely bypassing generations of abstract artists of color.

In fact, Medina's piece *BlackGold* (2012) represents a direct challenge to dominant views of abstraction as "too white." With this piece, Medina

anchors the values of transcultural identity and difference—which they feel are missing in the art world—imbuing geometric forms, often seen as an absence of identity, with highly saturated cultural references. For instance, in *BlackGold* they make up a pictorial and original visual alphabet based on geometric shapes deconstructed from the popular boombox. In it, Afrodiasporic cultural references from hip-hop commingle with indigenous visual references to anchor the work in pre-modern influences of abstraction. As Glendalys tells me, “The indigenous people were the first graffiti artists.” Like other Nuyorican artists, Glendalys uses Taino references as a foundation for her own Nuyorican identity. In particular, their use of gold draws on research into Fray Inigo de Abad y Lasierra’s 1788 representation of Taino as “sun-kissed” and the dominance of gold in the colonial Spanish economy, which fueled the genocide of indigenous peoples across the Americas. With this piece, Medina exposes gold’s continued fetishization in present-day consumer-capitalist societies, while elevating urban, hip-hop, and Afro-Nuyorican and Taino references in her work. When drawing on Abad y Lasierra’s accounts, Medina is well aware that they are drawing on the incomplete and fictional perspective of colonizers, but this only makes these sources more uniquely suited for her re-telling of new narratives of Nuyorican empowerment. In the end, Medina traces a direct line of invention, creativity and empowerment between the art and writing the Taino left in stones and those of kids carrying boomboxes, listening to hip-hop and writing graffiti in the Bronx.

In all, abstract art has played and continues to play a key anchoring role in the experiences of these two Nuyorican artists and many more abstract Latinx artists. For both, abstraction functions as a space to refuse narrow identification and stereotypes about their work, and to tell broader stories about their past and present, while challenging art history narratives where there is no space to imagine artists like them. Their narratives about their practice, positionality and work also provide clues as to how artists contest and refashion borders and identities in the art world. They demonstrate why it is so important that we broaden our understanding and repertoire of women’s creativity and invention, as well as the scope and image of contemporary Nuyorican art.

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20. Joy Gregory: A Woman on the Go!

Cheryl Finley



Fig. 1 Joy Gregory, *Bridge of Miracles*, Venice, 1997–2001. Image copyright the author. All rights reserved.

West Indian emigrants, such as my parents, traveled [to Europe] with the hope that both worlds might belong to them, the old and the new. They traveled in the hope that the mother country would remain true to her promise that she would protect the children of her empire. However, shortly after disembarkation the West Indian migrants of the fifties and sixties discovered that the realities of this new world were likely to be more challenging than they had anticipated. In fact, much to their dismay, they discovered that the mother country had little, if any desire to embrace her colonial offspring.

Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound*

Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and the living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent the ghost.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

The journey to Elmina Castle, Ouidah, or Gorée Island is first and foremost a way of commemorating slavery at its purported site of origin, although one could just as easily travel to Portugal or visit the Vatican.

Saidiya Hartman, *The Time of Slavery*

On the twentieth anniversary of photographer Joy Gregory's seminal series *Cinderella Tours Europe* (1997–2001), let us take a moment to consider how ahead of her time this globe-trotting artist was, offering a series of photographs that recast fairytale notions of home and belonging, race, gender and nation, suggesting new roles within the ever-moving global economy of desire. In *Cinderella Tours Europe*, Gregory photographed famous buildings, monuments, and cities associated with the construction of a popular image of Europe, such as the famed Sagrada Familia Church by Antoni Gaudí in Barcelona or the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The places that Gregory chose to record on film comprise a list of the classic sites of memory on any tourist's photographic itinerary. Many of these sites have long held a place in the popular imagination of Europe, like the Alhambra in Granada or the city of Venice, itself a magical mirage of twelfth-century buildings floating on water. Other sites are associated with more recent historical and political narratives, such as the Palais des Nations or the 1936 Olympic Park in Berlin. But Gregory's images are anything but your typical tourist photograph. While she employs many of the conventions of tourist photography, from the use of vibrant color film to the conscious choice of the most advantageous angle, the one thing that is missing from each photograph is the tourist body itself, which has been replaced by a pair of very self-possessed golden slippers, both referencing the classic Cinderella fairytale and literally standing in for contemporary Caribbean people, for whom the possibility of such a grand tour is becoming more and more difficult. The result is something distinctly of the artist's making, a reengineered notion of the tourist snap, layered with a twenty-first century sense of diasporic memory.

Cinderella Was Black

Most of us know Cinderella from the children's storybook fairytale or the animated Walt Disney film.¹ The young woman that we picture has fair skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. She is rescued from a life of servitude by a little bit of magic, a pair of gold (or glass) slippers, and a handsome prince. Cinderella embodies a child's hopes and dreams and her literal rags-to-riches story symbolizes the classic battle of good over evil. Gregory's re-visioning of this popular fairytale imagines a post-colonial life for Cinderella in a global economy of tourism, labor and commodities, while trying to make sense of the past and present. In the fairytale,

The poor child had to do the most difficult work. She had to get up before sunrise, carry water, make the fire, cook, and wash. To add to her misery, her stepsisters ridiculed her and then scattered peas and lentils into the ashes, and she had to spend the whole day sorting them out again. At night when she was tired there was no bed for her to sleep in, but she had

1 *Cinderella Tours Europe* is based on the Grimm Brothers' version of *Cinderella*, first published by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Kassel, 1812 (the English translation was published in 1857). The Grimms' version features a gold slipper, not a glass slipper, and Cinderella's stepsisters cut off pieces of their feet (toes and a slice of a heel) in attempts to fit the shoe. The most popular version of the Cinderella narrative, *Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper*, first appeared in Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1697), with the alternate title *Contes de Ma Mère l'Oye* (*Mother Goose Tales*). The classic Disney animated film was based on the Perrault version. See: Brothers Grimm, *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993), pp. 80–86. *Cinderella*, dir. Wilfred Jackson; Hamilton Luske, Clyde Geronimi (Walt Disney Studio/RKO Radio Pictures, 1950). The animated sequel, *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True*, was released direct-to-video in 2002; see *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True*, dir. John Kafka (Walt Disney Pictures, 2002). A musical film version was released in 1964 with a score by Rogers and Hammerstein, starring the brown-haired, brown-eyed Lesley Anne Warren as Cinderella and Ginger Rogers as the Queen; see *Cinderella*, dir. Charles S. Dubin (Samuel Goldwyn, 1964). In 2003, a musical film version of *Cinderella* produced by the Wonderful World of Disney and Whitney Houston presented the first multi-racial cast, starring the pop music and television star Brandy as Cinderella, Whitney Houston as the fairy godmother, Whoopi Goldberg as the Queen and Paulo Montalban as the Prince; the Cinderella fairytale also has been adapted as a popular horror film based on a novel by Stephen King (*Carrie*, dir. Brian De Palma, United Artists, 1976), and as an urban love story (*Are You Cinderella?*, written and dir. Charles Hall, A fat-daddy-loves-you production, 1999).

to lie down next to the hearth in the ashes. Because she was always dirty with ashes and dust, they gave her the name *Cinderella*.²

As a young woman forced to slave away for an evil stepmother and two tortuous stepsisters, she could represent the ancestors of contemporary Caribbean people who were once enslaved by Europeans and over whose freedom and humanity a battle of good and evil ensued for centuries. The enchanted journey that Gregory documents with *Cinderella's* golden slippers envisions the ability of Caribbean people to transgress the borders of Europe from which they are increasingly restricted.

Caribbean-European (Dis)Connections

The impetus for *Cinderella Tours Europe* grew out of research that the artist was conducting in Europe and her former colonies in the Caribbean for the two critically acclaimed projects *Lost Histories* (1997) and *Memory and Skin* (1998).³ Over five months, Gregory traveled extensively in Belgium, Holland, France, Spain, Portugal, Cuba, Jamaica, Panama, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, and Haiti. Probing for evidence of the contemporary and colonial relationship between Europe and the Caribbean, she conducted interviews with people while collecting artifacts, recording sound, and photographing important sites of memory.

One of the paradoxes Gregory noticed about the people she met in the Caribbean was their strong connection to, and affinity for, Europe as a motherland, despite the fact that some were the (partial) descendants of enslaved Africans forcibly brought by Europeans to the so-called new world to work the sugar cane, rice, and tobacco plantations. The fruits of their labors helped to build Europe while stripping the Caribbean and Africa of valuable natural and human resources. Today, many of the

2 Brothers Grimm, p. 80.

3 *Lost Histories* was commissioned by the National Gallery of South Africa, Cape Town, where it was first exhibited in 1998. The exhibition of twenty salt prints also traveled to the Durban Art Gallery, South Africa, in the same year. *Memory and Skin*, Gregory's first installation of photographs, sound, video, sculpture and artifacts, has been shown widely in the United Kingdom, appearing at the Huddersfield Art Gallery (1998), the Fruit Market Gallery in Edinburgh (1998), and at the Royal Photographic Society in Bath (1999). See Joy Gregory, *Memory and Skin*, 1999 (exhibition catalogue); *Continental Drift: Europe Approaching the Millennium* (Edinburgh: Fruit Market Gallery and Edinburgh College of Art/Edinburgh Projects, 1998), 16–23.

world's poorest nations are located in these regions, including Haiti and Sierra Leone, to name just two.

Considering the effects of the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent ravages of colonial rule, it should come as no surprise that the familial bond between Europe and the Caribbean is complicated, to say the least. On the one hand, Europe symbolizes the evil stepmother of the Cinderella fairytale; on the other hand, it represents the free, happily-ever-after lifestyle that the handsome prince offers. Many Caribbean residents were lured to mother Europe during the post-war era with the promise of employment, better education, and the benefits of being at the epicenter of the empire, even in its decline. Gregory's parents emigrated from Jamaica to England more than forty years ago, settling in Britain's Home Counties, near the city of Leeds in Yorkshire.⁴ They represent the West Indian emigrants that Caryl Phillips spoke of in his novel, *The Atlantic Sound* (2000), who "traveled [to Europe] with the hope that both worlds might belong to them, the old and the new. They traveled in the hope that the mother country would remain true to her promise that she would protect the children of her empire."⁵

For those that remained in the Caribbean, Europe still represents a mythical, faraway place, a fantasyland and an unattainable dream, according to many of the people that Gregory interviewed. She asked them, "Where would you go, if you could?"⁶ Many responded with the name of a European country or city: England, France, Spain and Portugal were the popular countries, while London, Paris, Venice and Lisbon were the favored cities. The people that Gregory spoke to were very knowledgeable about Europe, from the colonial ties that bind them as well as from articles in the press, grade-school history and geography

4 Leeds now boasts a significant Caribbean population, mostly from Jamaica. The city center is approximately twenty-five minutes from Harewood House, an opulent English stately home built on 4,000 acres of rolling countryside in the late eighteenth century by the Lascelles family, who had considerable interests in sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Harewood House is one of the most popular national tourist destinations in the Midlands, where a sense of Englishness (read 'European') and national pride are bestowed upon the visitor with little mention of its historical and contemporary ties to the Caribbean. Present efforts on the part of the Heritage Lottery Fund and local scholars, activists and cultural workers are trying to make connections between the intertwined histories of Harewood House and the Caribbean more integral to public history.

5 Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) 20–21.

6 Interview with Joy Gregory, London, 9 June 2003.

classes, and their relatives who went there some fifty years ago or less. One person explained her dream of going to Europe: "My mother left us here and went to England in 1962; she never came home."⁷ Certainly, today's residents of most Caribbean nations rarely have the means to go to Europe to visit family or for medical treatment, let alone to take a vacation. Not to mention the fact that even if they did book a holiday, access is now restricted: they are required by some mother countries to have a visa, which is often difficult to obtain. For example, the United Kingdom now requires Jamaicans to carry a visa.

As a first-generation Jamaican English woman, Gregory has a special understanding of the complicated relationship between Europe and the Caribbean. She still has familial ties in Jamaica and is acutely aware of how freely she can travel there with her British passport, and how difficult it is for her Jamaican relatives to visit her in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe (and around the world). The artist also notes how painfully ironic it is that the people whose ancestors labored to build Europe are increasingly shut out (of her borders) and unacknowledged. Their fate seems to be part of a larger trend, or backlash, if you will, borne out of fears stemming from the globalization of labor, commodities and tourism, on the one hand, and of the formalization of the European Union, on the other. Timely in the making, *Cinderella Tours Europe* was completed at the close of 2001, just months before the European Union introduced the Euro in February 2002, and significant discussions about the consequences of a global economy began in the major news media and in artistic and academic circles.⁸

Many scholars and artists have commented on how the borders of Europe seem to be shrinking, becoming less accessible, and how the

7 Joy Gregory, *Objects of Beauty* (London: Autograph, 2004), 78. This scenario was not uncommon. Many Caribbean immigrants to the United Kingdom and European nations still find it challenging to return to the Caribbean, either to pick up the lives they left behind or to bring children and relatives to join them in Europe. After post-war Europe met its needs with the new workforce it had beckoned from the Caribbean, immigration laws were tightened, foreclosing the possibility of return for many.

8 *Cinderella Tours Europe* was commissioned by the Organization of Visual Arts (OVA), London in 2001 and first exhibited as *Cinderella Stories* at the Pitshanger Manor Gallery in London the same year. In 2003, *Cinderella Tours Europe* was exhibited at Archivo del Territorio Histórico de Álava, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain.

nation-states that comprise Europe are becoming smaller and smaller.⁹ In turn, identity is becoming more sharply defined both within and outside of these nation-states. As curator Gilane Tawadros has pointed out, “The most recent phase in the process of globalization has not dispensed with the categories of race and nation as defining identity within the public and private realms.”¹⁰ With globalization comes the fear of shifting populations and homogeneity. Yet as Tawadros explains, “the reality is that many of us now occupy the grey expanse that is international, inter-racial, and inter-linguistic.”¹¹

Cinderella Wore Prada

The shoes that have a starring role in Gregory’s *Cinderella Tours Europe* caught the artist’s eye in a shop window in Panama City. Hardly the designs of Prada, Manolo Blahnik, or Pedro Garcia, they are flashy, gaudy, and sexy nevertheless. An obvious allusion to wealth, the shimmering, faux-snakeskin shoes reference the contemporary yet age-old style of many Caribbean people, who proudly don showy gold jewelry and ornamentation as a status symbol.¹² This cultural practice stems from pre-Columbian times when gold was abundant and worn in elaborate designs, as part of headdresses, clothing accessories and body adornments. Indeed, it was this overstated opulence that attracted early European explorers, such as Christopher Columbus and Sir John Hawkins, who first made it big in the Caribbean after finding vast resources of gold there in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The exploitation of native Amerindian, and later imported African, labor

9 See, for example, the critically acclaimed exhibition and book, *Unpacking Europe*, which questioned the historical and contemporary meaning of Europe in light of the introduction of the Euro, stricter immigration policies, increasing xenophobia, and the project of globalization. Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (eds), *Unpacking Europe* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and NAI Publishers, 2001).

10 *Ibid.*, 10.

11 *Ibid.*

12 This fashion is not exclusive to Caribbean people; rather it is highly prevalent in hip-hop culture and urbanized global culture, as well as in parts of Africa where gold production is still a primary economic industry, such as in Ghana. In some poorer parts of the world, including the Caribbean, many people wear imitation gold, gold plate, and hollow gold jewelry, an indication that the resources that their lands once had have been all but depleted or that the highest quality goods are reserved for export.

made it possible for countries like Spain, Portugal, and England to reap vast amounts of wealth, while stimulating a demand for enslaved African labor. In the mid- to late nineteenth century, Chinese laborers were brought to many parts of the Caribbean, including Jamaica, where the declining numbers of formerly enslaved laborers had slowed the plantation economy. Gregory made three separate journeys to complete *Cinderella Tours Europe* and these took their toll on the shoes she took as her companion. "Each time I came back, I had to re-gild the shoes. I poured glitter over them and let them dry and shook them and then took them on the next journey in the same shoe box that I brought from Panama."¹³ Indeed, the performative nature of the artist's process demands consideration here. Gregory's three journeys, involving multiple trips and re-gilding of the shoes, on the one hand recalls the travel routes of the colonial explorers mentioned above (and even reinscribes a diasporic, post-colonial existence), and on the other hand, suggests the impracticality of (real) golden shoes and highlights their artifice.

Yet, Gregory's golden high-heeled pumps are not ashamed to be desirable. They are sexy and self-conscious, posing and acutely aware. On the steps of the gardens of Versailles, they seem to pause, as if waiting for someone to notice them, before running off, disappearing to catch a carriage that is destined to turn into a pumpkin. Like other artists before her, Gregory is also playing on the fetishistic quality of women's shoes, which, in classic Freudian analysis, stand in for and allude to sexuality and genitalia. In her extensive essay on the work of Lorna Simpson, art historian Kellie Jones has written about the relationship between the shoe, the body, and sexuality, calling the shoe "the ultimate fetish and substitute for the missing sexual organ."¹⁴ In Lorna Simpson's homage to Sartje Baartman, *Unavailable For Comment* (1993), the ghost of the famed Hottentot Venus breaks into the Musée de l'Homme to take back her labia, and leaves behind her shoes in their place. Simpson's black and white photograph shows a pair of suede pumps amidst the remnants of a shattered glass jar that had contained Baartman's dissected private

13 Joy Gregory, *Objects of Beauty* (London: Autograph, 2004), 124–25.

14 Kellie Jones, "(Un)Seen and Overheard: Pictures by Lorna Simpson", in *Lorna Simpson* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 51. Other notable works by Simpson that use the symbolism and fetishistic quality of the shoe include: *Bio* (1992); *Practical Joke* (1992); *Combination Platter* (1992); *Magdalena* (1992); *Landscape/Body Parts I-III* (1992) and *Shoe Lover* (1992).

parts. In *Cinderella Tours Europe*, the golden shoes remain empty and Cinderella is effectively disembodied, an act that allows viewers to imagine the body(part) of another in her place and tempts their desire to see themselves in her shoes. For example, in *Zaanse Shans*, Netherlands, Gregory's golden shoes, photographed in the extreme foreground, appear to straddle three classic Dutch windmills barely visible across the water. With the thoughtful positioning of the shimmering new shoes against the picturesque Dutch landscape, the artist seems to suggest the Caribbean woman's power over man, technology, the elements, and tradition.

For Gregory, the golden shoes symbolized the sum total of her experience in the Caribbean, as she put it, "becoming a personification of all the relationships and conversations struck up during four months of traveling."¹⁵ They became her muse and with them she entered the world of make-believe, embarking on a post-colonial Grand Tour around Europe to familiar landmarks that were significant to the people she came to know in the Caribbean. She took her golden slippers, among other places, to the city of love and lights, Paris, and to the Olympiastadion in Berlin, where in 1936 the black American athlete Jesse Owens won a record-breaking four gold medals.¹⁶ His victory, in the midst of Hitler's control of Nazi Germany and America's continued segregationist policies, symbolized a triumph over fascism and racism, both on the American home front and internationally. Almost imperceptibly, then, Gregory layers personal narratives of Caribbean longing and public narratives of the notable historic sites, thus relating the public to the private and the global to the local.

Cinderella, a Woman on the Go!

Gregory is a consummate traveler. She has set foot on nearly every continent and is aware of how deeply tourism affects the global economy. For *Cinderella Tours Europe*, she traveled as a tourist herself,

15 Interview with Joy Gregory, London, 9 June 2003.

16 Jesse Owens was the first American in the history of Olympic Track and Field to win four gold medals in a single Olympics. The significance of his victory is especially meaningful as he defied the racially scientific claims of biological inferiority that Adolph Hitler's Nazi regime was trying to assert against blacks, Jews, homosexuals and others.

photographing clichéd sites of memory in a style reminiscent of nineteenth-century European adventurers on the Grand Tour, who brought back photographs of the exotic, the native, and the so-called other. Instead of pyramids, colorful markets, and grinning natives, her golden slippers are posed in front of the docks at Antwerp, the Reichstag in Berlin, and the geyser at Lake Geneva. With this strategy, the artist shrewdly asks the questions: what is foreign, who is other, and from whose perspective are these determined? Exercising a bit of role reversal, Gregory took the workers/servants of the tourist economies of the Caribbean (symbolized by the golden slippers) on a tour of Europe and gave them a taste of what it might be like to be photographed as a tourist in the presence of monuments, sites, and cities that have deep, albeit complicated, significance to their past. Gregory has stated that in *Cinderella Tours Europe*, "Tourism is turned on its head as the viewed becomes the viewer, and the feared are rendered harmless."¹⁷ Thus she posed her subjects in ways that reference this complicated relationship, using distance and blurring to suggest their sense of belonging or disorientation.

The artist studied post cards, street maps, and city guides to determine the best view, angle, or location from which to take each photograph. Her method is as calculating as the marketing masterminds at Kodak, who designed a series of *Kodak Picture Spots* at Disney World and other amusement parks that direct tourists to the best vantage points from which to take pictures of loved ones in front of memorable sites that are guaranteed to be perfect souvenirs (the Disney Castle, for example).¹⁸ But Gregory uses this methodology to different design and effect. Aside from having a pair of golden shoes take center stage in the place of a person or a family group, there is often something slightly off, eye-catching, or out of place in this series of photographs.

For example, in the image of Cristo Rei taken in Lisbon, the famous, towering statue of Christ is shrouded in scaffolding, only recognizable by his small head, which peers out from the top. Virtually eclipsed by the restoration efforts, his block-like appearance with long, rectangular legs brings to mind a stiff robot or a small toy figure that a child might build from Lego. Placed in the extreme foreground, as if walking out

17 Interview with Joy Gregory, London, 9 June 2003.

18 See David T. Doris, "It's the Truth, It's Actual: Kodak Picture Spots at Walt Disney World", *Visual Resources*, XIV/3 (1999), 321–38.

of the left corner of the image, is the pair of golden shoes—confident, alluring, taking a stand. In fact, if one were to imagine the figure of a Caribbean woman standing in them from that point of view, she would overshadow the imposing statue of Cristo Rei, perhaps asserting her right to be there. As playful and girlish as the fairytale itself—filled with magic and mystery, Gregory’s photographs sometimes involve a game of hide and seek, where the viewer strains to find the pair of golden slippers in the image. Such is the case in another photograph taken in Lisbon, in which the pair of golden shoes is barely visible in front of the tourists gathered before the blinding, white-marble monument to Vasco da Gama on the shores of the Atlantic.¹⁹ That monument, in the shape of a stylized ship, celebrates the achievements of the sixteenth-century explorer, which heralded Portugal’s entry into the slave trade and preeminence as a world colonial power. During that period, a tenth of the people living in Lisbon came from Africa. Both the Cristo Rei statue and the Vasco da Gama monument to the ‘discoveries’ are framed so as to be in conversation with her former colonies in the new world, facing out across the Atlantic, pointing and looking westward. Together, Gregory’s photographs pay homage to the African presence in Portugal, while recognizing the power of Christianity as a medium of faith as well as a colonizing force.

In several photographs in the series, the golden shoes are placed in front of, behind, or hanging from wrought iron fences, bringing to mind historical associations of black people with being kept out or kept in: slavery, imprisonment, and denial of entry.²⁰ In Gregory’s photograph of the Palace of Westminster, the golden shoes are positioned on a granite pillar between wrought iron spikes, which were placed there to keep unwanted people (and pigeons) from sitting, loitering, or sleeping. The Palace of Westminster appears as a foggy mirage in the distance across the Thames, perhaps suggesting the outsider status of Caribbean people traveling to and within the United Kingdom.

Gregory’s photographs of the Alhambra in Granada and the Plaza de España in Seville are reminders that at one time North Africa conquered Spain. The Moorish conqueror Al Tariq invaded Spain in the

19 The 25 de Abril Bridge, celebrating the 1974 Carnation Revolution, is in the background.

20 See, for example, the works *Palace of Westminster*, *The Alhambra*, *The Geyser*, and *The Docks at Antwerp*.

eighth century, calling it Al-Andalus. The Moors remained in power, especially in the south, until about the fourteenth century, when they were forced back into North Africa. The ways in which they influenced art and culture in Southern Europe can still be felt today. Gregory's golden shoes stand outside of an iron fence that encloses the Orange Garden at the Alhambra. Once the headquarters of the Caliph during the Arab rule of Spain, the ornate palace is the finest example of Moorish architecture in Europe. Perched on a ledge of the Plaza de España, the golden shoes seem to interrogate that monument to national pride and accomplishment. Constructed primarily of colorful mosaic tiles called azulejos, themselves a symbol of Spanish identity, it is rarely noted how their origin and design was influenced by artistic traditions of North Africa. Both images reflect the aesthetic contributions of the Moors to Spanish art and architecture.

Becoming Cinderella

Joy Gregory is among a group of black British artists who came of age in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, which Stuart Hall has identified as the "second generation" of black diaspora artists.²¹ Many of these artists, the children of Caribbean, African and South Asian parents, who immigrated to the cosmopolitan centers of London, Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester in the 1950s and 1960s, were poised to fight for educational and exhibition opportunities that artists of the previous immigrant generation, whom Hall identifies as the "first generation", did not have. Many of these artists who came to Britain in the post-war period, including Aubrey Williams, Frank Bowling and Rasheed Arareen, worked in abstract and conceptual modes, creating pieces that often recalled physical and political aspects of the homeland they left behind, if not a spatial, metaphorical notion of diaspora itself, which Hall has referred to as "a landscape in the process of becoming abstract". The artists of Gregory's "second generation", including Keith Piper and

21 Hall's "first generation" of black diaspora artists was born abroad in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia in the 1920s and immigrated to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s. The "second generation" was born in the 1950s (in Britain) and began to exhibit there in the 1970s and 1980s. Stuart Hall, "Three Moments in the History of Black Diaspora Visual Artists", The Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture, Conway Hall, University of East London, November 19, 2004.

Ingrid Pollard, fashioned works in conversation with the turbulent 1980s, a period of civil rights struggle for black people in the United Kingdom, where the body and its signifiers of identification were often at center stage. Their works were characterized formally by photography, graphic arts and documentary styles that utilized autobiography, portraiture, and other strategies of visualizing the black body and issues related to gender, politics, and sexuality.

The experiences of women were also at stake for artists of the second generation, and Gregory was a pioneer in that regard. From *Autoportrait* (1989) to *Objects of Beauty* (1992–1995) to the *Handbag Project* (1998) to the *Amberley Queens* (1999) and *Girl Thing* (2002), Gregory has steadfastly honed a feminist approach to art making, infusing her narrative series with a form of activism that brings to the fore the concerns, desires and overlooked histories of black women. Key to her visual practice are aesthetic strategies that illuminate women's work, strengths, bodies, and complex identities. Gregory's obsession with fashion magazines as a teenager and her training in Communication, Art and Design at Manchester Polytechnic, and in Photography at the Royal College of Art, made her acutely aware of the visual devices of advertising, especially as it puts photography to work against (the image of) women. Her concern with the craft of photography has yielded prints of extraordinary beauty, delicacy and intimacy, and she often uses rare, hand-made papers to realize difficult nineteenth-century printing processes, such as the calotype and cyanotype, which are printed outdoors using available sunlight. Thus the artist shrewdly harnesses both the sensuousness of the photographic print and its unique visual language to turn advertising photography on its head, or as she describes, "to reveal the constructed nature of femininity and the feminine."²²

Gregory relies upon the (promise of) real and imagined possibilities of narrative fiction to create new works of visual urgency that question the very processes of looking, and are part autobiography, part performance, part ritual process. Gregory's particular brand of autobiographical work enlists her own personal archives of family photographs, self-portraits, vintage pocketbooks and designer shoes. More than just props, they say something about the artist to make larger claims. Hers is a form of

22 Joy Gregory, *Objects of Beauty* (London: Autograph, 2004), p. 123.

self-representation in which the self is visually absent, removed from the frame.

Gregory's now classic *Objects of Beauty* (1992–95), a series of twenty-one hand-pulled calotypes of the devices and trimmings that are used to define, shape and enhance women's physical appearances—literally their bodies and body parts—references the female body without picturing it. These alluring yet specimen-like images of stockings, false eyelashes, combs, bustiers and hair nets resituate for a contemporary audience the ways in which women like Baartman were subjected to scientific study and humiliating public exhibition in their lifetime. Emulating an ethnographic-scientific style, Gregory photographed tape measures with corsets and bustiers to reinforce this constant struggle with public perceptions of beauty and the pressures of conformity. A critique of the fashion industry and its promotion of unattainable and unhealthy ideals of beauty, Gregory argues for the normalcy of the full-figured woman, and *Objects of Beauty* could be an unacknowledged homage to the legacy of Baartman and the countless other women who have suffered in her wake. As Gregory explains: "People in different societies and historical periods have pursued radically different ideals and many of the most remarkable women of history have been well built, middle aged or elderly. Yet in contemporary western society the issue of beauty negatively affects almost all women, young and old regardless of race or social position."²³ The viewer is left to imagine the physical and psychic constraints that these objects of beauty conjure up. In similar fashion, Gregory has positioned a pair of golden slippers in *Cinderella Tours Europe* to stand in for the necessarily *make-believe* journey of the diasporic (post-colonial) woman returned home. For, as Stuart Hall reminds us, "diaspora always involves dissemination, but not necessarily a return home, to go back." As he reiterates, "it is a one-way journey, where home is a place of the imagination, a place to understand the current trauma and globalization of Africa (of home) and the cosmopolitan centers of Europe and the West."²⁴

Cinderella Tours Europe is a combination of two aesthetic processes, Gregory admits: collecting data and using that data to create a visual

23 Gregory, p. 28.

24 Stuart Hall, "Three Moments in the History of Black Diaspora Visual Artists", The Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture, Conway Hall, University of East London, November 19, 2004.

narrative, or, in other words, listening to, witnessing and recording the desires of others and drawing upon their stories to create counter narratives. These processes create a tension between the public and the private, the local and the global, the personal and the group, fact and fiction. Cinderella's fictional European odyssey is thus a mixture of Gregory's personal location as a black British woman of Caribbean ancestry and the stories told to her by other Caribbean people of African, Amerindian, Asian and European descent. Performing fairytale magic of immense political dimensions for Caribbean people, she travels for those who cannot transgress the borders of Europe, her golden slippers symbolically performing their modest desires to visit a landmark or historical monument. This artistic performance/practice of fulfilling the hopes and desires of others resonates with the series *Where We Come From 2001/2003*, by the Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir, who has traveled across the treacherous Israeli-Palestinian border at the Gaza strip to perform small deeds for Palestinians who, living under occupation, lack the proper documentation, such as a passport, to visit loved ones. One person asked her, "Go to my grandmother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and place flowers there and say a prayer." Presented as testimonials documented with photography and text, these small acts also include attending a sports event of a relative or having dinner with a friend.

The Location of Blackness

While firmly grounded in feminist practice, the issues raised by *Cinderella Tours Europe* also address the problems of mobility for post-colonial subjects in the present, not only because of border and visa restrictions, but also due to the painful ironies of the contemporary tourist trade. The traditional colonial economies of the Caribbean relied upon slave labor and the plantation system, which are now replaced with a service economy in which tourism and its ancillary businesses employ many working residents. The tourist industry markets the Caribbean as a place of white sandy beaches, water sports, relaxation, and service eliding the not-too-distant history of the slave/plantation economy. The people of the Caribbean are constantly bombarded with not only tourist advertising, but also the desires of North and South American as well as European tourists who propel tourism as a thriving business.

In other words, the interactions of tourists and service providers enact and bring to life the fantasies pictured in the ads, if not the fantasy of tourism itself. Caribbean workers are part of the marketing program: they appear as servants in advertising photographs, and in their roles as service providers actually perform (act out) the desires of visiting tourists. Yet while laboring in an economy driven today by tourism to the Caribbean, most Caribbean people can barely afford to travel as tourists themselves outside of the Caribbean. In this context, their wishes to travel as tourists to Europe's most recognizable tourist attractions may not seem that farfetched. In the same way that white sandy beaches may seem desirable tourist destinations, the sites and monuments of Europe are enviable attractions for Gregory's interviewees.

On many levels, *Cinderella Tours Europe* questions the very location of blackness, arguing for the presence of Caribbean people within Europe's borders. By re-visioning their place in the world, the artist offers alternative ways of being that engender a novel sense of mobility for Caribbean people and redefine fixed histories often secreted in the landscapes that hold symbolic markers of national memory. Gregory thus reorients our spatial imagination of Europe by inserting her magical gold slippers—markers for absent black bodies—into the landscape.

With this gesture, she enters into a rich dialogue with other black British artists of her generation, including Ingrid Pollard, Roshini Kempadoo, and Isaac Julien, whose works of photography, web-based media and film call for the recognition of a black presence in national, transnational and global landscapes. In the series *Pastoral Interludes* (1986), Pollard used hand-colored, black and white photographs and text to question the notion of Englishness by placing black Britons in pastoral settings away from the urban centers they are presumed to inhabit. Kempadoo's web-based series *Sweetness and Light* (1996) combines documentary photography with the layering possibilities of computer-based media to suggest the relationship between colonialism, ethnographic research and the contemporary realities of tourism in the Caribbean. Julien's three-channel digital video installation *True North* (2004), an homage to the unacknowledged legacy of Matthew Henson, goes beyond the troubled binary that charts the complicated social effects of post-colonial migration between Britain and her former colonies seen in his film *Paradise* (2002) to imagine a space for black people in a barren, ice covered landscape spatially and ontologically outside of

that oft-charted binary. Like Gregory, these works also question the relationship of the black body to histories of tourism, exploration and exploitation.

Rewriting, Reclaiming History

Gregory has taken children's fairytales, such as Cinderella, or popular historical narratives to update them with diasporic African figures, women and others who are frequently left out of the picture. With such a gesture, she asks, why can't a Caribbean woman occupy the happily-ever-after fantasy life of Cinderella? And why can't Gregory rewrite Cinderella's fantasy to include a tour of Europe and the places that have significance for the Caribbean people she interviewed? This isn't Gregory's first foray into rewriting popular narratives; rather, that contemporary art practice is central to her manner of working. In a similar fashion, in 1999, Gregory reinterpreted the Amberley Panels, a group of eight sixteenth-century paintings at Pallant House in Chichester, England, which depict the Amazon queens, noted historical figures, warriors and scholars. Gregory used contemporary women from diverse economic, social and ethnic backgrounds as her (role-) models and incorporated text in order to make the narratives of the queens relevant and accessible to today's audiences. In the resulting series of portraits called the *Amberley Queens*, Gregory photographed contemporary women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as shapes, sizes and ages in roles traditionally portrayed with the image of white European women. Like photographers and installation artists Carrie Mae Weems, Renée Cox, Fred Wilson and Terry Adkins, Gregory can be counted among a group of artists working today who regularly create works of redemptive memory.²⁵

To Travel in Her Shoes

Gregory's interest in tourism has been shared by other contemporary artists of note, including the late photographer Tseng Kwong Chi, who,

25 See Cheryl Finley, "The Mask of Memory: African Diaspora Artists and the Tradition of Remembrance", in Daniell Cornell and Cheryl Finley, *Imaging African Art: Documentation and Transformation* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2000), pp. 9–12.

from 1979 until 1990, made the *Expeditionary Series* (also known as *East Meets West*), the acclaimed body of self-portraits in front of famous monuments and sites of the world, calling attention to the fleeting nature of his physical self in the face of AIDS and the seeming permanence of the monuments. In addition, the conceptual artist Ken Lum in *There's No Place Like Home* (2000/2001), a billboard project installed at the Kunsthalle in Vienna in 2000 and at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 2001, took the famous words spoken by Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* to confront the plight of immigrants and asylum seekers in Europe.²⁶ Also of note is work by the multimedia artist Keith Piper, whose digital collages of postcards, passports and city views followed the comings and goings of a make-believe post-colonial tourist in the urban centers of Europe in *A Fictional Tourist in Europe, 2001*.²⁷

In *Cinderella Tours Europe*, Gregory proposes an unconventional and little considered itinerary for *roots tourism*, a form of "travel-related identity-seeking by culturally specific groups to monuments, historic sites, museums and places of interest that aim to give a sense of their origins", also named in part after Alex Haley's popular novel *Roots*.²⁸ Instead of venturing "back to" Africa, to the slave forts and castles of Cape Coast and Elmina in Ghana or Gorée Island in Senegal, she takes her golden slippers to Europe, suggesting a less considered origin of slavery, implying a different notion of home. This is precisely Gregory's point. As Saidiya Hartman notes, "The journey to Elmina Castle, Ouidah, or Gorée Island is first and foremost a way of commemorating slavery at its purported site of origin, although one could just as easily travel to Portugal or visit the Vatican." Gregory's post-colonial Caribbean subjects have as much of a claim to Europe as they do to Africa.²⁹

26 See Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (eds), *Unpacking Europe*, 362–67.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 386–91.

28 Cheryl Finley, "The Door of (No) Return", www.common-place.org, 1.4 (July 2001). See also Cheryl Finley, "Authenticating Dungeons, Whitewashing Castles: The Former Sites of the Slave Trade on the Ghanaian Coast", in Brian MacLaren and D. Medina Lasansky (eds), *The Tourism of Architecture/The Architecture of Tourism*. (London: Berg, 2004), 165–88.

29 Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery" *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101.4 (2002), 757–77 (p. 764).

21. Reading against the Grain of the Black Madonna

Black Motherhood, Race and Religion

Yelaine Rodriguez

Introduction

Could BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) productively produce without the confrontations or challenges of colonial legacies or archival silences? Moreover, how can they recover silenced voices and provide agency to marginalized ones? By employing the Black Madonna in Częstochowa, Figure 1, I demonstrate how BIPOC attempting to revive underrepresented voices build their arguments through the absence of resources, archival limitations, and bias constructs. I bring forth the Black Madonna as a case study since the narratives regarding her adaptation tell the untold stories of women's lives. I argue that within the colonial archives, the erasure and ghosting processes of Black women further highlight this observation. When Black women do appear in colonial archives, usually, the pen of a man dictates their narratives. This detail matters because it illustrates why there is a lack of representation of Black women within the archives. It also matters because it serves as an example of some of the elements contributing to the erasure and ghosting of Black women.



Fig. 1 15th C. Black Madonna of Częstochowa restored in 1434, https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.nyu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000891521.

BIPOC must read through the biased sources in the archives while researching and constructing their arguments. They have to perfect reading “against their grain”¹ to justify their research. The Black Madonna’s connections to various demographics and geographical locations and biased archival sources have rendered her origins a mystery. In this paper, I examine the migration patterns of the Black Madonna [in] Częstochowa, from Polish soldiers to Haitian insurgents during the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), and her appropriation into Haitian Vodou as loa (deity) Erzulie Dantor, ultimately attributing her for the success of the revolution. I examine how her Blackness was justified to allow the adoration of White patrons in Europe. Lastly, I

1 Laura Anne Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Acts of Governance”, *Archival Science*, 2/1 (2002), 87–109 (p. 99), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435632>.

display how contemporary Black artists reinterpret her to celebrate Black women and draw awareness and compassion for Black expressions and experiences. This research paper is composed of three main points. The first of these is an analysis of the appropriations of the Black Madonna and religious imagery within Black and White communities. Second, the connections between the Haitian Revolution, the Black Madonna, and Erzulie Dantor are considered, followed thirdly by a discussion of colonial legacies, archival silences, and BIPOC scholars and artists' attempts to preserve and recover Black experiences and stories.

First, I like to acknowledge that I choose to write 'Black Madonna in Częstochowa' rather than the commonly used 'Black Madonna of Częstochowa', because [of] implies a singular ownership of the image by the people of Częstochowa. By replacing [of] with [in], I place emphasis on the migration patterns of this specific painting of the Virgin Mary from its discovery in the Holy Land (Jerusalem) in 326 by Saint Helena, mother to Constantine the Great, to Poland in the fourteenth century, and to the hands of the Haitian insurgents as inexpensive lithograph reproductions in nineteenth-century Saint-Domingue, modern-day Haiti. Additionally, by using 'in' rather than 'of', I seek to remove ownership of this image by an individual group. The recontextualization of the Black Madonna, throughout history and across numerous geographical locations, takes on new meaning. From the general public to distinctive cultures and BIPOC artists' interpretations, the Black Madonna is reborn. Regardless of her place in history, her association with motherhood and as protector of children remains intact and undisputable. For example, both the Virgin Mary and Poland's history with adversities made her a symbol of Poland's soul and culture since her arrival, which also coincided with Poland's nation-building project during the mid-1300s. Similarly, she appears in the nineteenth century, when Haiti is constructing its nation-state identity. Naturally, within the circumstances and timing, she becomes a mother figure to the formerly enslaved population of the first free Black republic.

Additionally, in this paper, I delve further into the origins of the Black Madonna and how her story has shifted depending on time, place, and culture. I discuss how believers of different races, traditions, and backgrounds justify their relationship with the image and how they negotiate with the resources that best promote their arguments.

Furthermore, I study archival silence methods within colonial and Black archives, the preserved resources, and the written and dismissed narratives. I look into the archival hierarchy and how BIPOC find alternative strategies to extract and recover untold Black accounts. In conclusion, I recontextualize the main points by bringing forth three Black contemporary artists who use religious imagery, breathing new life, and drawing awareness to Black experiences. The works of Chris Ofili (born 1968), Renée Cox (born 1960), and Jon Henry (born 1982) together dismantle the biased constructs of what we know, based on archives as knowledge production. Their works speak to the contemporary relevance of the subject matter discussed in this text. Together, these bodies of work serve as visual representations of ‘going against the grain’, deconstructing our epistemologies of religion and race.

Part I: The Appropriations of the Black Madonna and Religious Imagery within Black and White Communities.

How does an image like the Black Madonna in Częstochowa take on multiple patrons from distinctive paths of life, race, and cultures? If we are “made in the image of God,”² should our visual representation of religious figures mirror each individual? What happens when that image does not reflect marginalized or disenfranchised communities, BIPOC? How can we justify our beliefs and principles when the visual does not reflect who we are and what we know? The Black Madonna in Częstochowa, who attracts pilgrimages yearly in great numbers, made her way to Poland in the fourteenth century. However, how she made her way onto the earth, in general, is far from simple. In addition, her dark complexion not only raises questions but renders her origins notably perplexing. Some believe that the Black Madonna in Częstochowa was

2 The phrase “Image of God” has its origins in Genesis 1:27, wherein “God created man in his own image [...]” This phrase does not suggest that God is in human form. What it insinuates is that humans resemble the image of God morally, spiritually, and intellectually. The metaphysical expression is associated solely with humans, which signifies the symbolic connection between God and humanity.

“not made by human hand”³ and that she is a product of *acheiropoietoi*.⁴ It is worth noting that the beginning of Christian art is an outcome of the presence of Christ on earth and the desire to capture the ‘true image’ of Christ by early believers. Before Christ, figurative works of the holy had numerous opponents hesitant to accept icons, but as Ewa Kuryluk affirms, “the existence of Jesus, a vera icon of divinity created in Mary’s flesh, calls for representation.”⁵ An *acheiropoietoi* image is associated with mystery and supernatural happenings, ultimately determining how the faithful interact with the object. The earliest account of the Black Madonna in Częstochowa states that “Saint Luke painted with his own hands”⁶ the image in her likeness, thus making it the most true-to-life portrait in possession. Others say that “it was created by angels, while Saint Luke fell asleep,”⁷ or by Mary herself. It is also said that the surface on which the image is painted is a wooden desk made by Jesus Christ himself. Together these legends emphasizing direct contact between the object and the holy figure enable believers to feel closer to the Black Madonna. Collectively these legends fabricate a narrative centered on false or self-contradictory grounds, which further adds to the inaccurate and biased nature of the archive.

Naturally, patrons want to see themselves reflected within religious imagery. Both White and Black patrons hold on to the narratives or legends that best fit their interest, or support their beliefs, and how they relate to this version of Mary. White patrons attribute her Blackness to a force unbeknownst to man, as one newspaper clipping from 1915 states: “the Madonna was originally painted in flesh tints, but once miraculously turned black overnight.”⁸ For White patrons, her Blackness must be a

3 Anna Niedźwiedz, *The Image and The Figure: Our Lady of Czestochowa in Polish Culture and Popular Religion* (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2010), p. 6

4 This is a Medieval Greek word meaning “made without hands” and referring to images thought to have been made without hands. These are Christian icons whose existence in itself is a miraculous act. I am using Niedźwiedz’s spelling of the word.

5 E. Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth. History, Symbolism, and Structure of a “True” Image* (Cambridge, MA: Oxford, 1991), p. 8. Cited in Niedzwiedz (2010), p. 5.

6 H. Kowalewicz (ed.), *Najstarsze historie o Częstochowskim Obrazie Panny Maryi XV i XVI wiek*, trans. H. Kowalewicz, M. Kowalewiczowa (Warszawa, 1983), p. 75. Cited in Niedźwiedz (2010), p. 12.

7 M. Skrudlik, *Królowa Korony Polskiej. Szkice z historii malarstwa i kultu Bogarodzicy w Polsce* (Lwów, 1930); *Cudowny obraz Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej* (Kraków, 1932), p. 64. Cited in Niedźwiedz (2010), p. 13.

8 Staff Correspondent of *The Times*, 18 March 1915, p. 4.

miracle, inexplicable by natural or scientific laws, but a divine occurrence rather than her natural complexion. If her White patrons accept her Blackness as part of her 'initial' origin, they will have to confront their own racial prejudice and beliefs. Their inability to explain her Blackness does not prevent them from fabricating other external possibilities, adding to the bias we face in the archives. For example, some credit her Blackness to aging, accumulation of smoke from the candles, and other environmental factors, as alluded to in a newspaper clipping from 1899.⁹ They choose to believe that aging or smoke accumulation is responsible for her dark complexion, disregarding that such processes would have darkened other portions of the painting. Besides, this rationalization does not explain why there are Black sculptures of the Madonna from around the same period. It is important to note that over three hundred Black Madonnas exist in both painted and sculptural form, yet her Blackness is still in question. Coming to terms with the possibility that Mary herself could have been a person of color is not an option, although there is a sculpture of the Black Madonna in Sicily dating back to the eighth century with a Latin inscription that states, "I am Black." Whitewashing influential Black historical figures is a common trope of the colonial period, as lithographs and other visual representations in archives demonstrate.

Despite the attempts to erase the Black Madonna's true origins, Black believers refuse to accept any justifications that negate her Blackness. In the 1960s, Black reverends such as Rev. Albert B. Cleage from Detroit sought to "restore Christianity to what he considers to be its 'original' identity: a black man's religion."¹⁰ Preaching in front of a Black Madonna, Rev. Albert B. Cleage pushed for "a Black Messiah born to a Black woman"¹¹ and for the Black religion to "reinterpret its message in terms of the needs of the Black Revolution."¹² For the Black population during the Civil Rights Movement, the way Christianity was taught, through the White male perspective, "was a way of directing attention away

9 Monte Williams, "Yo Mama" Artist Takes on Catholic Critic", *The New York Times*, 21 February 2001. Section B, p. 3.

10 B. Albert Cleage, cited in B. Edward Fiske, "Color God Black", *The New York Times*, 10 November 1968, p. 249.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

from social injustice"¹³ and kept the Black man in his place (enslaved and uninformed of his roots), alleviating the slave owner's guilt. For the Black community in the 1960s, when 'Black is Beautiful' and 'Buy Black' were phrases employed to empower the Black race, it was crucial to "Color God Black"¹⁴ and to have religious imagery representing Blackness. The intention behind these images was that Black visual representations would entice Black people to see themselves as active participants of a community, of a country. It was about a self-assurance and self-empowerment through visual representation that exceeds religion.

It is worth noting that "such pictures, chiefly in the form of cheap lithographs, have for years past been supplied to the negroes [Black Americans] and Indians of South America [Latin Americans] by enterprising German printing firms,"¹⁵ as stated in a 1924 newspaper clipping from *The New York Times*. The author Henry C. Hampson writes in the 'Letter to the Editor' on 6 August 1924, petitioning for Black representation: "The effect, when seen for the first time, is certainly startling, but in reality, there is little to cause surprise in the fact of negroes making a mental picture for themselves of a black Deity, nor anything to offend the susceptibilities of the white man, however religiously inclined."¹⁶ Henry C. Hampson further states: "What is chiefly remarkable is that the Catholic negroes and Indians of South America have solved this problem for themselves in a simple, natural and inoffensive manner, without any attempt, as was very apparent at yesterday's convention, to drag in racial animosity."¹⁷ The author chose to highlight the desire to see oneself reflected within these religious imageries without offending White patrons or creating racial animosity, illustrating the silence imposed on Black expressions and voices. His letter emphasizes which groups are in positions of power, and how these groups in power use violence and their positionality to silence disenfranchised communities. Together, these exchanges and written documents from Black and White patrons of the Black Madonna

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Henry C. Hampson, "Representing Deity As Black", *The New York Times*, 6 August 1924, p. 150.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

perpetuate the archival inaccuracies with which scholars interested in this subject must contend.

Part 2: The Haitian Revolution, The Black Madonna, and Erzulie Dantor

In the early 1800s, when the Black Madonna made her way into Haiti in the form of cheap miniature lithographs within the pockets of Polish soldiers sent forth by Napoleon to fight against the rebels, the Madonna was further recontextualized. She was adopted into the Afro-Syncretic religion of Haitian Vodou, taking on new meaning, with her image gaining another layer of mystery. Napoleon Bonaparte's attempts to recapture the French colony of Saint-Domingue, modern-day Haiti, ironically backfired when the Polish soldiers he sent in 1802 switched sides, joining the Black insurgents. Haitian accounts speak of a Vodou ceremony (Bois Caïman ceremony) before the uprising of 1791 against the French colonizers, in which a new loa (deity) emerged, born to Haitian soil. The loa is Erzulie Dantor, regarded as the mother of Haiti. She has origins at the inception of the uprising. Erzulie Dantor became an inspiration for the enslaved people of Saint-Domingue, who were struggling for liberation and independence from their oppressors. By 1802 the war was eleven years in and still two years from its end when the image of the Black Madonna in Cześćochowa appeared as a symbol that inspired the Haitian rebels and provided the incentives they needed during the last months of the revolution. When the Polish troops joined the Haitian army, this solidified Haitians' beliefs that the lithograph of the Black Madonna that Polish troops brought with them was, in actuality, Erzulie Dantor. The Polish soldiers, and the image of the Black Madonna they carried, revived the revolution.

Numerous Polish troops sided with the Haitian army. They were dissatisfied with the French forces, which disregarded and undervalued their demi-brigades. Furthermore, they were seeking independence for Poland by oppressing another country, and could not ignore the irony of this situation. In 1796, Napoleon Bonaparte vowed to re-establish Poland as a nation if they joined his army, but in actuality he had little intention of doing so. The French coerced the Polish troops into action. Around 5,300 troops landed in Haiti, having been misinformed by the

French that they would be landing in Louisiana-State instead of Saint-Domingue. In the following months, about 4,000 troops “died on the distant island: as prisoners, drowned, killed in battle, or—primarily by the yellow fever.”¹⁸ As a result, Polish demi-brigades departed for the rebel army, “where Dessalines nicknamed them the negroes of Europe.”¹⁹ General Dessalines granted the remaining 400 Polish soldiers Haitian citizenship, giving the “order to spare the lives of Poles because he was touched [...] Polish soldiers had joined the uprising.”²⁰ These events provide a context for the incorporation of the Black Madonna in Częstochowa into Haitian culture.

The Polish soldiers that arrived in Haiti during the final months of the revolution helped carry it towards victory. The image of the Black Madonna that they brought with them did not go unnoticed. Her story was to be forever cemented in the birth of the Haitian nation, culture, and belief system. For example, the author of a 1966 article discusses the importance of the “American Czestochowa” in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. The “American Czestochowa” houses a shrine for a reproduction of the Black Madonna that was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in 1966. The author notes that “Czestochowa’s role is shifting,”²¹ elaborating further that: “members of the Haitian community have for many years made pilgrimages to Doylestown to honor the Black Madonna, who is also revered by some as a representation of the Vodou deity, Erzulie Dantor.”²² This detail matters because it illustrates the complexity and multiple dimensions underlying the Black Madonna. Both White and Black patrons, from different geographical locations, Poland and Haiti, find their way to this image in America (a third nation), to pay tribute to two distinctive translations of this religious imagery. One group is partaking in a pilgrimage to the Black Madonna and the other to the Vodou loa Erzulie Dantor, but both regard the same image with adoration. This image travels through various geographical locations across time, being

18 Leszek Kolankiewicz and Olga Kaczmarek, “Grotowski in a Maze of Haitian Narration”, *TDR* (1988-) 56/3 (2012), 131–40 (p. 132), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23262938>.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Thomas Rzeznik, “[About the Cover]: The National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa”, *American Catholic Studies*, 127 (2016), 97–106 (p. 106).

22 Ibid.

associated with infinite narratives. In a sense, she experiences a rebirth in each new context. However, despite the evolution, endless admiration, and constant desire to protect her image, there is ironically a continuous silencing of the Black Madonna in Cz stochowa.

Countless fabrications and inconsistencies circulate the true origins of the Black Madonna in Cz stochowa, all of which are distinctive and support multiple beliefs. However, the most logical explanation, overlooked by records, is that "it is possible that some of the oldest [Black Madonnas] are imported figures of Isis,"²³ as stated in a newspaper clipping from 1899 in *The New York Times*. I argue that this is the most sensible explanation for her dark complexion. Isis, an Ancient Egyptian goddess, is an African figure, reported to be of dark complexion. The Black Madonna in Cz stochowa, as stated earlier, was found in Jerusalem in 326 by Saint Helena. Jerusalem may be reached from Egypt on foot in a little over a week. As the gospel reports, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus went to Egypt to escape Herod's great slaughter of baby boys in Bethlehem, thus illustrating the historic cultural exchange between these two nations. We can therefore conclude that the Black Madonna has experienced both displacement and wrongful identification. External beliefs projected onto her have ultimately perpetuated misinformation and silenced her true origins, Africa. The Egyptian goddess, Isis (Queen of the Throne), similarly to the Virgin, is a virgin who births children, a compassionate, selfless, and giving mother. As we shall now see, ironically, Haitian adaptations of the Black Madonna in Cz stochowa into Haitian Vodou as loa Erzulie Dantor have enacted a similar process to that of the fourteenth-century Polish patrons who imposed another identity onto this painting.

What is noteworthy about the adaptation of the Black Madonna in Cz stochowa into Haitian Vodou is that Erzulie Dantor is a unique product of the New World and religious syncretism. Erzulie Dantor is a collage of various sources encompassed as one, original to Haiti and its nation-building project, which began in 1791. She is neither Catholic, nor from Yoruba traditions, the common combination of Afro-Syncretic religions. She emerges from the enslaved Africans and is exclusive to Haiti and the New World. However, even though she is the youngest

23 "Black Images of the Madonna", Notes and Queries, *The New York Times*, 1 January 1899, p. 19.

variation or adaptation of this portrait, her story is fractured. With her various incarnations and many faces, her mere existence is a reminder of the impact of colonialism on women's experiences not only in Haiti but everywhere in the Caribbean.

Erzulie is one to Haiti, and analogies that align her with other religions or belief systems are unjustified. Yet, there are various versions of Erzulie, each connected to a version of the Virgin Mary, for example, Erzulie Dantor and the Black Madonna, or Erzulie Freda and Our Lady of Sorrows, with the skin complexion of both pairings coinciding. Erzulie Dantor is Black, Erzulie Freda is White, like their respective saints. In Haiti, there are three popular Erzulie recognized as such: Erzulie-Freda (White lady of luxury and love), Erzulie-Dantor (Black woman of passion with a dagger in her heart), and Erzulie-Ge-Rouge (red-eyed militant of vengeance). In *Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti* (1994), the author Joan Dayan demonstrates how authors such as Roumain, Alexis, and Chauvet turn to analogy. They describe Erzulie Dantor as Venus or the Virgin. However, the author suggests that when addressing Erzulie, we should "forgo such external impositions [...] instead [trying] to talk about the continuing presence of Erzulie through those relationships and events particular to women in Haiti whether black, mulatto, or white."²⁴ By abandoning such external impositions, we may preserve the original voice of Erzulie and prevent further misconceptions that may erase her true nature. Problems arise when we identify different Erzulies, pitting them against each other, and thereby perpetuating the erasure of a full picture. The author exposes the issues that arise when women are either erased from narratives, or written into them by men who dictate their voices.

As Dayan points out, "everything written about Erzulie can be contradicted."²⁵ Records showcase Erzulie as the loa of lust prayed to by prostitutes, as a goddess served by Haitian elites, young virgins, and the LGBTQ+ community, as they are all her children. Some feminist scholars argue that "to be Erzulie is to be imagined and perceived by men."²⁶ Women like Erzulie are split into objects to be desired or abhorred. Based on the imaginations of men, women are confined to specific roles.

24 Joan Dayan, "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti", *Research in African Literatures* 25/2 (1994), 5-31 (p. 6), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4618262>.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 7.

They are either one or the other, presented as stereotypes of Black or White women, like the “spiritualized and de-sexualized images of white women”²⁷ that are only made possible by the “prostitution or violation of the dark women in their midst.”²⁸ The splitting of Erzulie mirrors the roles of women that adhere to the beliefs of men. One such example is the fabrication of a corrupted dark woman invented by the male imaginary and colonized gaze. Vodou is an arrangement of colonial and post-colonial memories of the enslaved that continues to be passed down to their descendants. The loas are creations of enslaved peoples of Caribbean history, as seen through the colonized gaze. It is about the lives they live, their experiences, and their education. The various identities of Erzulie are reflections of the numerous roles performed by women. However, the issue is “whether called whore or virgin, women seem always to find themselves in the hands of the definers.”²⁹ Splitting Erzulie into these distinct fixed ideas of women who are “lady” or “savage” does not give her the agency to freely exist, making her incomplete, and thus silencing her.

Part 3: Colonial Legacies, Archival Silences, and Black Scholars and Artists’ Attempts to Recover Black Women’s Voices

To construct a narrative about the Black Madonna in Częstochowa and her various incarnations, for once, we must be critical of our use of documentary sources that speak for her. The Black Madonna in Częstochowa has a complicated and unfinished history, fragmented in scattered archival records, across numerous institutions. Black scholars or artists employing the Black Madonna in Częstochowa as a topic or source of creative inspiration must see the “archives as epistemological experiments rather than as sources.”³⁰ The archives and their records are not sites of historical truth. The archives house official documents of the state, yet this does not exempt them from bias structures, as “cultural

27 Ibid., p. 8.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 15.

30 Stoler, p. 87.

accounts were discredited or restored”³¹ according to the state’s interests. Scholars must read through the absence of sources as “colonial archives were both sites of the imaginary and institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed, and reproduced the power of the state.”³² Scholars must read against the grain of the archives, as well as with the grain. They must do this while being attentive “for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake.”³³ It is necessary to acknowledge the issues with archives in order to prevent further inaccuracies and mistakes as scholars continue to develop and share their research.

I argue that all archives are colonial, or influenced by colonialism. For example, “a historic social hierarchy exists within the black community, most notably along lines of class, gender, and sexual orientation; this stratification creates prohibitive selection dynamics similar to those in traditional archives.”³⁴ Even within marginalized groups, hierarchical structures dictate which cultural accounts are preserved. Afro-syncretic religions have historically been stigmatized as backward within some elite circles. Therefore, it is not unusual for Afro-Caribbean religious practices to be underrepresented in the archives. It is not sufficient to read “against the grain” of the colonial archives; we must also recognize the internalized prejudices and standards of inclusion within Black archives themselves. Black focus archives are not exempt from the “traditional appraisal and selection models that excluded minority groups.”³⁵ The first Black archives are products of an “elite class of college-educated intellectuals”, and “these early pioneers, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson, believed that Black history and education were requisite components for racial advancement.”³⁶ This observation matters because the standard of elitism for racial progress influenced what entered into the archives for both remembrance and as an example of Black excellence. Those works that did not fit within the

31 Ibid., p. 98.

32 Hyden White (1987), p. 12. Cited in Stoler, p. 97.

33 Stoler, p. 100.

34 Rabia Gibbs, “The Heart of the Matter: The Developmental History of African American Archives”, *The American Archivist*, 75 (2012), 195–204 (p. 197), <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.75.1.n1612w0214242080>.

35 Ibid., p. 195.

36 Ibid., p. 200.

elite frameworks of college-educated intellectuals thus fell short, and were neither prioritized nor counted.

There has been a “move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject [gaining] its contemporary currency from a range of different analytic shifts, practical concerns, and political projects.”³⁷ For example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in his treatment of the archival silences of the Haitian Revolution, is an example of this shift whereby scholars are becoming active participants in their approach to the archives. This portrait of a Black mother and child often termed the ‘Black Madonna of Częstochowa’ is ironically a product of archival silence. It is one of the most recognized images, adored by various patrons, and a source of creative inspiration for numerous artists. Nonetheless, the inconsistency of her story and the endless adaptation of her portrait has erased the voice she was initially intended to have. Numerous people make the pilgrimage hoping that their prayers are heard, disregarding how she herself has been rendered mute by their actions.

“Whether documents are trustworthy, authentic, and reliable remain pressing questions,”³⁸ but how scholars and artists become consciously active participants of history depends on the individual. The fact that irregularities exist within the archives is undisputable. Their foundations uphold colonial agendas. The sources are manipulated, the “publishing houses made sure that documents were selectively duplicated, disseminated, or destroyed,”³⁹ and that documents were “properly cataloged and stored”⁴⁰ to their liking. Everyone working in archives should ask themselves: “what political forces, social cues, and moral virtues produce qualified knowledges that, in turn, disqualified other ways of knowing, other knowledges”?⁴¹ Black contemporary artists, attempting to recover Black voices, are thus challenging what we know, which relates to the archives and the colonial production of knowledge. For example, in 1999, *The Holy Virgin Mary* by Chris Ofili, depicting the Virgin Mary (Black Madonna) “with a clump of elephant

37 Stoler, p. 93.

38 Ibid., p. 91.

39 Ibid., p. 98.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 95.

dung on one breast,"⁴² almost caused the financial destruction of the Brooklyn Museum (see Figure 2). In 2001, Renée Cox's *Yo Mama's Last Supper*, a nude self-portrait of the artist in Christ's place at the Last Supper, drew public outcry. Additionally, New York-based photographer Jon Henry's series *Stranger Fruit* (2014–present) draws the classical Pietà for inspiration for his portraits of Black mothers cradling their sons. Jon Henry began the series *Stranger Fruit* in 2014 as a commentary and a form of response to the police murders of Black men: "Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice and continues as they never seem to end."⁴³

In 1999, London-based artist Chris Ofili participated in the Brooklyn Museum exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* with a painting of "a Black Madonna with a clump of elephant dung on one breast and cutouts of genitalia from pornographic magazines in the background."⁴⁴ The following day, then-mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani stirred a political and religious furor, encouraging people to protest the exhibit, and threatening to cut the museum's funding. The support of the mayor and the Catholic League empowered and provoked individuals like Dennis Heiner, a seventy-two-year-old white male, who removed "a plastic bottle from underneath his arm and squeezed white paint in a broad stroke across the face and body of the Black Madonna."⁴⁵ This individual felt an entitlement and ownership of the Madonna, hence his deliberate attack on Chris Ofili's version of the Virgin. This gesture was a sinister act of violence and erasure of Black perspectives, which I argue is derivative of the mechanism of archival silences. Additionally, this act against Chris Ofili's painting is a product of the misguided and misrepresentational nature of religious imagery perpetuated over time in the archives of individuals who choose to see the raw sources without examining them. As Chris Ofili said, "the people who are attacking this painting are attacking their own interpretation, not mine."⁴⁶ They are

42 Carol Vogel, "Holding Fast to His Inspiration; An Artist Tries to Keep His Cool in the Face of Angry Criticism", *The New York Times*, 28 September 1999, Section E, p. 1.

43 Jon Feinstein, "These Portraits Process Black Mothers' Greatest Fear", *Humble Arts Foundation*, 15 October 2020, <http://hafny.org/>.

44 Vogel.

45 Robert D. Mcfadden, "Disputed Madonna Painting in Brooklyn Show Is Defaced", *The New York Times*, 17 December 1999, Section A, p. 1.

46 Vogel.

once more projecting their views onto others, deciding which stories to value and which to discredit.



Fig. 2 Chris Ofili, *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996), © Chris Ofili, image courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro and David Zwirner.

In 2001, the Brooklyn Museum again drew negative attention, this time over photographer Renée Cox's *Yo Mama's Last Supper*. Once more, Rudolph W. Giuliani and the Catholic League were at the forefront of the controversy. Instead of threatening to pull funds, Giuliani vowed to "appoint a commission to set [decency standards] to keep such works out of museums that receive public money."⁴⁷ He describes the work as "disgusting, outrageous, and anti-Catholic,"⁴⁸ rallying protestors to censor the artist, discrediting her work and perspective. Whether the

47 Monte Williams, "Yo Mama" Artist Takes on Catholic Critic", *The New York Times*, 21 February 2001.

48 Bumiller, Elisabeth, "Affronted by Nude 'Last Supper,' Giuliani Calls for Decency Panel", *The New York Times*, 16 February 2001, Section A, p. 1.

public agrees with the artist or not, the “link between what counts as knowledge and who has power, has long been a founding principle of colonial ethnography,”⁴⁹ manifesting in various facets of life. Renée Cox’s body of work is an act of resistance against the Whitewashing of the Black Madonna. The *Yo Mama* series also includes the classical Pietà of a half-nude Renée Cox with a veil made of fabrics as she observes and embraces the sitter in the position of Christ (see Figure 3). Renée Cox’s artworks incorporate topics of motherhood and social critiques of institutionalized religion. Cox replied to the controversy by confronting the Catholic critics: “I have a right to interpret the Last Supper just as Leonardo da Vinci created the Last Supper with people who look like him.”⁵⁰ By embodying the Black Madonna, Cox gives agency to Black women and takes a political stance that draws awareness to marginalized voices and perspectives that have been silenced by colonialism and its legacies. In effect, her body of work challenges and addresses structural silences.



Fig. 3 Renée Cox, *Yo Mama's Pietà*, 1994.

49 Stoler, p. 96.

50 Williams.



Fig. 4 Jon Henry, *Untitled #29*, North Miami, FL, 2015.

New York-based photographer Jon Henry takes on a similar approach as Renée Cox through his series *Stranger Fruit* (2014–present) (see Figure 4). He brings into conversation religion and institutionalized racism. His photographs of Black mothers holding their sons allude to Michelangelo’s *Pietà* through a political lens. The difference with Jon Henry’s photography is that in these portraits, the mothers almost always return the viewers’ gaze directly. With this stylistic choice, these mothers are active participants in confronting the public. Their eyes urge spectators to take notice and to be part of the movement to dismantle police brutality and all the senseless deaths of Black men. By employing the *Pietà*, Jon Henry strategically illustrates the irony and contradictions of institutionalized religions when it comes to marginalized BIPOC communities. He draws attention to the countless murders inflicted by the police while utilizing iconic religious imagery, forcing viewers to pay attention to Black women and their voices, narratives, and pain.

Together, these artists employ religious imagery to reassess and recover the untold narratives of Black women. In effect, they give agency to the Black Madonna and acknowledge her Blackness via everyday Black women. Yet, certain opponents utilize modern tactics to silence these artists, thus acting on the colonial tropes visible in the archives. We must ask who has ownership of the Madonna, and why? Which institutions validate dominant views of this religious imagery, and how does it partake in the erasure of the subject's true origins? Can a singular demographic dictate how to represent her image? Despite the contradictions surrounding this image, she is foremost a mother figure to numerous patrons, both Black and White, whether regarded as Isis, the Black Madonna in Częstochowa, or as Erzulie Dantor. However, that does not justify the erasure of her true origins, and I argue that it should act as a motivator for scholars, who as knowledge producers are morally obligated to correct such inaccuracies.

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PART THREE:

CRISIS

In the first chapter of this section, Debora Spini introduces a cogent discussion reflecting on women and migration and the transformations of “care” and care work caused by the spread of COVID-19, both in the public and in the private sphere. She explores the concept that the containment measures adopted throughout the world have brought about a regression into domesticity that has primarily targeted women. Bryn Evans’ poem focuses on memory and refuge over land and water. Arielsela Holdbrook-Smith interrogates Black students from migrant backgrounds at Predominantly White Institutions in the United States and Afro-diasporic cultural organizations. She writes about the events students organize in order to set the stage for storytelling, meaning-making, and cultural connection through the sharing of home recipes and migrant stories. Heike Raphael-Hernandez unpacks cinematic depictions of women from the Global South immigrant communities, and focuses in particular on Hollywood’s representation of gender dynamics as a means of reinstating Western cultural superiority. Paulette Young’s research examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the rendering and adorning of African wax print textiles in the lives of Ghanaian women. Esther Armah offers a call to action for Black women in Africa and its diaspora to resist the burdens of racism and oppression by waging an intervention of rest that counters social and cultural expectations of Black women’s bodies as always in service to others. Roshini Kempadoo’s contribution rounds out the section by recounting a body of photographs she calls “women resistance narratives” that have been made to oppose the visible colonial legacies, racism and injustices that sustain the current conditions of women of color.

22. Back Home

Lessons from the Pandemic on Care, Gender and Justice

Debora Spini

This chapter aims at offering some elements for a wider reflection on women and migration focusing on the transformations of “care” and care work caused by the spread of COVID-19, both in the public and in the private sphere. The containment measures adopted throughout the globe have brought a regression into domesticity that has primarily targeted women. This condition of forced domesticity has, in turn, made the well-known gender biases regulating the distribution of care work even more evident: a development that could not fail to affect migrant women. The pandemic not only confirmed that the distribution of care is a matter of social and political justice, but also revealed its global dimension. The chapter will briefly address the nexus between care work, gender, and migration, to highlight how the new contradictions brought to light by COVID-19 interrogate feminist reflections.¹

1. Care in Feminist Moral and Political Theory

Care occupies a very special place in feminist political and moral thought, to the point that an ethics of care is often identified as ‘the’ feminist approach to moral philosophy. Although this identification is

1 I am grateful to Elena Pulcini’s cherished memory for the help and support she gave me in writing this chapter just weeks before she was snatched away from us. I also wish to thank professor S. Marchetti, of Venice University, for her kind advice.

definitely reductive, it is undeniable that major trends within Western feminist thought have singled out care as the ground for developing an alternative to mainstream moral approaches, beginning with Kantian deontology. Carol Gilligan's seminal work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women Development* (1982) is considered the turning point for the development of an ethics of care, meant as an ethical outlook which focuses more on relationships than on abstract principles, on needs rather than on rights.

The choice to assign a central place to care in ethical reflection has momentous consequences, as it requires the adoption of quite a different vocabulary and conceptual toolkit from those which are typical of the moral and political thought of mainstream, Western modernity. A care-centered approach to ethics goes beyond rationality and impartiality, as it calls into play the emotional ('passional') dimension.² More importantly, re-thinking moral capacity in terms of care makes it necessary to view the dominant model of moral agent as an independent subject, capable of rational self-government. A relationship of care is instead by its own nature asymmetrical, as it implies that at least one of the parties involved is needy, vulnerable and fragile. Such a drastic change of paradigm makes it necessary to reconsider many of the crucial assumptions underlying mainstream Western moral and political philosophy: to take but one example, the nexus between responsibility and vulnerability.

The focus on care has momentous consequences also in the field of politics, as in Western democracy moral autonomy and citizenship are deeply connected. In fact, in the experience of Western democracies, the capacities of independent and impartial moral judgment and rational self-government have been regarded as the pre-condition for accessing democratic citizenship. Integrating care within the scope of democratic politics, on the contrary, makes it necessary to think beyond the entitlement to 'individual rights' as the grounds for legitimacy and agency. In fact, citizens may not be already independent and autonomous agents claiming recognition, as they may find themselves in the condition of being vulnerable, fragile, needy. A genuinely democratic political community therefore has to "take care" of its citizens, so as to make it

2 For an in-depth philosophical analysis of the implications of giving care, as well as for an exhaustive debate of the literature, see Pulcini 2012.

possible for them to actually exercise political autonomy: “rights” are thus reformulated as capabilities (Nussbaum 2000).

The focus on care has raised a host of debates even within feminist scholarship and activism. Critical voices have observed how it may end up reinforcing a patriarchal binary order, based upon an essentialist view whereby women would be ‘by nature’ oriented to nurture and care.³ This critique points to a very important knot of issues lying at the heart of modern democratic politics, which may be traced back to the division between public and private spheres: a cornerstone of the Western liberal conception of citizenship which developed hand in hand with the affirmation of capitalism. In this view, the sphere of citizenship is regulated by individual rights, whilst competition dominates in that of economic life, whilst the family is supposed to be regulated by generosity, love, and selflessness, a series of virtues epitomized by maternal love. In this haven of virtue, justice had no place. Insofar as they belonged solely to the private sphere, women remained so to say ‘condemned’ to their natural destiny of caregivers.

On the other hand, care does not have to be necessarily the sworn enemy of justice. On the contrary, they can be considered as mutually dependent: the oblation nature of care is possible only within a justice framework, whilst the emotional dimension of care, with the value it attributes to the emotional dimension, may provide the motivation to fight injustice (Pulcini 2020).

2. Care Work, Gender and Migration

The family thus emerges as the sphere performing a series of care functions: care therefore is not solely a mental or emotional inclination, but a fully-fledged form of work. Tronto and Fisher defined caring as “a species activity that includes every-thing that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining Web” (Tronto 1993, 103). In this light, care becomes in fact a form of work, originally performed mostly, if not exclusively, by the family. In contemporary

3 See for example Dietz 1998.

societies, especially those implementing some kind of welfare state, care related works are performed by a wide variety of professions, such as nurses, social workers, educators. The activity aiming to “maintain, continue and repair the world” includes the care of children of the elderly, of the sick and ensures all the minimal conditions for the reproduction of life, or, more specifically in the context of capitalist societies, for social reproduction. Care work is essential to capitalism, as it “forms capitalism’s human subjects, sustaining them as embodied natural beings, while also constituting them as social beings, forming their *habitus* and the cultural ethos in which they move” (Fraser 2016).

The lens of intersectionality reveals how the plight of domestic migrant workers is defined by a series of interlocking dimensions where gender justice interacts with class and economic structures, and consequently becomes part of a wider scenario of global justice issues. Women have (supposedly) gained access to the spheres of public life, however, the rhythm regulating the life of the family spheres has not changed. So ‘emancipation’ has in many cases meant that women have to juggle and combine the demands of paid work outside of the family and unpaid work within it. The care functions that make the world go around are still an iceberg, whose main portion is hidden from view. Care work does not appear in budgets and is not summed up in GDPs; time spent in care activities is considered to be ‘free’ or ‘personal’. To borrow the vocabulary of one of the most famous philosophical disputes of the last decades, care is thus both a problem of recognition as well as of distribution. Joan Tronto in fact points out how democracy should reflect on how to allocate caring responsibilities so as to take them out of the family (Tronto 2013). Tronto’s claim is even more forceful and relevant in light of the fact that, all over the world, neoliberal policies are jeopardizing welfare state services.

Failing a reconsideration of roles in the family, the access to external work has made it harder for women to comply with well settled expectations in terms of care work performance. Migrant labor becomes a crucial resource, as care work, within and outside the home’s boundaries, is more and more in demand. Needless to say, care work continues to have a marked gender character, thus leading to the phenomenon defined as the “feminization of migration”: “[...] women are on the move as never before in history. *In 2015, women comprised 48*

percent of all international migrants worldwide. Second, there is a growing demand for migrant women's labor in destination countries, especially in the care, domestic, and manufacturing sectors" (P. Lucio Maimon 2017). More specifically, domestic work is one of the most important reasons for migration. According to data provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the total figure of migrant domestic workers is approximately 11.5 million, of which about 73.4% (or around 8.5 million) are women (ILO 2015, p. xi). Domestic work is the less recognized form of care work: and, if care work is seldom recognized, migrant domestic work is almost invisible (Lokot and Batia 2020). Migrant domestic workers experience a specific form of vulnerability. They are often trapped in their workplace ('home') and the nature of their employment causes them to be isolated and consequently for the most part unable to organize.

The "globalization of social reproduction" (Kofman, quoted in Marchetti 2016, 452) causes millions of women from the Global South to migrate in order to perform "'women's work' of the north—work that affluent women in the Global North are no longer able or willing to do." (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 3.) The term 'Global Care Chains'⁴ describes the process whereby migrant laborers (again, mostly women) are brought in to perform functions of care, whilst other caregivers have to replace them in the country of origin. The real impact of this "care drain" on children, families and more generally on the countries of origin of migrant workers (Ochshild 2014, 121) is still to be fully appreciated.

3. Gender, Migration and Pandemic

The pandemic has further embittered the knot of contradictions surrounding the distribution of care. As far as the Western world is concerned, the measures to contrast COVID-19 have upset the fragile equilibrium between life and work, or public and private, by causing a

4 Amaia Pérez Orozco provides this definition of global care chains: "Global care chains are networks of transnational dimensions that are formed for the purpose of maintaining daily life. These networks are comprised of households which transfer their caregiving tasks from one to another on the basis of power axes, such as gender, ethnicity, social class, and place of origin" (Pérez Orozco 2009).

process of forced domesticity. The impact of these long months of home-secluded life on gender roles is still to be fully mapped and assessed, but the comforting representation of life in lockdown where yoga, healthy food and family quality time can easily be reconciled with online work is far from accurate. Women, like everyone else, had to go back home, but 'home' also became a workplace and a classroom. Many functions performed by public agencies or at least available on the market—the most obvious of all being education—are now taking place within the family circle, and, because of the enduring imbalance in the distribution of roles, such functions end up being the sole responsibility of women. The unprecedented economic crisis also has a notable gender dimension, which has prompted economists to speak about a 'she-cession'. First of all, women are mostly employed in those sectors more dramatically affected by the pandemic. Furthermore, the unfair distribution of care responsibilities affects women's professional lives, causing stress, burnout, and a consequential decrease in productivity (Madgavkar et al. 2020).

In this framework, migrant women workers experience a specific form of vulnerability, as detailed in a recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) report (Foley and Piper 2020). In many countries the majority of workers in the health sector are migrants, and more precisely migrant women who are therefore more directly exposed to contagion. The same considerations apply for the high number of migrant women workers employed in other caring structures such as nursing homes. Furthermore, the pandemic has exacerbated the already precarious status of migrant domestic workers. The restrictions affecting international travel and mobility affect migrant workers in general, but as domestic work is often informal and irregular, migrant women find themselves in much greater danger of being deported or fined. Evidently, the she-cession will impact women in the Global North, resulting in the consequently higher job insecurity of their migrant women employees. The care work provided by domestic migrant workers is at risk of becoming superfluous—or alternatively, even further removed from the light of public attention, and even more confined within the walls of someone else's home.

Concluding Remarks: Where Does It All Leave Us

The most evident legacy of one year of life in the time of COVID-19 is a series of urgent and unsettling questions for feminist reflection. The pandemic's impact on migrant women shows what is really at stake in the redistribution of care work. The challenge of 'balancing work and family' is only the tip of the iceberg, and questions about care and justice cannot be hastily dismissed as 'women covering up for other women'. The specific condition of women migrant workers, if considered from an intersectional angle, shows the essentially political dimension of care work. Furthermore, the impact of the pandemic on migrant women makes it all the more evident how distorting and misleading the juxtaposition between 'care' and 'justice' is, as already indicated by Pulcini. The distribution of care work is evidently a problem of gender justice, and at the same time, as shown by Tronto, it is also a question of citizenship rights and of the nature and scope of democratic public spaces. Most importantly, the plight of migrant domestic workers in the grip of the pandemic reveals the global dimension of the distribution of care work, and ultimately leads, as indicated by Fraser, to a wider analysis of social reproduction in capitalism.

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pile in glittered shards / look out into the salt and drink

this house is not a home / it is / a boat
drowning

/ it is / a luxury to have somewhere / else
to go

24. Sustaining and Retaining

A Social Ecological Reflection on Cultural Dance Performance for African Women and Femmes in Higher Education

Arielsela Holdbrook-Smith

For Black students of migrant backgrounds at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the United States, Afro-diasporic cultural organizations offer an opportunity to find and take up space in ostracizing campus environments. The annual cultural celebrations hosted by these organizations are highly appealing to newcomers and seasoned students alike. These highly anticipated, student-led showcases become the stage for storytelling, meaning-making, and cultural connection. Between the artistic performances, the food catering, and the community collaborations, they are sites of self-definition and establishment of community, of creatively engaging with our migrant stories and journeys from the continent.

Cultural dances from a breadth of diasporic origins are often a highlight of collegiate cultural celebrations. Dance, as a cultural tool significant to many cultures of the African continent and its diaspora, prompts full body commitment and an opportunity for healing that only movement can provide. From a social-ecological framework, the use of dance among young adults from African immigrant backgrounds reveals a story about community resistance, resilience, and healing. For women and femmes of African migrant backgrounds, participation in cultural dance performances is a declaration of agency and identity, and a window to collective liberation.

An informal survey of ten women and femmes who participated as undergraduates in the annual Celebration of Africa hosted by the African Student Association at the University of California, San Diego over a period of seven years yielded key themes such as identifying (with) and remembering the migratory experience through cultural celebration. The graduates' heritages encompass multiple countries and regions across the continent, from Nigeria to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The responses assert that these community-based representations carry impact on every social-ecological level, from individual to societal.

African dance is critical to engaging in post-colonial pedagogy, and African Student Associations become vessels of decolonization for participants internally and externally. Ojeya Cruz Banks, a Denison University professor of Dance and Black Studies, articulates in her writing that "dance acts as a force for recovering non-Western forms of empowerment" (Cruz Banks 2010). The individual experience of partaking in dance performances is one of restoring agency. As women and femmes of African descent, some survey participants noted dancing in the cultural celebrations as an exercising of bodily autonomy and self-determination that is not always afforded to Black women and femmes. It is a performance that addresses the violence of internalized anti-Blackness, xenophobia, and misogynoir through the empowerment of moving our bodies in ways that declare pride. It is a bold reclamation of self in response to the 'othering' that occurs in university campus climates.

Interpersonally, as the choreographing students teach others, they hand down a foundational campus community history that exists between generations of students as a sort of cultural relic. As explained by multiple surveyed participants, it is a community-building, participatory experience that cultivates a sense of belonging among members. It is an artistic form of knowledge-sharing amongst peers of similar backgrounds, interpreting experiences of identity in tandem. The very process of collaborative choreographing and practicing for the culminating performance builds social networks, defining the stories we want to tell in the time we have at this institution and what the community will signify for present and future students. Collectively, the experience creates a home away from home, particularly for international and first-generation university students. Participants in these Afro-diasporic

dance groups often reflect upon this process as an important bonding experience during their undergraduate years.

For participants, dancing and choreographing for these cultural celebrations is a manifestation of joy as resistance. Afro-diasporic cultural celebrations, such as the University of California, San Diego's Celebration of Africa, are about claiming space. Celebration of Africa vocalizes the presence of a Black campus community that asserts its ownership of campus space physically and figuratively. It offers the opportunity to engage with African arts on a community level that extends to both local and global communities.¹ Celebrity appearances are a highlight feature of some events, while others may focus more on giving a spotlight to local African businesses in the area. Regardless, the emphasis on community reverberates throughout each celebration. Dancers in past Celebration of Africa events, for example, have had a unique opportunity to collaborate with local African drummers and musical performers in the San Diego area. The mutual support raises awareness for community resources while also providing a space to share in African creative expression with local organizers.

On a larger societal scale, university cultural celebrations address the exclusion of African immigrants from the migration narrative in the United States. Dance, as a form of cultural expression at these events, places into conversation the intersectional identities of being Black, African, and immigrant in America, pushing for visibility of Black migrants in a narrative which disproportionately impacts the African community. Dance performances in Celebration of Africa originate from multiple regions, addressing the heterogeneity of African cultures. Celious and Oysman posit that "racial identity theories, however, typically handle race as a simple Black-White dichotomy that overlooks within-group heterogeneity" (Celious and Oysman 2001). In one night, multiple groups take the stage to represent their cultures and histories, articulating the unique salience of their own cultural experiences and rejecting monolithic notions of the African experience. Our cultural contexts as women and femmes of African migrant backgrounds, while

1 The differences in celebrations between African Student Associations at various American universities somewhat depend on funding, as some institutions provide greater funding to student cultural organizations than others.

similar in some aspects, are also widely varied with nuances that deserve to be heard and respected.

Collegiate cultural shows remain significant for African-identifying women and femmes of migrant backgrounds, as they provide space for self-definition and community-building. As these events support students in making sense and meaning of their historical, cultural, and individual experiences, they also provide an opportunity for unapologetic celebration. The prioritization of joy as a gateway to resilience and autonomy creates a foundational environment for women and femmes to connect with others who look like them and who may share similar experiences. In the transition between cultures and geographies, cultural celebrations are a space of coming into our own as adults determining our individual and communal futures through the interpretation of the social and historical contexts that influence our multidimensional existences.

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25. The ‘New’ Hollywood and Beyond

Women, Migration, and Cultural Victimhood

Heike Raphael-Hernandez

When U.S. American film directors include members of Global South immigrant communities in their movies, many often reinforce—intentionally or unintentionally—pre-existing cultural stereotypes that allow them, together with their respective audiences, to gaze in horror at those immigrants’ countries of origin and their respective cultures. This can be observed especially when films deal with gender. It seems that gender serves better than any other aspect to satisfy narratives of the superior West versus the inferior East. Gender issues are presented in ways that allow the West to offer women the opportunity to be rescued from their oppressing Eastern or ‘Oriental’ cultures.

The last decade has seen a growing cinematic interest in the Arab female victim. While the twenty-first century still rescues Asian women, as one can observe in *Gran Torino* (2008), for example, the post-9/11, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim climate, however, seems to have chosen the Arab and Muslim American communities for such gender mission. In her essay “Islamophobia and the ‘Privileging’ of Arab American Women”, Nada Elia observes that in the eyes of the Western mainstream public, the Muslim woman has become *the* symbol for cultural suffering; she seems to embody the quintessential helpless victim who is in need of being rescued from her brutal father, husband, brother, or son.¹

1 Nada Elia, “Islamophobia and the ‘Privileging’ of Arab American Women”, *Feminist Formations* 18/3 (2006), 155–61 (p. 155).

Changes in U.S. foreign politics in recent decades have also contributed to reinforcing the stereotypes of the Arab woman as the helpless, passive, submissive, and oppressed, veiled child-wife who suffers through arranged marriages, honor killings, female genital mutilation, and religiously sanctified domestic abuse. And because “liberating Muslim women from their bondage is part of the American mission to the Islamic world,”² First Lady Laura Bush was able to offer her now-famous radio announcement about the start of the war in Afghanistan, just two months after the events of 9/11 in which she stated, “We are now engaged in a worldwide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the Taliban.”³ Likewise, the war in Iraq was camouflaged with the same rhetoric: in bringing democracy to the country, one of the most important goals would also be to bring rights to women. In U.S. film, one can watch such rescue missions of women of Middle Eastern descent in mainstream productions such as *Crossing Over* (2009), as well as in independent films such as *American East* (2008), *Amreeka* (2009), and *Three Veils* (2011), just to name a few examples.

The cinematic approach to culture via women’s bodies raises several potential problems. For example, the individual, male and female alike, is often mistakenly taken as representing the entire group. An additional problem is connected to an ethical dilemma arising from

2 Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and Kathleen M. Moore, *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 3.

3 Quoted in Haddad, Smith, and Moore, *Muslim Women in America*, p. 3. In her radio address on 17 November 2001, Laura Bush announced that the United States is now engaged in “a world-wide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the Al-Qaida terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban. That regime is now in retreat across much of the country, and the people of Afghanistan—especially women—are rejoicing. Afghan women know, through hard experience, what the rest of the world is discovering: the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists”. Quoted in Anne Brodsky, “Violence Against Afghan Women: Tradition, Religion, Conflict, and War”, in *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*, ed. by Moha Ennaji and Fatima Sadiqi (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 115–37 (p. 115). Anne Brodsky notes also that interestingly, however, “the suffering of the Afghan people, and particularly Afghan women, which occurred from 1996 to 2001 under the Taliban, was of little concern to most Western governments before September 11 brought tragedy to U.S. shores” (p. 116). Brodsky cites a U.S. State Department spokesperson who told the *Voice of America* in 1996 that “the US found ‘nothing objectionable’ about the Taliban’s fundamental policies” (p. 116).

such a generalization: how should one criticize acts of male chauvinism and oppression that are not just cinematic inventions, but truly exist in the reality of many women? Avoiding any criticism would waste the opportunity to improve women's circumstances via this public cinematic exposure. On the other hand, any criticism of non-Western cultures could easily enforce pre-existing negative stereotypes and perpetuate Western claims to superiority. And the representation of gendered cultural markers leads to additional questions. Since these markers easily imply the danger of sensationalist representations, one has to ask: who is doing the act of speaking? And who is the subject that is spoken of?

Cinematic Challenges

For the American movie industry, the helpless 'Muslim woman' has been a fascinating staple since its beginnings. For example, Rudolph Valentino's *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), two highly successful movies, demonstrate Hollywood's earliest cinematic attempts at representing Islam's barbaric masculinity and victimized femininity.⁴ In *The Sheik*, the very first scenes let the viewer know that Islam, the Middle East, and subsequent gender-related cultural customs belong together; for the opening shot, the viewer watches a group of about twenty unidentified men in Oriental outfits in ritual worship in a desert bowing together in prayer. Soon, a title card lets the viewer know that this is a place, "Where the children of Araby dwell in happy ignorance that Civilization has passed them by." In the scene that immediately follows, the viewer watches young women unhappily lining up in front of a tent and reads about them, "Maidens chosen for the marriage market—An ancient custom by which Wives are secured for the wealthy sons of Allah." Similar Western cinematic fabrications have often been presented throughout the following decades. The cinematic fascination with the 'Muslimwoman' and her cultural suffering has never ceased to excite outside viewers.

The depiction of the powerless, oppressed 'Muslimwoman' has not been limited to cinematic representations of the Middle East; the Arab

4 *The Sheik*, dir. by George Melford (Paramount Pictures, 1921); *The Son of the Sheik*, dir. by George Fitzmaurice (Feature Productions, 1926).

American woman who actually lives in the United States and is a rightful citizen has often been presented as the suffering 'Muslimwoman' as well. Even films that try to fairly represent Arab American communities seem to fall into this trap. This can definitely be observed in mainstream productions such as Hollywood's *Crossing Over* (2009).⁵ The film focuses on a timely and hotly debated topic—illegal immigration to the United States. The viewer watches Harrison Ford, who plays Max Brogan, an ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agent, hunting down immigrants of diverse nationalities. Since most contemporary public debates focus solely on Mexican immigrants when the issue of illegal immigration comes up, the film truly tries to do justice to the complexity of the issue with its diversity. It includes not only the inevitable Mexican single mother, but also an Australian actress, a Bangladeshi taxi driver with his family of five, and an Israeli student. The movie also includes a family of Arab descent, the Baraheri family; yet while they are not illegal, they are still first-generation immigrants from Egypt whom the viewer sees at the end of the movie taking their oath of citizenship during their naturalization ceremony. Hamid Baraheri, one of the sons, works together with Max Brogan at the Immigration Enforcement agency. The variety of conflicts of all these people in *Crossing Over* is told in subplots, which unfold simultaneously.

While the story of most of the characters in *Crossing Over* is clearly related to their hopes of leaving poverty behind or pursuing professional dreams, the subplot focusing on the Egyptian immigrant family is included only because of their conflict with their outcast daughter, Zahra, whose older brother, Farid, eventually murders her to save the family's honor. Whereas all the other immigrants are provided enough screen time for a discourse that allows them to detail their lives in the United States and the particular challenges they have to face in their diasporic circumstances, the Baraheri family is not provided with such liberal cinematic space. Yet, the movie did in fact have the opportunity to present such a discourse; at some point, Max Brogan is invited to a private family party at the Baraheris' house, where he meets his colleague's family members and converses with them in polite, small-talk fashion about their new life in the United States. Here, the movie misses its chance to develop a more complex discourse about

5 *Crossing Over*, dir. by Wayne Kramer (The Weinstein Company, The Kennedy/Marshall Company & Movie Prose, 2009).

the Baraheris' life back in their country of origin and their new life in America. Instead, the movie uses the family gathering solely for the purpose of cinematically introducing the daughter as the outcast. When she shows up, other mothers take their children away; women whisper and stare at her, and Max Brogan is told not to talk to her. At that point, the viewer does not know about the family's conflict with her, but the viewer must wonder why she is so shunned by her own family. Only later does the viewer learn that she has become the outcast of the family because of an affair with her married boss. While her brother's decision to murder her to save the family's honor is solely his own and not the result of a family council, the murder is, nevertheless, covered up by the rest of the family members. The movie ends with his arrest during the Baraheris' naturalization ceremony; the timing of his arrest could be read as a symbolic statement that America is willing to do a lot for its immigrants, but barbaric cultural practices will not be accepted. The family can only be accepted as Americans once they hand over their barbaric son.

For my reading of the film, it is important to understand that honor killings do indeed occur among immigrants in Western countries, and they should, of course, be called murder and prosecuted as such. However, the problem is that if a movie starts out by intending to bravely face hotly debated political issues and tries to paint a more complex and humanized picture of all the other immigrants with their different subplots, the same should be expected for the Arab immigrant family. Instead, the Baraheris seem to be included just for the sake of addressing the sensationalist topic of honor killings.

The problem with such movies is that they truly help to nurture the image of violent and ignorant Arab men, be it the father or the son, and of the submissive Arab woman. This reinforces the stereotype that when the American, value-loving daughter tries to escape these oppressive and barbaric, backward circumstances, her family will destroy her.

In Their Own Voice

Considering the damage that movies can do in regard to cultural representation, they should depict empowered women, who are not just in need of some form of cultural saving, but instead are able to hybridize their own specific cultures with parts of mainstream American society.

These new women can be found, for example, in *American East* (2008), *Amreeka* (2009), and *Three Veils* (2011).⁶

Looking at the Arab American film community and their dealings with gendered cultural topics, *American East* is an example of a film that tries to present a responsible representation of the topic. In *American East*, screenwriter Sayed Badreya, who also plays the lead role of Mustafa, an Egyptian fast-food eatery owner in L.A., and director Hesham Issawi, both of whom are Egyptian American, offer a movie that has often been praised as the very first Arab American movie. The writers' own awareness of its novelty could also have been the reason why, at times, it is a bit slow and feels more like a college-level introductory course to post-9/11 Arab American issues. The film tries to cover nearly all topics of concern to Arab Americans, such as FBI surveillance, state-sanctioned discrimination against Arab Americans, unfair media coverage of the Middle East, American mainstream stereotypes of Muslim culture, Jewish-Arab conflicts in the Middle East and in the United States, intra-Arab conflicts, arranged marriages, teenage sons who want to buy Christmas trees and attend Friday night parties, and teenage daughters who want to dress in Western attire and hang out with pot-smoking non-Muslims. This large number of topics puts the film in danger of being a bit too educational; the characters often 'explain' Arab Americans to non-Arab Americans. However, even with these shortcomings, this is still a movie that deserves the praise it has received in reviews.

The movie opens with Mustafa's cousin arriving in L.A. from Egypt to meet with Salwah, Mustafa's sister, who was promised to him when she was twelve years old. Her cousin has come to take her home to Egypt. Some of the discussions about the dilemma of Salwah, who is by then already in her late-twenties and works as a nurse and a hairstylist, come across awkwardly as didactic explanations for U.S. mainstream audiences. Several times in the movie, one finds her explaining the custom of an arranged marriage to non-Arab people. It is also hard to believe that until the arrival of her cousin, she has not yet had a single conversation with her brother about her pending marriage—a brother who otherwise

6 *American East*, dir. by Hesham Issawi (Distant Horizon & Zahra Pictures, 2008); *Amreeka*, dir. by Cherien Dabis (National Geographic, Imagenation & Levantine Entertainment, 2009); *Three Veils*, dir. by Rolla Selbak (Three Veils Production Company & Zahra Pictures, 2011).

seems to act reasonably when it comes to Arab women living in the United States. After all, he allows his teenage daughter to hang out with her pot-smoking friends since she, as he confirms, has the right to have an American life outside the Arab café. Nevertheless, the movie handles the topic well without any sensationalist plot developments; the plot allows Salwah to get out of this arrangement without any major event or action. The viewer does not watch any dramatic conflict or violence on any side. Salwah's cousin himself declares that she has changed too much into an American woman so that she would not be the right woman for him. All this happens among people who show respect for each other on all fronts. Films like *American East* deserve praise because, while they try to deal honestly with complex cultural gender issues and their transfer to diasporic contexts, these films do not need to rely on male bashing to accomplish their purpose.

In *Three Veils*, filmmaker Rolla Selbak tells the story of three young Arab American women, Nikki, Amira, and Leila, who struggle with issues that women anywhere might have to deal with at some point in their lives such as women's rights and family expectations, rape, gay relationships, failed love, friendship, and substance abuse. However, since all three women are also Muslima, their personal struggles can be seen only within this framework. Their particular culture necessarily complicates their own dreams that have been influenced by their upbringing in non-Muslim America. The three stories allow viewers to get a personal and informative insight into female Muslim and Arab American culture, and to symbolically peek behind their veils, since none of the three women actually wears a veil.

For example, the movie includes an arranged marriage; the viewer meets Leila for the first time during her preparations for the engagement party to Ali. In the following scenes, the viewer watches Leila being torn between her growing love for Ali—whenever she looks at him and he lovingly smiles back at her, the viewer sees her dreaming of having romantic candlelight dinners and erotic baths together in their beautiful future home—and her doubts about a relationship that is not founded on her own, but rather her parents' choice. Nevertheless, the movie also portrays her parents as providing a nurturing space for Leila that allows her to question her parents' culture-based decision. In one of her tearful talks with her father, he makes it clear to her that her own happiness

takes priority over any other considerations. That his promise was not just some superficial rhetorical exercise can be seen when her parents help Leila get out of her engagement after Ali rapes her.

Amira, on the other hand, belongs to a family in which it seems that her parents, who are very loving, but also very self-centered, do not care at all what their children do. They are more absent than present in their children's lives. Amira is completely left alone with her conflict between her erotic awakening toward women and her spiritual awakening toward religious devotion. One can see that she even wishes for someone who would just guide her towards reconciling these two seemingly antagonistic desires. Only through her friendship with Nikki, who has her own share of conflicts with cultural expectations of correct female Muslim behavior, does she find a way to accept her own devout Muslim, but also lesbian identity.

While the threat of them is always imminent, sensationalist cultural subplots are absent from this movie. In its clearly woman-centered presentation, the film does not shy away from conflict; however, any violence or aberrant male behavior is presented as individual guilt and responsibility.

Likewise, *Amreeka* is a movie that is free of any cultural gender bias. It offers several strong Palestinian American women—the sisters Muna and Raghda, and Raghda's teenage daughter Salma. The movie deals with many post-9/11 conflicts with which Arab Americans were confronted, yet the portrayals of Muna, Raghda, and her husband Nabeel do not follow gender stereotypes at all. The teenage daughter puts her parents through the same headaches that any other teenage daughter might put her parents through, but her experimentation with boys and drugs and late-night parties is never met with any hints from her father that he wants a daughter who is a good Arab girl in the sense that other, gender-biased movies define good Arab girls. Her mother does get angry at her at one point after Salma comes home in the middle of the night and is clearly lying about her outings; her mother yells at her: "I don't want my daughter running around like American girls. Drinking, doing drugs and God knows what else..." Raghda also grounds her daughter for one month, unknowingly choosing a punishment that epitomizes Western cultural norms, a culture that she otherwise despises. But even if the mother's concerns display her dislike for American culture, this is not

a conversation that even hints at any abuse of an Arab daughter who is kept hostage in her own culture. Salma is depicted as the young woman who takes a strong stand in her school against arrogant peers and condescending political science teachers, and is not intimidated by their remarks about Arabs. With her strength of character and her ability to fight back, she represents a cinematic role model for other young Arab American women in American society.

In addition, the viewer can see Muna as a strong role model for her own community. Nabeel, the head of the Halaby family, becomes increasingly confined in an internment of his own psyche. His medical practice is losing patients daily because, in patriotic post-9/11 times, people do not want to be treated by a physician of Arab descent. It seems only a question of time before his family faces financial ruin; he tells Muna that they have already missed several payments on the mortgage for the house. While his wife tries to tell him that perhaps this could also be a good time to leave America, he knows that they cannot move somewhere else that easily. Palestine does not offer the standard of living to which they are now accustomed, and every other Arab country treats Palestinians as second-class refugees. Not knowing how to deal with this dilemma, he resigns himself to not talking to his wife anymore, and instead moves into the basement where he watches Arab news channels. It is ultimately Muna who helps him to get out of this mental trap. One night she is doing laundry in the basement while he is watching Arab news. When he tells her: "Look at this. They demolished thirteen homes in Rafah. Three Palestinians were killed. And on the American stations, they are never showing this. It's as if it has never happened", she responds, "Enough with all this news. It is depressing." She helps him to understand that Palestinians indeed do not have any place to go where life would be peaceful and perfect for them, so instead of giving in to resignation, they should simply pick up the pieces and keep fighting their battles wherever they live now.

As I argue in this essay, new films do exist. Movies such as *American East*, *Amreeka*, and *Three Veils* offer strong women who do indeed struggle to find their place in their own respective diasporic societies, a process that requires hybrid cultural adjustments, but their struggles and final solutions are represented in a respectful way. Yet, all these films are produced by independent filmmakers. So far, mainstream productions

still lack representations that are free of voyeuristic desires; these independent films, however, can serve as a vanguard and inspiration for future mainstream productions.

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26. Telling the Story of a Global Pandemic

African Wax Prints, Style, Beauty and COVID-19 in Ghana, West Africa

Paulette Young

Textiles, and particularly wax prints, play a multifaceted role intimately tied to significant events in Ghanaian life. Wax prints are colorful, printed cloths that express meaningful messages through their design and culturally significant names, often in the form of a proverb. Women adopt wax prints to mark significant experiences over the course of their life. They have become popular to wear to work as “National Friday Wear” to show solidarity and support local textile related industries. Wax prints are also an important part of the national heritage of Ghana and memorialize key historical events, celebrations and global disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ghana Textile Printing Company (GTP) created a collection of COVID-inspired wax print designs to assist in the global fight to control the coronavirus. The goal was to remind the nation of the government directives to manage the crisis, including washing hands, social distancing and staying at home. There was also the promise that the popularity of the COVID-inspired wax print designs would increase sales and productivity within the largely female-centered Ghanaian textile industry, which had been negatively impacted by the health and economic crisis. This paper examines the impact of the global pandemic on wax prints and women’s lives during this tumultuous time period.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global event that has a significant local effect on the lives of Ghanaians. Women are at the core of the fight against COVID-19 as they face potential job and income loss and shoulder increased demands at home including domestic chores, schooling, and care for children and the elderly. They are overrepresented at the frontlines of the global pandemic, in jobs traditionally done by women in the service sectors, including retail sales.¹ Within the textile industry, girls and women are on the economic frontlines as entrepreneurs in the public market, in brick-and-mortar boutiques and online. The textile industry has been hit particularly hard economically, with women cloth venders, marketers and fashion designers especially devastated. An often overlooked group in the textile community that has been impacted by the coronavirus is the *Kayayee*—female porters—often girls as young as eight years old, who migrate mainly from the northern areas for work in the marketplace and transport heavy piles of textiles, adornment accoutrements and a range of commercial beauty products, often in a large bowl on their head.² With no financial safety net and limited access to water for handwashing or less crowded living and working spaces for social distancing, these workers, essential to the marketplace, are vulnerable to COVID-19.

From the early discovery of COVID-19 in Ghana on 12 March 2020, the government immediately introduced public health and socio-economic policy measures. A strategic plan to combat the spread included limiting the importation of the virus, containing the spread, caring for patients, limiting the social and economic impacts of the virus and expanding the country's domestic capability and self-reliance.³

The coronavirus is spread by human contact and viral transmission; one way to contain it is by avoiding unnecessary touching and thorough

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- 1 Chuku Chuku, Adamo Mukasa, and Yasin Yenice, "Africa in Focus: Putting women and girls' safety first in Africa's response to COVID-19", Brookings Institute, 8 May 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/05/08/putting-women-and-girls-first-in-africas-response-to-covid-19/>.
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frequent handwashing. The customary Ghanaian practice of shaking hands as a greeting has been particularly challenging to quell. In Ghana, to refuse to shake a person's hand as a greeting is difficult, for as a local proverb notes, "Only enemies refuse to shake hands". As journalist and former Ghana government minister Elizabeth Ohene notes, "Here in Ghana, there are some things that are sacred in our lives and nobody touches them under any circumstance: religion, handshakes and funerals... many people believe they define our very existence."⁴ The fist bump, elbow smooch, the shoulder rub and even the leg kick are becoming a hesitant replacement:⁵ "President Nana Akufo-Addo set the tone for the new rules at the celebrations of Ghana's 63rd independence anniversary on 6 March, when he ostentatiously kept both hands resolutely behind his back when he arrived at the ceremony to greet those seated on the dais."⁶

Social distancing measures were announced on 15 March and international travelers into Ghana were restricted from entry. A week later, all air, land and sea borders were closed. By the end of March, major cities across the country were locked down, including a ban on all public gatherings, for three weeks.⁷

The government took an aggressive approach to managing the pandemic, gaining well-deserved praise locally and globally. From the initial cases, they began contact tracing, launched a COVID-19 Tracker App for assessing and reporting symptoms and locating free health care services. They used drones to deliver testing samples, which significantly controlled the spread. National loans were provided to local companies to produce personal protective equipment, limiting reliance on foreign imports. The government also provided economic assistance to citizens and businesses.⁸ The President issued a nation-wide mandate for public

4 Elizabeth Ohene, "Coronavirus: Why Ghana has gone into mourning after mass funeral ban", *BBC*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52010868>.

5 Elizabeth Ohene, "We might learn some lessons", *The Graphic*, 18 March 2020, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/elizabeth-ohene/we-might-learn-some-lessons.html>.

6 Ohene, "Coronavirus: Why Ghana has gone into mourning after mass funeral ban".

7 Zhang, "How well is Ghana?".

8 Ibid.

face-mask wearing to help control spread of the virus, with violators subjected to immediate arrest.⁹

While the public health measures were admirable and well-intended, the Kayayei Youth Association characterizes the Ghanaian government's assistance as inadequate in the face of COVID-19 challenges. Young members of the textile community were still facing hardship in order to adhere to the public health recommendations. This led to community leaders organizing demonstrations demanding free water for a few months to enable hand washing to avoid the spread of the virus. They also requested government-sponsored transport to give Kayayei the option to return to their northern homes, as well as assistance with housing and food.¹⁰

The government believed that clear communication was key to defeating the coronavirus. A highlight was President Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo's highly anticipated nationally televised weekly addresses to the nation. He shared his knowledge from experts noting that the virus was transmitted by the spread of droplets from person to person through talking, singing, coughing and sneezing and reminded the public to adhere to social distancing and enhanced hygiene protocols.¹¹ Wearing his characteristic round spectacles and shirts fashioned from locally produced colorful textile designs, embedded with culturally significant meanings and messages, the President led the nation through this time of crisis and appealed to public cooperation, highlighting the civic responsibilities as a collective family to help control the pandemic (Figure 1). "Our survival is in our own hands [...] If we are mindful and self-disciplined, we have it in us to defeat this pandemic, and help return our lives to normalcy".¹² Wax prints, and their messaging capability would prove to be integral to this effort.

9 "Wear a mask or risk being arrested—President", *General News*, 15 June 2020, <https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2020/06/15/wear-a-mask-or-risk-being-arrested-president/>.

10 Whitney Bauck, "Workers who form the backbone of the second market are especially vulnerable in a time of pandemic", *Fashionista*, 6 May 2020, <https://fashionista.com/2020/05/secondhand-clothing-ghana-kayayei-covid-19>.

11 *General News*, "Wear a Mask".

12 *Ibid.*



Fig. 1 President Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo in his characteristic round spectacles wearing a shirt fashioned from the wax print “Ahene pa Nkasa”. Image permission: SDG Advocate.

Waxprint Designs and the Fight against COVID-19

The Ghana Textile Printing Company (GTP), a popular and well-respected local fabric company operating since 1966, known for their beautiful, culturally meaningful designs, played a significant role in highlighting the social responsibility of citizens to combat COVID-19 while expressing national unity. Reverend Stephen Kofi Badu, marketing director of GTP, noted (and many agree) that although GTP is currently owned by Vlisco, a company founded in Holland and currently owned by a British private equity company, the brand is synonymous with Ghanaian national identity.¹³

Badu noted that “the company primarily sees itself as a storyteller who uses color, design and titles to relate important ideas”. GTP decided to create a collection of textile prints “as a reminder of the safety measures adopted to protect Ghanaians and to curb the spread of COVID-19.” It is also a creative way to preserve the historical record of COVID-19 in Ghana. A key aspect of the endeavor was self-reliance, as Badu noted, by “developing designs created in Ghana and by Ghanaians.”¹⁴

¹³ Reverend Stephen Kofi Badu, Marketing Director for Tex Styles Ghana Ltd (parent company of Ghana Textiles Printing), Interview with Paulette Young (remote interview, 27 January 2021.)

¹⁴ Ibid.

A marketing campaign ensued featuring the Ghanaian actress and entrepreneur Martha Ankomah enrobed in a beautiful ensemble styled from the COVID-inspired design, “Nana’s Spectacles”, with the motto, “Fellow Ghanaians... Be Safe” (Figure 2).

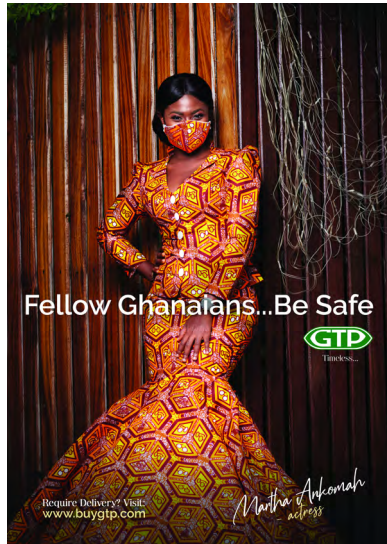


Fig. 2 Promotional ad featuring GTP brand ambassador, actress and entrepreneur Martha Ankomah wearing an ensemble in the coronavirus-themed “Fellow Ghanaians” pattern. Image compliments of GTP.

In mid-June 2020, GTP released two collections, titled “Lockdown” and “Fellow Ghanaians.” Lockdown shows a literal padlock and incorporates key aspects of the shutdown measures including “No flights/No fly zone”, which shows airplane wings and indicates the closure of air and land borders, and “stay at home” (Figure 3).



Fig. 3 Lockdown, Lock and Key and No fly zone. Image compliments of GTP.

“Fellow Ghanaians” references the words habitually used by H. E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo to begin his weekly televised COVID-19 update broadcasts as commander-in-chief to the nation. The first of three designs in the collection features President Akufo-Addo’s iconic, small, round spectacles (“Nana’s spectacles”); another highlights the television screen motif, and the last features radio waves, signifying the national broadcasts of his COVID-19 updates (Figures 4 and 5).



Fig. 4 Fellow Ghanaians collection: Nana’s spectacles, television screen, and radio waves. Image compliments of GTP.



Fig. 5 President Akufo-Addo wearing a shirt fashioned from the waxprint “Ahene pa Nkasa” and his iconic round spectacles featured in the wax print, “My Fellow Ghanaians, Nana’s Spectacles”. Image permission: SDG Advocate and compliments of GTP.

The collections were very well received and remain in high demand.¹⁵ Badu noted that at the start of the pandemic in March 2020, local income, business activity and sales plummeted, mainly due to the restrictions on social gatherings in which wax prints play a significant role of fashion and cultural display. Of the projected monthly sales target of 1,000,000 yards, in April, none were sold; in May, only 40% of the 100,000-yard target was sold; by June sales rose to 400,000 yards and have slowly increased since then.¹⁶

Over the summer of 2020, the government eased the lockdown measures, reopened schools, and modified restrictions on public transportation, tourist sites and church services, where attendance was limited to 25% capacity.¹⁷ However some have questioned if science was the sole rationale for the timetable applied to the easing of restrictions and the lifting of public health measures. Political activities like voter registration drives, primary in-person elections, and a desire to satisfy the public's demand to return to 'normal', may have had an impact on the decision to ease restrictions before the 7 December national election of that year.

To mark the early successes in containing the coronavirus, the return to some form of normalcy and the possibility of new opportunities, in early September 2020, GTP launched a limited-edition collection entitled, "This Too Shall Pass (Wei Nso Be Twa Mu)." These are the well-known concluding words of the COVID-19 public addresses of President Akufo-Addo. These words of optimism give hope to the nation and encourage Ghanaians to persevere because good times shall return.¹⁸ No condition is permanent.

The collection comes in three designs: the first shows a tree evolving from barrenness to growth and flourishing; the second highlights a nest of eggs which indicates impending life; the third shows an hourglass, referencing the flow of food, fortune and hard times (Figure 6).

15 An unexpected advantage of the COVID-related marketing and manufacturing environment is a significant drop in illegal counterfeit cloth proliferated by China-based companies.

16 Badu, interview.

17 Zhang, "How well is Ghana?"

18 Badu, interview.

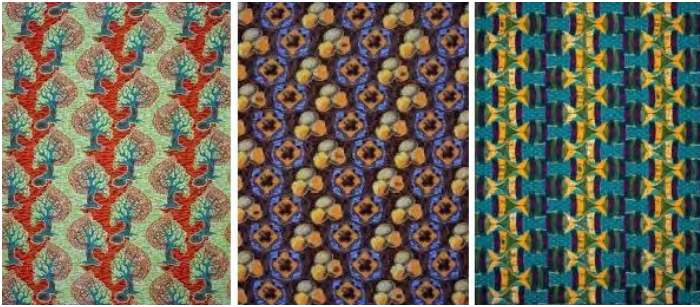


Fig. 6 This Too Shall Pass: Tree from barren to growth; Nest of eggs; Hourglass.
Images compliments of GTP.

The most popular and sought-after design was without a doubt the “Fellow Ghanaians” collection and particularly “Nana’s spectacles” which referenced the President’s iconic glasses. Demand began at 90,000 yards and at its peak 300,000 yards were produced.¹⁹ Bismark Adu Asare, Head of Creative Desk at GTP described the hidden meaning of “Fellow Ghanaians/Nana’s Spectacles”, noting that “in Ghana, the story of COVID cannot be told without mentioning our Commander-in-Chief and the various weekly broadcasts he had to the nation. In trying to depict it, we took his most favorite design, that is ‘Ahene pa nkasa’, and put in the glasses that has become iconic for the Commander in Chief, and put the two together to make this wonderful design”.²⁰ “Ahene pa nkasa” refers to the popular Ghanaian proverb, “good beads do not rattle.” In other words, “a good person does not toot their own horn” (or “empty barrels make the most noise...”).²¹ Humility will be a key attribute in winning the fight against COVID-19.

19 Ibid.

20 Charles Ayitey, “COVID-19 Inspired Designs: Apparel industry cashes in on new wax-prints – The Market Place on Joy News”, *Youtube*, 8 July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hG0iyx_JBzk&feature=youtu.be.

21 Paulette R. Young, *Cloth that Speaks: African Women’s Visual Voice and Creative Expression in Ghana (West Africa)* (New York: Columbia University, 2004), p. 221.

Women and Wax Prints and the Fight Against COVID-19: Designers, Fashionistas and Collectors



Fig. 7 Wax Print Textiles Entrepreneur in Kumasi Market, Ghana. Copyright Paulette Young, 2004.

Across Ghana, women are intimately involved in the marketing, purchasing, and fashion design of textiles. They spend great portions of their income on acquiring cloth and rely on the expertise of women distributors to recommend and supply new and desirable designs (Figure 7). Women are significant purchasers of wax prints from which they commission elaborate dresses and stunning ensembles, designed and tailored by highly skilled women entrepreneurs (Figure 8). For these women, dress is part of a conscious, non-verbal system of communication about oneself and is a means of relating that self to others. Cloth protects and shields the body from the physical elements, and selected designs can even shield from malevolent spirit forces.²² The GTP commemorative pandemic fabric, transformed into striking couture robes and ensembles, memorializes the overcoming of a moment of crisis for the nation and the world. The fashion designs uplift and showcase beauty and joy from a potentially devastating global health crisis, expressing hope for the future and marking the resilience

²² Young, *Cloth that Speaks*, p. 169.

of the community while celebrating the beauty, strength, and economic prowess of women.



Fig. 8 “Sunday fashion inspiration” by @quinsera_1, Dress fashioned from “Lock Down” Collection. Image compliments of GTP.

The release of the GTP COVID-19 influenced wax prints provided an increase in sales and, initially, an uptick in work for seamstresses. The excitement of acquiring a new, coveted design had a positive impact on client demand. However, an interesting twist is that most of these purchases were not for dressmaking. The drastic COVID-19 restrictions on social gatherings, including a ban on mass gatherings at funerals, religious services, marriages, engagements and baby-naming ceremonies, culminated in fewer opportunities to wear fashionable outfits and, for some, limited economic resources to splurge on formal attire. Instead, according to GTP, it appears that the majority of sales beyond the initial ‘outdooring’ period (the local term for ‘debut’) are by textile collectors. Badu notes that while most sales are local, he received orders for the COVID-inspired wax prints from as far away as Germany, where they were being acquired as mementoes.²³

The acquisition of wax prints specifically to be stored is not a new phenomenon in Ghana. In addition to their beauty, wax prints are

²³ Badu, interview.

also prized possessions bestowed at life-affirming cultural events like baby-naming and marriage engagement ceremonies. Textiles are part of a long-standing, recognizable marker of female wealth. They are acquired and accumulated, particularly by women, as a way to build an independent source of personal wealth. As a culturally sanctioned aspect of women's wealth, textiles can be transferred from mother to child without interference from her husband or his family.²⁴ While many will envy a woman with beautiful ensembles crafted from coveted textile designs, possession of cloth in its uncut form is viewed as the action of a wealthy and highly respected woman.²⁵

Wax prints also retain and evoke memories and are collected by a woman over the course of her life. Wax print designs are a means of history keeping and memory making. Six- or twelve-yard pieces of cloth are folded and carefully stored in a chest, closet or wooden box over the course of a woman's life.²⁶ Upon her death, her female kin will inherit her cloth and disburse it on her behalf to family and friends.²⁷ The cloth collection can also be used to address debts incurred by the deceased owner while living, or expenses incurred by family members on her behalf, such as funerary costs. However, not just any cloth worth storing; cloths with names and designs that evoke specific memories in the minds of the owners or the community are preferred.²⁸ The limited-edition COVID-19 inspired designs are certainly categorized as highly desired and collectable wax prints.

Mask Up! Women, Masks and Textiles

Mask wearing in public spaces is critical in the fight to control the spread of COVID-19 and it is mandatory in Ghana—or citizens risk being

24 The matrilineal descent structure, particularly among the Akan-speaking peoples of Ghana, affects conjugal resources. In cases where financial support is weak, women look for ways to prepare for possible financial crises. Because of the high value and costs of printed textiles, accumulating these cloths is a creative and well-established way that will store wealth to meet financial and societal responsibilities. See Young, *Cloth that Speaks*, pp. 174–75.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 180–81.

28 Six yards is the amount required for a traditional kabba top, slit skirt and wrapper stole. Young, *Cloth that Speaks*, p. 183.

arrested.²⁹ To protect their families, essential workers, and themselves, women in Ghana have sprung into action. Designers, entrepreneurs and creatives collaborated with global networks to create protective, reusable and culturally significant facemasks. They use meaningful new wax prints created by local graphic artists, with designs incorporating cultural signifiers, to contain the virus. GTP provided the Ministry of Health and public schools with 'bleach cloth', the base cotton fabric from which to sew cloth masks.³⁰

Other NGOs are collaborating with international networks to create fabric face masks for their communities. Global Mamas, an NGO that helps women support themselves by creating artistic goods in Ghana for the international market, switched its production from colorful household goods and clothing to African print masks. Bead-makers and weavers were retrained as seamstresses to sew masks. This enabled women to still receive an income and thus to continue to support their families during the pandemic.³¹

Conclusion

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the livelihood, social life, health and overall welfare of Ghanaians, and particularly women. Textile manufacturers, distributors, fashion designers and clients have taken the threat to the survival of their communities to heart and developed creative strategies to survive. The GTP COVID-inspired collections of beautiful, message-bearing wax prints remind us of the fragility of life and also enrich and highlight the beauty and joy of living, inspiring us to hope for better days ahead. The power of symbols, translated into revenue, is all the more important since the pandemic began. For GTP, in selling these prints, every Ghanaian owns a part of the story.³²

29 *General News*, "Wear a Mask".

30 Badu, interview

31 Stacey Knott, "Global Effort Under Way to Create African-Print Face Masks for Ghana", *Voice of America*, 27 March 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/global-effort-under-way-create-african-print-face-masks-ghana>.

32 Ayitey, "COVID-19 Inspired Designs".

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27. The Empathy Exodus

Esther A. Armah

The ad would read...

Black woman

Desperately seeking Empathy

Long term Commitment? Obviously not

Would settle for one night

Stand?

No...

supine yes...

Not the missionary position

I need to be on top

Of everything,

every issue,

every trauma

every item on my to do list

every protest

every awakening that has shit to do with me

I am a stranger to my reflection. I see only a growing to do list where there used to be braids, and dissatisfaction for however many things I still haven't ticked off that list.

The phone goes, the WhatsApp pings, email notifications appear, a DM from Instagram, a Tweet I am tagged in... a friend, a colleague, a co-worker, a boss, another colleague. All newly awakened to the globalized horrors of injustice, they seek my counsel, my book lists, my listening ears, my black woman body to pour their revelations and raging. They assume my body has space for their Johnny-come-lately

revolutionary moment that may or may not last beyond the protest they are attending for the first time.

Multiple calls and texts with my global sisterhood spanning cities and continents reveals an exhaustion, an emotional labor that spanned borders, crossed oceans and inhabited our bodies, minds and hearts.

It is the night after the night after multiple days of protests where eight minutes forty-six seconds has become a global clock to tell the time of state violence against black people's bodies. The protests started in the US, now they are growing and globalizing. My city of birth—London—comes alive to the emotional sounds of *Star Wars* Black British actor John Boyega. Vulnerability staggers through the bullhorn he holds, he is sharing what it is to be Black and Man and Being on the streets of London, dealing with and being confronted by the Metropolitan Police, London's police force. Britain's tidy racism raises a pinky finger, sipping tea and staring aghast at America and what it considers 'their' race problem. On these streets, with these protests, allow John to reintroduce y'all selves—to the mother of racism, perpetrated and perpetuated twisted around batons and Britishness. In BedStuy Brooklyn, my home of eight years, the streets come alive to a soundtrack of protest featuring multiracial crowds who illuminate newscasts, dominate headlines and occupy Breaking News stories. In Ghana's capital Accra—my current home and city—our president does a tribute to George Floyd, newly re-connected to an African-American constituency, in the wake of 2019, the Year of Return that saw 15,000 African Americans return to Ghana, honoring 400 years since the first enslaved Africans left this corner of the Continent, and would land in Virginia.

How are you? Asked nobody ever of this Black woman, of too many Black women during many, many months of 2020. Or maybe they did, but they didn't mean me. Or more accurately, I don't mean they didn't say the words. I mean they didn't ask the question with the intent of listening to an actual response.

Sistren, your understanding, your comfort, your heart, your ears, your voice, your body, your breath, your everything trained on bodies and beings outside of you. Your you-ness was expected to be devoted to the service of others; be it discoveries of 2020 systemic racism by white friends, colleagues and randoms in 140 characters, be it manifest foolishness from the pens and minds of Black men navigating

unimaginable traumas, be it families for whom your one-person reality was their everything.

I invite global Black women to pause, to gather, to create a pipeline for migrating emotionalities.

We must momentarily wage an empathy exodus. Consider this a global intervention. Exhale. Breathe, you are choking on your own exhaustion, but continuing to listen as you choke. Our emotions must move to the rhythm of unknown, unheard, unrecognized soundtracks—our bodies calling they need us—slow down quickened hearts beating in protest at names turned hashtags we no longer remember but are expected to memorialize. Here in Ghana, women who carried trade on their heads to feed families now carry the weight of a community on their backs. Across the water in America, Black women wade, neck-deep, empathy bled out, but always being asked to give more, listen longer, be available. This is not reciprocal carriage, it is Black woman armies of emotionalities in service. Always in service.

So, I invite you to join *The Empathy Exodus*; to dance, wail, to rock threads that have been hidden in Zoom closets, to accessorize with your interiority, to marginalize the mayhem and mainstream your you-ness. *The Empathy Exodus* is a path that we'll make, then walk. It is a beat only we can hear and disappear into. It is the pursuit of peace that rewards rather than reminds us of a need we are yet to fulfil for someone other than us. *The Empathy Exodus* is an electric slide, the shaku shaku, the wind your wais', the oh hell no, the let's get it on. It is a pit, it is a pass.

It is where we partner to dismantle the emotional patriarchy—that system that caters to, privileges and prioritizes the feelings of white men, of all men—no matter the cost or consequence to women and Black and brown people. Make like Black Jonah, two by two, an empathy exodus—movement of jah sistren.

In the empathy exodus the mirror of emotional justice meets us. Brown eyes meet brown eyes. Just for a second, you are seen.

Who is that?

This global intervention, an act of revolution to honor unrecognized racialized emotional labor, and to kick everyone's ass who keeps demanding you add more to your To Do List even though it is noose, chain and shackles.

I write this sitting in Accra, Ghana's capital. My back is to Accra's inky night and the jasmine picked from the garden mixes with the burning scented candle.

The aim is peace. Or rather escape from a present that has me blinking, seeing a nine-year-old black girl in the back of a cop car in the States, handcuffed, pepper sprayed and yelled at by a police officer, who literally said to a nine-year-old child, "You're acting like a child!" Eight cops. Eight. E.I.G.H.T... and forty-six seconds later, they pepper sprayed her childishness.

Here in Accra, the sixteen regions report thirteen-year-olds returning to school pregnant, heavy doses of shame wafting through classrooms, airborne by teachers disgusted by their condition, but silent about the violence that has enabled their condition.

I want to break free, sings a sister, in Queen's Freddie Mercury voice. *I'd like to teach the world to sing/in perfect empathy*, sings another... A Coke won't fix this mess.

The soundtrack of this global intervention is Afro-beat. The mission of this intervention—if any Black woman chooses to accept it—is an empathy exodus as a particular part of our healing, fashioned just for us.

Some of you stare horrified at such an intervention. Seriously. Healing—yours and mine? Ours? Right now? Unimaginable. There's a pandemic, police brutality, protests and white women's newly awakened racial angst to get through. We residers in shithole nations slide deeper into cushions with bare feet crossed, glancing up at ceiling fans whirring and cooling COVID-free air, with an African night sky alive with inky black sounds of noisy lullabies, only to be awakened with a call to action centering others' transformation, but not our wellbeing.

We are in cycles of crises; of loss and converging pandemics.

From the closed borders of this nation I call home, wading through waters choked with putrid racism and newly found conscience, we make our way, moving quickly in the quicksand of stay-home politics and eternal Zoom-meetings.

I daydream as I muse about this ark. "What can I do that would be appreciated?" A white woman had asked me during a Q&A of my keynote on Emotional Justice, whiteness and racial justice. I was momentarily silenced by the question. We all were. Wait, so your action—if you actually take any—is predicated on knowing two

things—there will be a reaction, and that reaction must be appreciation. This, I silently say to myself, is what happens when we think competing ideology or progressive politics alone is our path to peace, healing and eternal wokeness. I want to challenge her. I cannot stomach the racialized emotional labor that will ensue, and how that will drain the little that is left from a wrung-out spirit. I say nothing. I fume in that global language that is ‘black women, white women, race and harm’. I do the emotional labor gymnastics to maintain an even keel and complete the Q&A portion of my keynote.

I return to the present. I long ago rejected being the milk-filled emotional titty of a world sucking from me and then sanctioning any expressed pain. This ark, of sorts. An emotional labor one. I don’t want to build it. That would require the kind of emotional labor familiar to Black women in the three cities in the three nations I call home. This is an ark for migrating emotionalities, for an empathy exodus, for the kind of flight that only requires your sanity and your safety. This ark cannot be made of wood—that surface wounds—and I, we, need the kind of vessel that allows us to sink without feeling drowned or drenched. Floating. That is my particular request. To move through space with all the benefit of male privilege and none of the toxicity, the part that chokes my humanity and renders me less human and less whole.

Why an empathy exodus? A rhetorical question for Black women. But I will try and answer it here.

A history that has wrapped itself around bodies, bootys and beauty requiring incessant emotional labor to stave off systemic insistence that nothing about me, my chocolateness, is precious, powerful—only pitifully unwanted, while simultaneously appropriated. These are old stories, that doesn’t mean they don’t sting with the freshness of 500-year-long history and traumas. Here in Accra, I reckon with and navigate a terrain of expectation that to cater to the feelings of others is not merely service, but the height of pleasure. Dare I suggest it is not, then my very woman-ness is not simply questioned, it is shunned, it is clearly unraveled—I must be unraveling.

For too many of my white sisters, I have no words. Throughout 2020, you have required and requested far too much emotional labor of me, of us. And when I say required and requested I mean expected and demanded—over your racial injustice awakening that overlooks

my racial justice insomnia. I need Emotional Ambien and respite from relentless required affirmation that the woke-ocracy is transformative. For you, maybe. For me, it is traumatizing.

Keynotes a go go, doing racial justice labor that somehow feels like strengthening inequity as a white woman discovers her racial justice wings, climbs on some Black woman's back and shouts, "look I'm flying", as your back bends and twists to the rhythm of her newly discovered justice jangle. Loss was the soundtrack of 2020. It was high-hat, negro spiritual, drum n bass, boo hoo blues and gospel. The Sounds of Blackness breaking and being remade from being broken and being reimaged. Exhaustion is a lyric, a concerto, a spoken word, a word, a mantra. I wonder if I can find ancient African languages to say this word.

This intervention starts as a global Black woman check-in. To check in, you must check out. This empathy exodus requires you travel to your reflection and pause, absent action, motion or goals. For so many of us, we can stare down white supremacy undaunted, spring into action. But stare at our own reflection, our own body, vulnerability, exhaustion and find us, our power, pleasure and our us-ness in the reflection that stares back. Eesh....

We have to warm up to an intervention—one that moves at the pace of Black women's emotional labor in service to our own souls. That is an unfamiliar journey, landscape and territory—so we move slow, it may seem pained, awkward, disjointed. Okay. That's okay, an empathy exodus is unfamiliar and feels unkind—but migrating emotionalities allow for fresh possibility.

Do not make your emotionality a villain—the empathy exodus is the intervention to make room for replenishment—the kind we must give ourselves.

No spa day for Black women's interiority—but that's why the ark is the perfect vessel to hold our exodus. Crisis feels like a yoga position—it is not so much a stretch, but resting stress positions, and so rearranging emotional limbs to move to the beat of self-care is an unfamiliar rhythm.

An empathy exodus, then, is the global intervention to address the crisis of Black women's emotionality and interiority from a year that bled, burnt, broke, built, burdened, bolstered, rewound. A cycle. A

cipher. A sister. A sistren. The empathy exodus is our reset button to make some space from no space to replenish.

This, then, is my intervention for global Black women sick of service, colleagues, friends, kids, family, partners, Zoom, protests, masks, loneliness, loss, soothing, comforting.

Final ad...

Need a moment that time-travels through notions and nations.

Step into the Ark,

The Empathy Exodus

it sways to an affirming rhythm

no shade, no judgment

returns you, returns us

to our us-ness,

rupture & return

Replenished?

Maybe. Maybe not.

Just reminded

Replenishment is a superpower

I cannot continue. I cannot not continue. I'm going to need that ark again and again.

So, this ark? It has a name. Emotional Justice. Inside of it? The visionary framework for racial healing that centers the wellbeing of global Black women and girls. It is in service to the empathy return of a more healed Black woman. Our emotional language has always been ancient.

So, consider this an African intervention, from this west coast corner. We are continent, nation, tribe, we are village, elder and young 'un. We name empathy, we name exodus because there is no future that is a wellness for us without an empathy exodus from spaces, places and people that treat you like emotional currency—your worth appreciates and depreciates according to the weight, depth and breadth of service for their soon-come-never-gets-here justice model. Our models are Egyptian mummies, tombs wrapped in batakari cotton, shades of indigo, storytelling in its stitches.

The ark might get built one day. But not today.

I will get to the empathy exodus. It is somewhere on my To Do list. Right after my next Zoom, answering questions for the next eight minutes forty-six seconds. I can breathe. I just can't feel. So, let's do this another time, 'kay?

28. Being Woke

Visualizing Solidarity and Resistance

Roshini Kempadoo¹

With twenty years between the selected artworks, I was invited by curator Sylvia Theuri to contribute two projects for the exhibition *Thirteen Ways Of Looking* that took place online and at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, between October and December 2020. This portfolio of photographs from the works exhibited, *Virtual Exiles* (2000) and *Moove...[s] In solidarity* (2020), are “women’s resistance narratives” that make visible colonial legacies, racism and injustices that sustain our current conditions as women of color.

Virtual Exiles was originally conceived as photographic prints, text and a participatory Internet site. The work came from my conversations with secondary school friends, family and others in Guyana and those, like me, who had left to settle in another country—whether England, Canada or the US. The return trips to Guyana and the subsequent creation of the website and montaged photographs were from a continued interest to use expanded digital imaging and networked environments as creative spaces for making social commentary. Visual archives of Guyana appeared despicable at times, or at odds with any lived knowledge or experience. The visual archives and conventional documentary approaches to making images, I argue, persistently fail to take account of my ancestors’ narratives or migration journeying between Guyana, the U.K. and North America. Texts by David Dabydeen, Grace Nichols, Pauline Melville and Edward Said’s *Reflections on Exile* (1984) evoked

¹ For more information on the author, see <https://roshinikempadoo.com/>.

motives and judgements for leaving my parents' homeland that in the end did not protect us. It is sustained by memories of Guyana's seawall, the backdam, curry and roti, metem and cassareep. Beyond the legacy of British colonialism is the persistent yearning for what it means to be Guyanese—to sustain a semblance rooted through imagined collective identities whether drawn from first-hand accounts or memories.

How, as a woman artist, am I able to somehow evoke and capture the colonial aftermath and lived experiences that those of us emergent from the dehumanized violent practices and displacement of peoples associated with slavery, land grabbing and indentureship? My ambition then was to re-imagine minor [her]stories of colonialism so they 'speak' to others living exiled or diasporic lives.

The series of photographs *Mooove...[s] In solidarity* was created during these months of confinement. I pose the question—what does it mean to embody the practice as a “hybrid-auto-instituting-linguaging-storytelling species” (Wynter 2000)? What must she look like for others to see her more directly and sharply than before? As I witness the endangerment of black lives, see violence and racism unfolding, some of us as protestors against the racism of the 1980s in Thatcher's Britain, are vigilant to the shifts and changes being demanded. The digital studio portraits, created as someone from another generation, pay homage and respect. They are proposed acts of solidarity to those making efforts to bring about change. The photographs and their relationship to being online recall a state of emergency to our health, to our bodies that will not be stilled, that need to move, to protest and call for solidarity. Influenced by revolutionary writings such as those of the late Kamau Brathwaite and Angela Davis; they take account of the creativity seen online such as *100 Years 100 Women*; formations created by younger political and social lives such as The Free Black University; and a claim for the right to life. This body with knowledge and memories of at least two cultures, imagines our “autonomous and beautiful lives” (Hartman 2019).

Figs 1–6 A selection of images from the series *Virtual Exiles* (2000) by Roshini Kempadoo.

The reality of her daughter's imminent arrival caused a mild fury to fizz up in her...

She stood with the letter in her hand... Hardest of all, she stared at the posed photograph of her three British children by Mr. Maurice Nevins that rested on the mantelpiece over the gas fire.

She bit her lip and tried to remember what Winsome looked like.

Pauline Melville, "A Disguised Land", *Shape Shifter* (1990)





Figs 7–10 A selection of images from the series *Mooove...[s] In solidarity* (2020) by Roshini Kempadoo.

Try
 Try to imagine being arrested at 14
 Fourteen....
 or try
 Try to imagine your child seeing you fall because you were tasered
 Or imagine receiving a letter after 50 years in this country stating
 "LIABILITY FOR REMOVAL"
 It's happening out there, beyond the boundaries and confinement of
 home in Lewisham
 I see, feel and hear nonetheless.

This body is consumed and rocked by sadness, anger and
 heartbreak as I hear of killings and brutality—by police, by
 politicians' lack of caring, by abhorrent cronyism, by white
 privilege.
 But I know something unprecedented is coming
 in-between environmental crises and
 outmoded dysfunctional systems of capital
 This body embraces the John Lewis eulogies and black women's
 sounds of affirmation, affiliation and beauty
 And most of all, humbled by voices of young folk—who persevere
 despite a broke and racist system
 calling for change, for lifeness and futurity.

[...] So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up.
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)



Fig. 7 #racismisapandemic, Giclée photographic prints, 80x45cm, 2020.



Fig. 8 #TakeAKnee, Giclée photographic prints, 80x45cm, 2020.



Fig. 9 #OurNecks, Giclée photographic prints, 80x45cm, 2020.

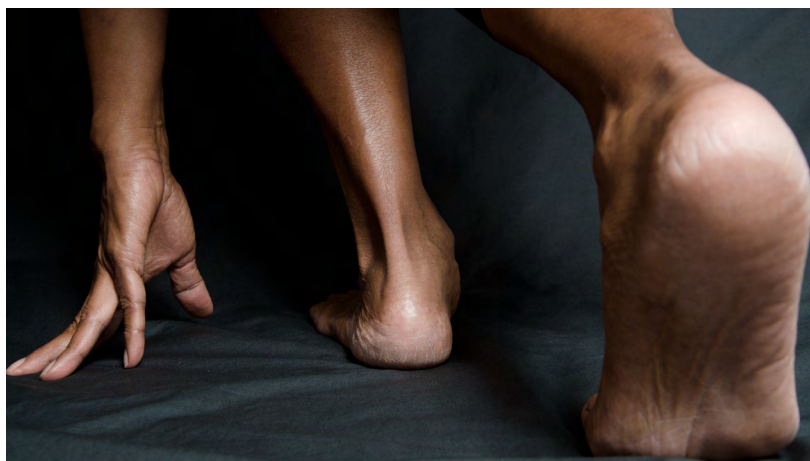


Fig. 10 #blackmoves, Giclée photographic prints, 80x45cm, 2020.

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PART FOUR

FRAGMENTED MEMORIES

Loss and identity are intertwined in fragmented, nostalgic and sometimes unstable memories of what has been left behind. In this section, our disciplinary lens is wide; shifting from art to memoir, history, biography and activism.

What is carried in memory, embedded in custom, relished in food, evoked in song? In migration stories, identity is as much defined by what we are no longer, what we have lost and what we hide, as by that to which we aspire. Unmoored from the comfort of a shared cultural identity, how does identity evolve and some sense of self—an interweave of cultural influences and deeply personal determinants—remain? Hande Gurses talks about the memory of the mundane, the quotidian, the loss of which makes the life of the exile unstable: “This gravitation towards the mundane indicates how for the exilic subject the taste of a simple home-cooked meal, the familiar urban noises, going to the supermarket, not having to spell their names when making an appointment, are not part of the routine.” It is precisely to these “fragments of extraordinary moments that are cherished and are worth being documented” that this section is committed.

Terri Geis speaks of “artforms that often extend back across multiple generations of women as their hands move in repetitive motion together [...] practices carried across waters on migratory journeys.” Von Diaz, in mouth-watering detail, describes the food that was “a way home for me and a strong bond” between herself and her grandmother. She speculates: “maybe part of me thought that if I stuffed myself with Puerto Rican food, with her food, I could somehow unlock the secrets of that place, that identity, its history, and this nagging sense that I belonged there.” Melvina Lathan’s memories of her grandmother’s cooking and recipes influenced by the Georgia Sea Island culture is fused with her reflections of a black woman who migrated to the North alone with four sons during the Great Depression. Michelle Lanier chronicles her family,

her African ancestral legacy in North Carolina, by reimagining grave sites while centering on love and the labor of black women.

Equally compelling are the narratives of lost or unacknowledged histories, an examination of that which Gunja SenGupta calls “the mutual workings of history and memory in the construction of diasporic identities.” Through investigations of historical markers of culture, our writers insist upon the right to their heritage, to the expression of the soft and redolent echoes of a past not admitted into history: Sarah Khan references the sixteenth-century Central Indian illustrated manuscript, *Book of Delights*, with response in writing, artworks, food stories, and plants and talks about “the lilt and longing of Sufi songs and poetry [that] invite my mind and heart to hum.” Ellyn Toscano investigates the migration that removed her grandmother “from the sources of her history and annihilated her knowable past, leaving her to imagine herself as the single subject of her own life.” Both are intended as resistance to what Gunja SenGupta calls the “deafening silence” that “often greets the professional historian listening hard for marginalized voices in traditional archives”, as corrections to “epistemic dehumanization.” Michelle Lanier concludes, “I will fix this. I will fix this”, with stories that redress erasure.

Gunja SenGupta grounds her essay in the making of the 1993 film *Sankofa* as she considers forced migration and enslaved women of African descent in the Atlantic World. For SenGupta, involuntary migration served at once as a source of trauma, a mode of resistance, a resource for regeneration, and a path to diasporic consciousness born of struggle and solidarity, all of which are depicted in the film.

Summer Sloane-Britt focuses on the migration of photographs of women and the legacy of the métis community in Senegal and France; and the photographs of the women who posed in homes and spaces that asserted their position in the dress that presented their sense of self. She looks at three portraits of Senegalese women who claim “authorship over their likenesses” and contextualize their identity with reference to their ancestors: the photographs, Sloane-Britt observes, “render the women’s conception of self as something existing beyond themselves, into a collective understanding of identity tethered to a culturally specific milieu. As family heirlooms, the photographs are entangled with past, present, and future kindred relations.”

Sirpa Salenius's migrations—from Finland to France, to Italy, the United States, Japan, and back to Finland—were not always voluntary. She connects her own experiences from childhood cultural crossings to her academic work on nineteenth-century African American women, who traveled for their careers, and found love, home, and independence in Italy. She writes about “rendering” memories, “fixed in situations, re-evoked through images and objects, to bring stability to a reality shifting like quicksand. From the fragments of distorted memories, we create our narratives of who we are and where we belong.”

Bettina Gockel reflects on Swiss writer and photographer Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who was active in the late 1920s and 1930s. She traveled in Europe, the Far and Near East, the United States, and Africa as she considered migration and exile in the historical context of European Fascism and worldwide migration.

Finally, Nohora Arrieta's essay speaks of the silences of women about their journeys at the borders of neighboring countries in South America, Colombia and Venezuela. If we insist on the right to autonomy, to tell our own truth, we must also insist on the right to silence and forgetting. Arrieta's essay explores the knowledge we gain from the refusal to tell, to recall, to re-experience the migrations.

As the first woman president of PEN International in 100 years, Jennifer Clement provides an arresting essay about rights and activism. She begins with the activist Grisha Prevoo, who spoke at a protest for racial justice in the Netherlands about the complexity of identity and what it has meant to her and her mother. Clement speaks of the efforts of PEN to ensure the rights of women to speak for themselves and tell their own stories, resisting the dystopian world of silenced and unheard women, a world where “There would be no magic, there would be no rain, there would be no word.” Sarah Khan draws our eye to women relegated to the background, just outside the focus of history: “Slight notice centers on those in the background, who harvested, hunted, prepared, cooked, and served in infinite ways.” It is these voices for whom Jennifer Clement and PEN International advocate. If, like Sarah Khan, we widen the frame, what magic, rain and words are admitted?

29. A Work from Sorrow

The PEN International Women's Manifesto

Jennifer Clement

In thinking about women and migrations, I'd like to open by quoting words from the activist Grisha Prevoo, who spoke at a protest for racial justice in the Netherlands last year:

My name is Grisha Prevoo,

I have Dutch, Nuba, Romanian, Fulani, French, Greek blood running along Macedonian, Albanian, Jewish and Arab great-grandparents, snow-white aunties and dark as ebony uncles, short Italian cousins and tall Scandinavian ones.

All these colorful populations of relatives and ancestors jiggle and rattle under my skin all the time, oblivious of the way I look, behave, move, in the choices I make.

Today I choose to set away my own fears. I choose to come here on this stage, to stand up, to tell you, tell you to choose to fight for a world where we all stand equal, together, a place where black lives matter.

Today I also want to stand up for my mother, my beautiful Sudanese black mother. Who has been so loving to this world and has been mistaken for my nanny or the cleaning lady so many times. I'm fed up of these prejudices, needing to explain, time and time over she is my mother. My blood, the person who made me. I want a world for us, for all of us, free of prejudices. A world where everyone is treated and seen equal.

Grisha Prevoo's words address the complexity of identity and what it has meant to her and her mother. With these words, and those of so many other women in both the past and the present, and as the first

woman president of PEN International in 100 years, I wanted to place women writers at the center of the organization. PEN was founded in London in 1921 and is the oldest and largest organization of writers in the world. However, women writers were not allowed to be members until the 6th PEN Congress in Oslo in 1928. A resolution presented by PEN's founder, Catharine Amy Dawson Scott, and carried unanimously, stated women writers, "shall be considered eligible for membership of P.E.N. if writers." It seems that several women had previously been approached to run for president but most declined, including Virginia Woolf in the mid-1930s, who wrote amusingly to her sister that she had "never been so insulted" in all her life.

As part of the work to support women writers, the PEN International Women's Manifesto was drafted. The document acknowledges that women today continue to face censorship through lack of education, inequality, and violence—violence that, in these times, often means the silencing and vilifying of women through attack on social media. The unanimous approval of the PEN International Women's Manifesto, at the 83rd PEN International Congress in Lviv, changed PEN into an organization a central part of whose mission is gender equality and the struggle for the recognition of women writers, as well as the protection of women writers at risk. The manifesto also opened avenues of collaboration with the United Nations and established new important partnerships with organizations such as VIDA: Women in Literary Arts and UNESCO.

In my speech at the congress in Quebec, Canada, I said, "This is a noteworthy hour for PEN and for equal rights for men and women. We believe in words and know their power, so I can say here tonight what everyone in this room, a room of writers, can understand. There are languages where nouns are divided up by gender. This is true of Spanish and French—two of PEN's three official languages. What would happen if, in languages that divide things by gender, everything with female gender disappeared? Think for a minute of a world with half of everything missing—the moon, clouds, and stars to begin with. Symbolically this is what is happening in the world every time a girl is not allowed to learn to read or write or have ownership over her body and mind—half the world, half the human experience is missing. There

would be no magic, there would be no rain, there would be no word: *La magia, la lluvia, la palabra. La chance, la lune, la parole. There would be no chair, no empty chair.*

Gender censorship is an important part of loss of freedom of expression. How many great novels and poems are missing? How many ground-breaking ideas and discoveries? I know there are whole libraries that don't exist because of gender censorship.

In January 2017 the first PEN International Woman's Manifesto dinner was held in London at the home of the late Aline Davidoff, President Emeritus of PEN Mexico. Present at the dinner were Caroline Craido Perez, Lisa Appignanesi, Kamila Shamsie, Rebecca Servadio, Gillian Slovo, Ellah Allfrey, Gaby Wood, Laure Thorel, Romana Cacchioli, Margie Orford, Aline Davidoff and myself.

Kamila Shamsie discussed how she'd tabulated women's prizes. Her work pointed to the fact that, with few exceptions, every time a woman won a prize her novel's protagonist had been a man.

Carolina Criado Perez created the campaign to have a woman, who is not the Queen, on a British bank note. Criado Perez was so vilified she had to shut down all her social media accounts as she received so much hate mail including threats of rape and murder. Thanks to her we now have Jane Austen's face on a ten-pound note.

Over the next months Margie Orford, a member of the PEN International Board and President Emeritus of PEN South Africa, and I drafted the document.

In drafting the PEN International Women's Manifesto, we needed to acknowledge women's inequality in the world and how the violence against women was also a censorship issue. It needed to have a humanist position, which addressed that lack of knowledge or, more to the point, missing knowledge. We don't even know what the world has lost. PEN's Women's Manifesto speaks to this sorrow and ends with these words: Humanity is both wanting and bereft without the full and free expression of women's creativity and knowledge.

Here is the document:

THE PEN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MANIFESTO

PEN International was founded in London in 1921 to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers everywhere, emphasize the role of literature in developing understanding, stand for freedom of expression and act as a powerful voice on behalf of writers harassed, silenced, imprisoned and sometimes killed for their views.

THE PEN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MANIFESTO

passed with unanimity
at the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International
83rd World Congress
Lviv, Ukraine
21 September 2017

*

Presented by Jennifer Clement, International President
and seconded by
Margie Orford, PEN International Board Member

THE PEN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MANIFESTO

The first and founding principle of the PEN Charter asserts that 'literature knows no frontiers'. These frontiers were traditionally thought of as borders between countries and peoples. For many women in the world—and for almost all women until relatively recently—the first, and the last and perhaps the most powerful frontier was the door of the house she lived in: her parents' or her husband's home.

For women to have free speech, the right to read, the right to write, they need to have the right to roam physically, socially and intellectually. There are few social systems that do not regard with hostility a woman who walks by herself.

PEN believes that violence against women, in all its many forms, both within the walls of a home or in the public sphere, creates dangerous forms of censorship. Across the globe, culture, religion and tradition are repeatedly valued above human rights and are used as arguments to encourage or defend harm against women and girls.

PEN believes that the act of silencing a person is to deny their existence. It is a kind of death. Humanity is both wanting and bereft without the full and free expression of women's creativity and knowledge.

PEN ENDORSES THE FOLLOWING INTERNATIONALLY
RECOGNISED PRINCIPLES:

1. **NON-VIOLENCE:** End violence against women and girls in all of its forms, including legal, physical, sexual, psychological, verbal and digital; promote an environment in which women and girls can express themselves freely, and ensure that all gender-based violence is comprehensively investigated and punished, and compensation provided for victims.
2. **SAFETY:** Protect women writers and journalists and combat impunity for violent acts and harassment committed against women writers and journalists in the world and online.
3. **EDUCATION:** Eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education by promoting full access to quality education for all women and girls, and ensuring that women can fully exercise their education rights to read and write.
4. **EQUALITY:** Ensure that women are accorded equality with men before the law, condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and take all necessary steps to eliminate discrimination and ensure the full equality of all people through the development and advancement of women writers.
5. **ACCESS:** Ensure that women are given the same access to the full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to enable the full and free participation and public recognition of women in all media and across the spectrum of literary forms. Additionally, ensure equal access for women and girls to all forms of media as a means of freedom of expression.
6. **PARITY:** Promote the equal economic participation of women writers, and ensure that women writers and journalists are employed and paid on equal terms to men without any discrimination.

30. Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 1.0 and 2.0 A.K.A. WMD

Women of Massive Delight | Our Own
Sister F%o#!-ing Pantheon¹

Sarah Khurshid Khan

To study the erasure of concepts or ideas is a difficult task, especially when it happens gradually and when the erased concepts are replaced by some hegemonic or majoritarian truth.

Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*

1 Acknowledgments: special thanks to many: Master printers Amos Paul Kennedy Jr, Sean Parrot-Wolfe, and David Wolfe; Residencies at Blue Mountain Center, Indigo Arts Alliance, Project for Empty Space Feminist Incubator; Generally brilliant women in my life like Meeta Mastani, Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Aisha Zia Khan, Namita Gupta Wiggers, Jasmine Wahli, Rebecca Jampol, and Krishnendu Ray; Drs Deborah Willis, Cheryl Finley, Ellyn Toscano, and Kalia Brooks and every person associated with the Women and Migration group; my sacred and beloved *The Black/Brown/ Don't Crack/Frown Elite Ladies Collective* also known as *The Afro-Gangetic Sisterhood*. My dear late father Khurshid Khan (1928–2020), Henry John Drewal, and serendipity.

Thank you, Mona Eltahawy. “My name is Mona Eltahawy, and this is my declaration of faith: f-- the patriarchy.” “In other words, it is imperative to understand how civility, decorum, manners, and the like are used to uphold authority—patriarchy, whiteness, other forms of privilege—and that we are urged to acquiesce as a form of maintaining that authority. Whether we are urged to be civil to racists or polite to patriarchy, the goal is the same: to maintain the power of the racist, to maintain the power of patriarchy.” <https://lithub.com/mona-eltahawy-civility-will-not-overturn-the-patriarchy/>.

The Indian Ocean World

Vast is the Indian Ocean World. The polyethnic peoples and cultures crisscrossed the waters and engaged in dynamic exchanges around language, foodways and much more, long before the hegemony of European colonization. I have an affinity for what I imagine was a cosmopolitan time period.² Perhaps that is why—as a US citizen with what I call ‘sub-condimental’³ ancestry—I find more common ground with Ethiopian foodways than North American, for example. The culinary palette is more similar and comforting to me. In a home where my parents and extended family spoke Urdu, Punjabi, and English, why would I not be familiar with words uttered in Malay or Swahili or Arabic? Raised in a house filled with 1960–70s sub-condimental music, why would not the lilt and longing of Sufi songs and poetry invite my mind and heart to hum? And, as an immigrant and child of immigrants, why would I not find inspiration from Black and brown folk who fight for social justice, everywhere?

The Book of Delights

For all this and more, the sixteenth-century Central Indian illustrated manuscript, *The Book of Delights*,⁴ sparked my recent bodies of prints.⁵ It

2 J. C. Hawley (ed.), *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 7.

3 Excerpt from Rushdie, S. *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Vintage, 1996). Bold added for emphasis: “I repeat: the pepper, if you please; for if it had not been for peppercorns, then what is ending now in East and West might never have begun. Pepper it was that brought Vasco da Gama’s tall ships across the ocean, from Lisbon’s Tower of Belem to the Malabar Coast: first to Calicut and later, for its lagoony harbour, to Cochin. English and French sailed in the wake of that first-arrived Portugee, so that in the period called Discovery-of-India-but how could we be discovered when we were not covered before?—we were ‘**not so much sub-continent as sub-condiment**’, as my distinguished mother had it.”

4 Norah M. Titley, *The Ni'matnāma Manuscript of the Sultans of Mandu: The Sultan's Book of Delights* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005).

5 My solo show of twenty-two prints, “Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 1.0”, was at Twelve Gates Arts in Philadelphia, PA from March to September 2020; Part of a group show, “What We Become When We Are Unbound”, includes twenty-one prints entitled “Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 2.0: WMD: Women of Massive Delight | Our Own Sister-F-%#!-ing Pantheon” at The Project for Empty Space, Feminist Incubator Residency, Newark, New Jersey from February to April

is on the dismantling and reassembling of *The Book of Delights*, with an emphasis on the array of ethnicities, foodways, and plants represented that I expand. The acts allow a death of one form and the rebirth, not only of seriously playful characters, but also of the self and unimagined possibilities for others too. By recreating the past, I assure futures.⁶

The cookbook is written in Persian and Urdu, and illustrated in the Sultanate miniature painting tradition.⁷ In the manuscript—also known as the *Ni'matnāma*—African, Arab, Turkic, and Central Asian women dutifully serve and surround the *bon-viveur* patriarch Ghiyath Shah of Malwa. The Sultan commissioned the cookbook in Shadiabad, when he retired to his City of Joy, 1469–1500 CE. Largely intact,⁸ it includes detailed cookware, flora, and pastel-vibrant illustrations that surround the Sultan. Demure and dutiful polyethnic attendants, frozen in half or three-quarter profiles, prepare spice-laden foods, medicinals, attars and aphrodisiacs with skill. At the behest of the Sultan, the women also hunt, fish, and engage in animated culinary, philosophical and religious debates.⁹

2021; Forthcoming, April 2021, is “Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 1.0 Catalogue, Twelve Gates Arts Publishing with Essays by Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Namita Gupta Wiggers, Krishnendu Ray, David Wolfe, and Sean Parrott-Wolfe”.

- 6 Many years ago, I learned of the work of Shazia Sikander. She continues to inspire. In a 2017 interview with fellow collaborators on her *Disruption as Rupture* multimedia project, she talked of learning from older manuscripts that “they hint at this world that is on the borders, in the corners [...] a microcosm of multiple periods and times.” She continues to talk about “how to pull it [the manuscript] apart, how to make it speak to the world [...] and in the dismantling, when you reassemble, you learn.” The conversation took place at Asia Society’s Lahore Literary Festival in New York and was moderated by Asia Society Director of Global Performing Arts and Cultural Initiatives Rachel Cooper. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKIWpyob5q4>.
- 7 Norah M. Titley, *The Ni'matnāma Manuscript of the Sultans of Mandu: The Sultan's Book of Delights* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005); Simon Digby, “The Literary Evidence for Painting in the Delhi Sultanate”, *Bulletin of the American Academy of Benares* (Varanasi) 1 (1967), 47–58; Robert Skelton, “The *Ni'mat nama*: A Landmark in Malwa Painting”, *Marg* 12/ 3 (June 1959), 44–50.
- 8 Oriental and Indian Office Collections of the British Library, <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2016/11/nasir-shahs-book-of-delights.html>.
- 9 R. Sharma, “Thinker, tailor, soldier, spy: The extraordinary women of Ghiyas-ud-din Khalji’s harem”, *Scroll*, 22 March 2017, <https://scroll.in/magazine/831419/thinker-tailor-soldier-spy-the-extraordinary-women-of-ghiyas-ud-din-khaljis-harem>.

Rejoice in the Pleasures of Defiance

And yet, the illustrated cookbook demanded a recasting and a new playful, visual and critical fabulation.¹⁰ Art historians study the Sultanate painting style; food historians concentrate on recipes of rich savories, medicinal remedies, perfumes, and hunting practices; and historians concentrate on the Sultan. Slight notice centers on those in the background, who harvested, hunted, prepared, cooked, and served in infinite ways. Originally painted with a range of skin colors, the images portray the women who worked, created, served, and most likely serviced the Shah. Little research explores the ordinary African, Arab, Turkic, and Central Asian women's lives depicted.¹¹ Yet from where, in that vast Central Indian and Indian Ocean World, did the disregarded come? What were their nuanced narratives? Did they consider the work a delight? Did they define the city as joyous? If the polyethnic world of the *zenāna*/harem prospered unfettered, with the Sultan cancelled, what might these un-imagined lives and worlds dream into?

Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 1.0

I deleted the Sultan in *Undisciplined*¹² *Pleasures, Vigilant*¹³ *Defiance 1.0* to dismantle erasures. In a liberated *zenāna*/harem zone, I visualized

-
- 10 I employ a visual critical fabulation to interpret and imagine the world of the Nīmatnāma's *zenāna*/harem. Thanks to the work of Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts", *Small Axe* 12/2 (2008), 1–14.
 - 11 Scholarship on South Asian female historical figures based on primary sources exists. For a few recent works in English see: Rukhsana Iftikhar, *Indian Feminism: Class, Gender & Identity in Medieval Ages* (Chennai: Notion Press, 2016); Ira Mukhoty, *Heroines: Powerful Indian Women of Myth and History* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2017); Ira Mukhoty, *Daughters of the Sun: Empresses, Queens, and Begums of the Mughal Empire* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018).
 - 12 Another influence on the work is that of Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). She talks about the need to be undisciplined: "We must become undisciplined. The work we do requires new modes and methods of research and teaching; new ways of entering and leaving the archives of slavery, of undoing the "racial calculus and [...]. political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago" (Hartman 2008, 6) "and that live into the present." (Ibid., p. 13).
 - 13 Sharpe continues with her reasons to remain vigilant. "It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living." Ibid., p. 10.

and crafted rose-, orange-blossom, and spice-infused realms derived from the larger Indian Ocean World (see Figure 1). In a variable series of prints¹⁴ and portraits,¹⁵ fifteen former attendants transform and meet across time and space. They participate in undisciplined pleasures. With three quarters of the print framed, the east-facing side remains open, so that they may depart and return freely at any time. All the while, the pleasure-seekers are enfolded within the warmth and comfort of simmering ovens (Figure 2). Their desires ignite and sustain through quotidian intimate gestures, ingestion of local indigenous foods, and preparations of traditional medicines. Mainly blue and white Jingdezhen vessels cradle the potions, remedies, and meals arranged in a courtly, aroma-infused, environment. An additional three historical female figures from the Indian Ocean's East African, Arab, and South Asian worlds—Queen Bilqis, Razia Sultan, and Freedom Fighter Abebach emerge (Figure 3). Bilqis hails from the ancient Ethiopia and Yemen areas, claimed by both Razia, a Sultanate period ruler who, though maligned and undermined by her elite Turkic community, was beloved by her local Delhi public, and freedom fighter Abebach, who rallied her Ethiopian sisters to fight fascism in the 1930s. Each woman is associated with two patterns and two colors inspired by *The Book of Delights*, Indian Ocean World cultures, and a range of painting traditions. And, when called to arms, the women brandish an assortment of weapons,¹⁶ alight on their steeds, and defy any and all forms of injustice (Figures 4 and 5).

14 Five printed editions on traditional handmade Wasli paper ~33(h) x 24(w) with deckled edges intact with the etching ink infused with multiple essential spice oils and extracts.

15 The Portraits of Pleasure editions comprising 1–6 (8.5x11”) and 7–9 (11x14”) include five prints and are printed on Khan's handmade paper made of any combination of cotton, abaca, hemp and flax. Some of the handmade papers are infused with ground spices, and/or essential oils, which are all represented in *The Book of Delights*; Editions 10–12 include three prints and are printed on Wasli paper (15 x 21 in) with deckled edges intact.

16 Weapons identified from other miniature paintings across different periods include Jehangir's bows and arrows, used to eliminate his accomplished Siddi rival Malik Ambar, and Malik Ambar's son, Fath Khan's swords and knives, stylized waves from Noah's Ark from Ottoman miniatures, a metal military headdress from the Deccan period, and a German Luger from the 1930s.

Figs 1–5. Printed on traditional handmade Wasli paper ~33(h) x 24(w) with deckled edges intact. We printed on an etching press and infused the etching ink with multiple essential oils and extracts.



Fig. 1 *In the Wake of the Indian Ocean World before European Colonization*. Sailboats, filled with all manners of people from the East African coast, Arabian Peninsula, Indus Valley, and the western coasts of South Asia, traversed the Indian Ocean long before European colonization and the introduction of chattel slavery. Skilled African seafarers, in their wooden dhows with lateen sails, steered the coasts and open oceans buoyed by the powerful seasonal Monsoon winds. Arabs, such as al-Idrisi the map maker, long plotted and charted the world; and Ibn Majid, from a family of navigators, developed sophisticated astrolabes to traverse the seas. The Indian Ocean World offered a rich cosmopolitanism, with older and different hegemonies and hierarchies.



Fig. 2 *Undisciplined Pleasures: Vigilant Caring, Conversing, Listening, Flirting, Loving I (Rose)*. Women reclaim the harem from the Sultan. Much is forbidden (*harām*) the *zenāna*/harem. No longer, in the recouped City of Joy. Delicacies simmer on ovens and frame the women-identified couples. Alchemy rules in the midst of pots abundant with all things food and medicine. The duos dedicate themselves to the elegant principles of undisciplined pleasures. They reaffirm what it means to care, converse, listen, and flirt without fear and with infinite love. The couples Uzza and Marjane, Nuha and Manat, Fatima and Gudot transform and are transformed, so love overrules.

Undisciplined Pleasures: Vigilant Caring, Conversing, Listening, Flirting, Loving II (Orange Blossom). The City of Joy endures as a dwelling of contentment. Duos Zulekha and Amrita, Hatshepsut and Maaza, Tsigereda and Lat strengthen their bonds in deep play. Frankincense and myrrh waft through their reclaimed City of Joy, time stretches, and pleasures persist.



Fig. 3 *Undisciplined Pleasures: Queen Bilqis of Ethiopia and Yemen* (Frankincense). Within the harem, Queen Bilqis, descended from East Africans and Arabs, receives a medicated massage. Tashu, the medicinal healer, is versed in their East African traditions and the local curative traditions of Unani, Siddha, and Ayurveda. Laden with therapeutic extracts from the natural world, the paste soothes. Restorative emollients seep into tired feet. In deep rest and play, Bilqis reignites her powers.

Undisciplined Pleasures: Razia Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate (Black Pepper, cinnamon, clove). Razia Sultan and her adept cook, Khadija, relish in locally foraged foods. Laced with the salutary properties of black pepper, clove, and cinnamon, each dish enlivens their palates. Enconced in Jingdezhen's blue and white porcelain, the sweet, savory, bitter, pungent, salty and sour offerings dazzle their gustatory sensibilities and heighten the senses, body and soul.

Undisciplined Pleasures: Ethiopian Freedom Fighter Abebach (Myrrh). Fighter Abebach receives advice from her skilled hunting and forest guide, Fere Alem, who visits from the African island of Janjira, located near the coast of Bombay. Fere Alem, versed in the ways of people and plants, reminds Abebach that the cooks and healers—already exploited by chefs and scientists who appropriate and profit from their deep knowledge—are threatened with the loss of large swathes of biocultural diversity. The nobility rip off the commons that locals managed for millennia. Attentive to experts who base data on vernacular knowledge systems and other scientific systems, Abebach listens and learns.



Fig. 4 *Vigilant Defiance: To Arms Queen Bilqis* (Frankincense). Queen Bilqis hears that the Ethiopian maid-servant stabbed a Deccani Sultan to death in self-defense. Despite numerous documented atrocities, the highbrow privileged male powers gaslight those who accuse this particular sultan of homicidal, maniacal ways. Bilqis leaves the security and confines of the women-run and operated *zenāna*/harem in her City of Joy. She mounts her horse, equipped with her superior spear, to join in the maid-servant's defense to fight against the elitist nobility, for she knows the machinations of misogynist men. Sisters join her...

Vigilant Defiance: To Arms Razia Sultan (Black Pepper, cinnamon, clove). Alerted to the fact that her Abyssinian brethren, who rule in the western regions of Bengal, continue to endure injustices, Razia Sultan, descended from enslaved Turks herself, alights on her steed. She exercises her power openly. Sword in hand and spear tucked under her arm, Razia will transport the former rulers to the safety of the Malwa, Gujrat and Deccan regions, where a cosmopolitan world awaits them. Sisters join her...

Vigilant Defiance: To Arms Freedom Fighter Abebach (Myrrh). Ethiopian freedom fighter Abebach, armed with her German Luger pistol, perches upon her swift Persian stallion. She heeds the call of the midwives and herbalists, at the edges of their forests, to help them fight against trespassers on their sacred domains, and the cruel enemies of climate science reason. Her adversaries are the ignorant who deny the effects of climate derangement on her seed-saving forest dwellers' lands. Sisters join her...



Fig. 5 *To Arms*: #Borderless #Unframed #IndianOceanWorld #ByAnyMeansNecessary #ForUsByUsAboutUs #Female_Identified #MoreWillJoin (Rose, black pepper, cinnamon, clove, frankincense, myrrh, orange blossom). Raging into beauty Bilqis, Razia, and Abebach revel in undisciplined pleasures and defy injustices. United across time and space, bathed in a golden light, the threesome soar on their stallions, unlinking themselves with grit and glee beyond the patterns of patriarchy. More will join...

Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 2.0 WMD: Women of Massive Delight | My/Our Own Sister F%#/-ing Pantheon

In *Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 2.0*, the polyethnic world of the *zenāna*/harem continues to prosper, unfettered, as part of a group show entitled “What We Become When We are Unbound” (Figure 6). Thawed from their frozen stances, the eighteen, now, fully frontal femmes armed with WMD¹⁷—rolling pins, knives, swords, a German Luger, rulers, spoons, spears, wine glasses, fire and blow torches—arise, patterned and bejeweled. Conjured from the waves in the ocean, the primordial expanse and the galactic star formations, they emerge unbound with the right to narrate their own stories. They array into an untethered ancient talismanic formation and in some instances

17 In Series 2.0 their weapons of choice expand. WMD may mean Women of Massive Delight or Weapons of Mass Destruction or Women of Massive Destruction. Go ahead, play with the WMD possibilities, and send me your ideas.

surrounded with a geometric pattern and/or a recurring map of the world from the twelfth century.¹⁸ Able, limber, and free from service to the Sultan, they materialize from the fertile firmament. Adorned with words, patterns and shapes that confer magical blessings, they rejoice in radically boundless ways. Invoked into the past, their bright futures are guaranteed to sparkle.



Fig. 6 Twenty-one prints, *Undisciplined Pleasures, Vigilant Defiance 2.0* exhibited in an elliptical pattern for group show “What We Become When We Are Unbound.”
Uzza/ العزى, Marjane/ مرجان, Manat/ مناة, Nuha/ نهى, Fatima/ فاطمة, Guditi/ ጉዲት,

Amrita/ अमृता, Zulekha/ زليخا, Hatshepsut/ حتشبسوت, Maza/ مزه, Lat/ اللات, Tsigerada/ ጽጌራዳ, Tashu/ ተሻ, Khadija/ خديجة, Fere Alem/ ፍሪ ላም, Bilqis/ بلقيس, Razia/ راضية, Abebach/ አበበች, Queen Bilqis, Razia Sultan, Freedom Fighter Abebach.



Languages of the Indian Ocean World and The Power to Name

All femmes materialize with a mere smattering of some of the many Indian Ocean World names like Uzza, Marjane, Tashu, Fatima, Tsigerada, Guditi, and Bilqis. Their names, uttered and written in pre-European colonization languages such as Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Malay, Hindi, Sinhala, Amharic, and Swahili, behold a depth and power. All

¹⁸ A hexagram, a talisman, also known as Solomon’s seal in Jewish and Islamic traditions. Al-Idrisi was a noted Arab map maker. He created a map of the world in 1152. This map reoccurs in my works.

the names and spice aromas emanate and originate from the lands associated with the Indian Ocean Worlds. The indigenous reclaim their reality. Via magic and play, pre-colonial languages return, in sound and form, to their rightful owners. The scents of the earth after the monsoon rains—rose, frankincense, black pepper, cinnamon, clove, orange blossom and myrrh—reignite the senses. Memory fills the future. An erased archive materializes, and the past is recouped.¹⁹ Cradled and cared for in the expanse, representing a myriad of nuanced histories, they appear from the annals of the omitted to occupy immense space, yesterday and tomorrow,²⁰ to chart their own stories. They shine and shimmer, whether you understand them or not.

19 Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2020). "Colonization refuses the colonized access to their own past. By imposing a colonial language, it retards the capacity of indigenous languages to represent reality. It claims that the language of the colonized lack 'technical' or 'scientific' vocabulary. It removes the archives, renders history as lack, blurs faces and names. Thus, the colonized face a diminished capacity to represent their past in categories other than those given to them in a European language, or provided to them in an imperial archive. This rupture, brought about by the colonial episteme, erases the fuller memory or awareness of the precolonial. Now, a 'translated' term for an indigenous concept is deemed sufficient to stand in for it by an academy more inclined to maintain citational coherence than the truth of history. The discipline of history, itself a colonizing tool, is resistant to the demands of the colonized." (p. 4).

20 کال kal, in Urdu and Hindi, means 'yesterday and tomorrow'. Notions of time, though linear, adhere to different rules. See Fatima Ashgar's poem, "Kal", <https://poets.org/poem/kal>:

"Allah, you gave us a language
where yesterday & tomorrow
are the same word. Kal. ..."

31. Instants

Fragments of a Return

Hande Gurses

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.¹

This is the memorable opening sentence of Edward Said's 1995 essay "Reflections on Exile" in which he addresses the layered complexities and connections between exilic subjectivity and expression. The opening sentence succinctly and tactfully compiles the knotty tensions that exile has presented for me. Prior to becoming a personal experience, displacement for me has mostly consisted of literary and critical tropes that are indeed very "compelling to think about". When, in 2013, I completed my dissertation titled "Fictional Displacements", little had I known what prophecies the title had in store, foreshadowing my own, not so fictional, displacement. Three years later, in 2016, I left my home country and started a new life in exile, leaving behind not only my family and friends, but also identities that made me who I am. I now had to reconfigure a new self with the fragments of who I once was.

In my new life in exile, questions prevailed over answers: "Why did you leave?" "What if you never see your family again?" "Will you ever be able to go back home?" "Do you think things will improve?" Unable to provide answers, I lived the profound uncertainty of exile in solitude. Exile's appeal as a matter of scholarly enquiry was now juxtaposed with a bitter and debilitating sense of sorrow. In the struggle to survive, adapt, and reinvent myself perpetually, I was unable to reconcile my

1 Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile", in *Reflections on Exile, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 173–86 (p. 173).

personal experience with the scholarly narratives of exile. Reflecting critically on exile while living it became an impossible task until the day when returning back home became a possibility.

Ironically, the borders that were closed to me during my time in exile opened when a pandemic prevailed across the globe, causing travel disruptions for many. As I was getting ready to reunite with my family and friends, the world was condemned to self-isolation, border closures, social distancing, and video conferencing applications. Under the circumstances dictated by the pandemic, exile stopped being the exception and became the norm. As I was anxiously planning for my trip, which would take place under unprecedented circumstances, I decided to venture into the creative expressions of what a return would mean. While the conditions of my return were far from what I had imagined, the possibility of return allowed me to find my voice and agency. To fight the invisibility and silence of the years spent in exile, I wanted to create a tangible object that would testify to this experience. Rather than merely documenting my return, I wanted to create an object, a material testimony of my experience to concretize the concealed yet painful impact of years spent in exile.

Fragments of Selves

The constrained spatiality of exile, combined with an uncertain future, results in an experience of spatiotemporal continuum that is mostly static. The possibility of return, from the moment of its inception, marks an abrupt moment of fissure and disrupts this steady setting by introducing the hope of reconciliation for the disjointed selves. Following a period of exilic solitude, the promise of a return home highlights the potential for a reunion with those fragmented identities. In an attempt to facilitate this reunion with the identities I had left behind, I decided to resort to a creative project, which would allow me to combine my scholarly voice with my personal experience, and words with images. I opted for a photo-journal that chronicles my return with instant photographs that are accompanied by short hand-written notes. I wrote one entry per day alongside one photograph, starting from the day of my departure from Vancouver on my way to Istanbul.

I wanted a medium that would be able to capture and represent the actual circumstances of my return without leaving room for any

subsequent editing. I wished to use a medium that would allow me to retain a proximity to the lived experience, with all its imperfections and ephemerality. Instead of making my notes on a computer, I opted for a notebook with handwritten notes and I used adhesive tape to secure the photographs on the pages of the notebook. The hand-written notes allowed me to trace my mood, the physical circumstances in which I was writing, and the tools that were available to me. Since the pages of the notebook are open to the elements during the moment of writing, they contain visible stains or creases, a crossed-out word, or an illegible mark. They reflect the instances when I had limited time to write my daily note, or when I had to stop because I had lost my train of thought. There are instances where I start writing in Turkish, forgetting that I was supposed to make my notes in English, showing how, as my body accustomed to being home, my mind also made linguistic adjustments. Unlike a digital document, a hand-written notebook does not allow for an editorial process and, as such, I am entirely dependent on the immediacy of the moment of writing. Unable to make changes to my entries, I have to content myself with the length, quality, and accuracy of my narrative for each day.

This gesture is also mirrored in the photographs: I opted for an instant camera to take them, which granted an immediate tangibility to the experience as well as an emphasis on the present moment since, as with the hand-written notes, I am unable to edit or re-take a photograph. Printed photographs constitute one of the most valued objects for a displaced person since they are objects that are easy to travel with, yet still provide a material connection, operating as memorabilia. While for most people printed photographs are presented and exhibited in frames in specific locations in their homes, for a displaced person printed photographs are deprived of frames so that they can easily be placed inside a book or a wallet, allowing them to be carried easily in unforeseen travel conditions. The photographs that I took with the instant camera are instantaneously printed and as such create a tangible object that does not rely on the agency of others. These photographs are not as versatile as their digital counterparts, since after a few minutes the colors fully settle into a final version regardless of the imperfections of the light or the angle. Similar to the experience of exile, these instant photographs force one to contend with the circumstances of the present moment, eradicating the nostalgic significance of the past and the

hopeful potential of the future. For instance, the moment I was trying to capture a banana cake, my personal childhood favorite, the lens of the camera focused on the table and the resulting image only shows the cake partially. The countertop of my parents' kitchen and the plate dominate the photograph and I have to contend with the peripheral appearance that the banana cake makes. While I may have not captured a perfect representation of the cake, I do have an image that shows the fleeting pleasure I did get from the cake, as well as other elements that make surprising appearances.



Fig. 1 *Hande Gurses* (2020), Goztepe, Istanbul.

The limitation of one photograph per day also forced me to be more creative and spontaneous in the capturing of moments. Rather than waiting for a perfect moment or the most interesting scene to capture, I took pictures of random and mundane settings without worrying about their aesthetic or emotional significance. Images of the view from my parents' apartment or the shopping cart that they use for groceries fill the pages of my notebook, accompanied by notes on the menu for different meals, the stores that I visited, or how annoyed I was with a friend. While I strived to create a critically relevant narrative, the more mundane details dominate the overall narrative. This gravitation towards

the mundane indicates how, for the exilic subject, the taste of a simple home-cooked meal, the familiar urban noises, going to the supermarket, or not having to spell their names when making an appointment are not part of the routine. These are all fragments of extraordinary moments that are cherished and are worthy of documentation.

Coda

The final result of my photo-journaling project is drastically different from what I set out to achieve. I envisioned creating a personal visual and written archive of my return home in the hopes that it would allow me to put together all the shattered pieces of my lost identities. I was hoping to overcome the perpetual state of ambivalence and loss caused by exile and to reunite with a sense of belonging at home. Now, as I look back to my notes and images from the summer of 2020, all I can see is a ghostly presence of who I once was.

Since the completion of this project my sense of belonging took another blow as my father became ill. His presence in this project is very much like the essence of the photographs: ghostly.



Fig. 2 *Hande Gurses* (2020), *Goztepe, Istanbul*.

The spectral appearance of his hand holding an ice-cream cone foreshadows his gradual decay, lingering between life and death. Very much like the photographs that exist in a ghostly space between life and death, my father's presence appears as a liminal space between presence and absence. Since "death is the *eidos* of photograph"² the images I captured, despite their aesthetic imperfections, reflect this inherent absence to come. While I was trying to put together pieces of myself that I had lost in my migration, this project taught me the impossibility of such a reconciliatory move. In each gesture to capture and mark my presence, there lies the haunting threat of eternal absence. As my father lingers in between presence and absence, I cherish the summer we had together knowing that "what the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially."³ My return home may not have granted me what I had lost in exile, but it did give me fragments of the most beautiful summer.

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2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 15.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

32. Reflections on Migrations and Border Crossings, Destinations and Destinies¹

Sirpa Salenius

Indépendance Cha-cha, to zuwi ye!
Oh Kimpwanza cha-cha, tubakidi
Oh Table Ronde cha-cha, ba gagnér oh!
Oh Lipanda cha-cha tozuwi ye!

(Indépendance Cha-cha declared
Oh Freedom cha-cha we've conquered
At the Round Table they won
Oh Liberty cha-cha we've conquered!)

Grand Kallé, 'Indépendance Cha cha'
(translation by Franklin Katunda)

Migration narratives composed of fragmented memories and frozen moments evoked through music and captured in photographs define home and belonging, destinations and destinies in non-linear, disrupted time cycles. Migration across nations entails incessant reconciliation, as dashing motion dissolves into rootless movement that is constant and continuous. Such movement is closely linked to re-location, displacement, and circulation. The identities of migrants tend to be in flux, embracing and absorbing difference, constantly changing, more so than of those more firmly rooted merely in one place. Therefore, there

1 Acknowledgments: I wish to express my gratitude to the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Terra Foundation for their generous support of my research. I am also thankful to Pekka Turtiainen at the Red Cross Finland branch for locating documents concerning my father's volunteer work in the Congo.

seems to be an urgency in capturing the essence of otherwise rapidly dissipating moments lived in particular societies and cultures, so that there is something to take with us, to render our memories tangible. The memories are fixed in situations, re-evoked through images and objects, to bring stability to a reality shifting like quicksand. From the fragments of distorted memories, we create our narratives of who we are and where we belong.

According to Susan L. Roberson, "Travel, movement, mobility [...] are some of the essential activities of human life."² They pertain not only to crossing geographical borders but are also intellectual, cultural, and emotional; travel and journey may be, and are, used as metaphors, often employed to define life in general. Migration, moreover, entails an uninterrupted, ongoing dialogue across different cultures that can be initiated through exposure to 'otherness' transfigured into a familiarization process. Similarly to everything else that may signal 'otherness,' we learn 'race.'

Departure

In my personal migration story, the encounter with Blackness that would become central in my research occurred early, through music, dance, and material culture. Right away, this encounter was positive, yet it remained distant and detached. At first it was mediated by my father, whose return from the Belgian Congo where he had been caring for the sick on call of the International Red Cross and the United Nations, was prompted by my birth. During his two-month shift in Africa, starting from early December 1960, he worked at the *Hôpital des Congolaise* in Leopoldville, then in Boma. He performed surgery but also treated patients with malaria, sleeping sickness, and various parasites that were quite common there. At the time, there was not a single Congolese doctor working among the population of some 14 million, which obviously was a Belgian strategy of colonial oppression, rendering the inhabitants dependent on foreigners. My father was among those contributing to the training of the Congolese, who started as medical assistants to these

2 Susan L. Roberson, "Defining Travel: An Introduction", in *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions*, ed. by Susan L. Roberson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), pp. xi-xxvi (p. xi).

doctors arriving from around the world as the nation was striving to become self-sufficient.³

When my father returned to Finland, he brought with him many souvenirs, bought from local markets, that ranged from African drums to *pili pili*, a hot pepper we stored in a big glass jar at home. Inexperienced in Congolese food culture, we had no idea how to prepare *pili pili* sauce but used the hot peppers to spice certain dishes (we were equally ignorant about the use of chili pepper from Italy, another spice uncommon in Finland at the time). Among the souvenirs was also a record of the Congolese independence song, “*Indépendance Cha cha*”, which I listened to during my formative years. The song, composed by Joseph Kabasélé, also known as Grand Kallé, immortalizes a moment of great hope. It is a *mélange*, an encounter of varied cultural influences that merge to convey the momentary euphoria experienced when “Belgian authorities and Congolese representatives came to an agreement about how to manage the process of independence”, as Hauke Dorsch notes.⁴ Here, as elsewhere, art was used as a tool of activism. The captivating rhythm of the song greatly differed from our own solemn and melancholy national anthem, a difference we attributed to great dissimilarities in climate and saw as reflective of that, in people’s mentalities, rather than their ‘race’ or ethnicity *per se*. Imprinted in my memory is the joy pervasive in the music and lyrics that celebrated freedom.

It is impossible to know how much that song and the emotions it set in motion influenced the trajectory of my future, but at about the age of eight I found myself in a small local children’s chorus singing Negro Spirituals whose texts had been translated into Finnish. This may seem unexpected considering that I was born in Helsinki, the capital of

3 Obviously the presence of the Red Cross can also be seen as patronizing, even as a form of colonialism, of imposing Western methods on to Congolese society. But perhaps these efforts to share knowledge had a positive impact, at least at that particular moment of change.

About the Congo in 1960, see, for example, M. G. Candau, “In the Congo”, *World Health* 13/6 (November-December 1960), 1–32; see also Sandrine Colard, “A Congolese Woman’s Life in Europe: A Postcolonial Diptych of Migration”, in *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History*, ed. by Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano, and Kalia Brooks Nelson (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019), pp. 39–46, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153>.

4 Hauke Dorsch, “‘Indépendance Cha Cha’: African Pop Music since the Independence Era”, *Africa Spectrum*, 45/3, Continuities, Dislocations and Transformations: 50 Years of Independence in Africa (2010), 131–46 (p. 133), <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971004500307>.

which at the time could perhaps be defined as an all-white, privileged Finland. According to the 31 December 1960 census, the total population of Finland was circa 4.4 million, out of which only 5,211 were foreigners (Strengell 9, 48). 'Race,' ethnicity, and the color of one's complexion were not defining categories in that census, in which residents were classified by place of birth, religion, and education, and foreigners by their citizenship, gender, and age. This, however, does not mean that the country was free from discrimination, only that the target groups were not necessarily defined on a 'race' basis. Jazz dance classes, taught by both white and Black teachers, many of them from the United States, filled the evenings of my adolescence. In the streets of Helsinki, the Black dancers perhaps appeared as a curiosity, but in the dance studio they were simply instructors, many of them also my personal friends.⁵ Their skills and personalities mattered more than the color of their complexion. The situation was the same approximately a decade later when I was taking dance classes in New York. Around the same time, I worked at a concert promotion agency that organized European tours for American R&B and blues musicians such as B.B. King.

I never really thought about 'race' although I was aware of my privileged position because I was born into a well-to-do family in Finland, a country that is safe, stable, and wealthy.⁶ We had some problems in the family but 'race' was not one of them. It was central in my life only when it became the focus of my research. The archival recovery work in which I am engaged centers nineteenth-century Black women and their migration experiences. I hope they will teach me about 'race'; they make me question the concept. It is perplexing that despite being exposed to a large range of socio-cultural differences, I still fail to grasp the meaning of 'race,' the source of its destructive power, and how to undo it. Struggling to understand, the right questions seem to evade me.

5 I myself have been an object of curious gazes, for example in rural areas of Japan where local people had never seen non-Asians before.

6 In many European countries, including Finland, official forms never ask you to define your 'race.' I had to choose the correct box in forms only when I first visited the United States.

Transfer

My own migrations—from Finland to France, to Italy, to the United States, to Japan, and back to Finland—were, and were not, voluntary. These transitions between countries may equally well be perceived as privileged immigration or expatriation, as Ellyn Toscano notes of her travels.⁷ But for me, the push for economic survival became central and particularly intense after moving to Italy where I found the ‘love of my life’ but felt unfulfilled in work. No longer feeling satisfied with odd jobs and pocket money, I joined numerous Italians who were pressed to migrate abroad in search of decent work opportunities. I first secured a contract, renewable for five years, at the University of Tokyo in Japan where the work environment was ideal and the culture fascinating, but the distance from ‘the man of my heart’ who remained in Italy, combined with time difference, made continuing in the position in Japan impractical. After a year of separation from my husband, I secured a position in Finland. Curiosity, education, exposure to diversity, and work opportunities have thus motivated the movement between countries and cultures, now between work and home, that has led to a deepened fragmentation, but also enrichment of social realities.

The interest toward mobility has increased in pace with a global economy that in Susan Ossman’s words produces “more adaptable, moveable people”, who with their “multiple national identifications challenge how we think about stability.”⁸ Comparisons between individual and collective or personal and social identity, or in the case of national identities, self and others, may help understand what one is and is not. More adaptable? Maybe. Migrants absorb from the various cultures they inhabit but to what extent do we consciously select what aspects of the foreign to integrate into our own lives? How does that process give direction to our present and future or to feelings of belonging?

7 Ellyn Toscano, “Between Self and Memory”, in *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History*, ed. by Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano, and Kalia Brooks Nelson (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019), pp. 13–22 (p. 16), <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153>.

8 Susan Ossman, “Introduction”, in *Places We Share: Migration, Subjectivity, and Global Mobility*, ed. by Susan Ossman (New York: Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 1–16 (p. 1).

I recently migrated to a place once familiar to me but one I had left behind decades earlier. Due to my long absence, the displacement presently occurs in the country of my birth rather than in the country of adoption. As often happens in the lives of migrants, work-life balance, which has become a central issue centering, in particular, on women's experiences, is transformed into work-life imbalance when employment is found abroad but family and social life remain elsewhere. Integration has become only partial in the society where time is dedicated to work that fills the hours otherwise endured with longing for home and family. In the work-life border crossings, my body curves under the pain of separation and the worst of me emerges as the working hours get exaggeratedly long. The sense of belonging is fractured by the loss of sociality. Nostalgia for home, a sense of loss, tension between gratitude for having work and resentment for being detached from my 'other half' and social contacts are equally present in such migration and movement between realities.

Arrival

Migration stories often are about a search for home and a sense of belonging. Writing this essay has turned into another migration expedition, one of reconciliation with the past as I wonder how much of my life journey has been about consciously chosen destinations, how much about destinies. In this narrative, the past is illuminating the present and future. Recognizing my roots makes me realize where home is and why I may feel at home with Black studies. The upbeat rhythm of the Congolese independence song is pushing forth through my memories, geographically connecting me to Finland although by now, a big part of me is connected to Italy, where I have lived the past three decades. More than the location, though, it is my husband whom I associate with home. He makes me feel complete. Perhaps home really is not a place at all but a condition, as James Baldwin contemplates in *Giovanni's Room* (1956).⁹ It resonates with me: home is where love is; it is doing research. Following the migrations and border crossings that characterize the lives of the nineteenth-century women who are the protagonists of my archival recovery work makes me realize that, in

9 James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (New York: Random House, 2000), p. 92.

many ways, my life parallels theirs. They traveled to Italy for education and experience and they found home.

My father transmitted to me his admiration for Italy so rich in arts and creativity, and from him I inherited the love of languages and foreign cultures, adventurous spirit, and curiosity. My small contribution toward a day where everyone will be able to sing about independence and freedom is to unearth experiences of bold and boisterous migrant women, to recognize that their stories deserve and need to be told. My own life journey started and moves forward with the rhythm of the 'Indépendance Cha cha' pervading the memories of my childhood and my father.



Figs 1a & 1b. Congo, 1960–61 (a snapshot from a home film).



Fig. 2. © Markku Nytytjää (1984), choreographer Malaika Kusumi (front left); me (front right).

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33. Optical Self(s)

Métis Women's Authorship Regarding Conception of Self in Pre-Independence Senegal

Summer Sloane-Britt

Visualizations of power dynamics did not begin with the invention of photography. Instead, photography served as an experimental technology that assisted in reinforcing preexisting associations and helped develop counternarratives—all grounded in perceived realities. The medium's development aided the need to see and hold images validating lives led by Senegalese people, but reflecting back on the country's preexisting sociopolitical landscape. Thus, when photography touched down in Saint-Louis, Senegal, studio practice swiftly favored depictions asserting middle-class identity, endowing photography, particularly portraiture, with a symbolic importance gesturing towards social status.¹ This included paradigmatic portraits taken in bedrooms and sitting rooms, advancing associations between the home, material wealth, and political value; commissioned portraits in homes became signals of both intimacy and specific economic dynamics. First becoming a "self-conscious group" in the mid-eighteenth century, métis people emerged from unions between signare women and European men.² Inevitably, descendants merged French bourgeoisie and local cultural customs, facilitating space for them to benefit in social, economic,

1 Frédérique Chapuis, "The Pioneers of Saint-Louis", in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 48–63 (p. 52).

2 Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 2.

and political arenas. The families balanced their networks between intracommunity members, varying French administrators, and the interior West African populace. Able to leverage a unique foundation of knowledge, métis people became instrumental for communication between varying public interests. Due to their evasive positions in Senegal and France, the métis community held federal and local gubernatorial and religious positions in colonial institutions. A trio of photographs (Figures 1–3) provide a space in which to consider how métis women exploited optical language to convey specific perceptions by claiming authorship over their likenesses. This paper will explore the techniques and historical contextualization that amplify the women's assertions through Adrian Piper's deviations between self-conception and conception of self.

A photograph, in its materiality, is a single object while the self is an amorphous entity that continually changes and adapts. A photograph's material existence reflects non-static social relationships and malleable purposes that evolve across sociopolitical contexts. Since self-conception and conception of self both change in response to the surrounding world, to understand three photographs of unidentified Senegalese women (Figures 1–3) requires aesthetic, historical, and theoretical regard. A one-directional perspective regarding photography's existence in Senegal does not permit an understanding that centers the women's agency. The images are not reflections solely of the critical moment of production but emerge from an extended relationship joining the medium, women, and their ancestors. This tract renders the women's conception of self as something existing beyond themselves, into a collective understanding of identity tethered to a culturally specific milieu. As family heirlooms, the photographs are entangled with past, present, and future kindred relations; and, when they move into public arenas, the images function as illustrations of power dynamics personal to the sitters and broadly relevant to photographic history. The presence of photography in Senegal commenced almost simultaneously to Europe in the 1840s, with the first daguerreotype studios opening in 1860 at the helm of Washington de Monrovia.³ The region immediately folded the artistic

3 Christaud Geary, "Roots and Routes of African Photographic Practices: From Modern to Vernacular Photography in West and Central Africa (1850–1980)", in *A Companion to Modern African Art*, ed. by Gitti Salami and Monica Blackmun Visonà (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), pp. 74–95 (p. 74).

medium into everyday urban life, facilitating constructions of aesthetic forms specific to Senegalese imaginaries. The centralized photographs originate from Saint-Louis, Senegal, a city recognized for its venerable relationship with Europeans, dating to the sixteenth century. These three images of unidentified métis women reflect 1930s negotiations surrounding conceptions of the self, as it relates to the pre-independence Senegalese sociopolitical terrain and the positionality of métis culture. This conception of self is distinct from reading the photographs as representations of these women's self-conception. Although the photographer and sitters' specific identities are unestablished, it is possible to situate them within a particular historical landscape.

Utilizing Adrian Piper's meditation regarding the self, finding these photographs' malleable meanings as historical documents allows understandings that extend beyond a singular person or portraiture as a genre. Piper articulates that structures facilitate individuals' knowledge, requiring the division of the self into multiple forms.⁴ Employing the image of a spool wrapped in thread, Piper writes:

So successful social institutions draw your attention towards themselves and their successes, and further away from the sprouting spool at your center. They devour your awareness, filling it with their importance and the complexity of their functioning, and awakening your need to find your place within them.⁵

These societal expectations are projected onto individuals immediately following birth—the sprouting spool—and are maintained throughout their entire existence, forcing the self to adapt accordingly. This conceptual assertion has been present in Piper's entire artistic oeuvre, and *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, A Moment of Embarrassment* (2012)

4 See: Adrian Piper 2018, 2013, and 1985. 2018's publication functions as a memoir-style text that elucidates Piper's experiences throughout her life leading to her emigration from the United States to Berlin. The 2013 text is a two-volume opus dedicated to extending Kant's definitions and examinations of metaethics, wherein Piper articulates that humans are fully capable of true ethics, but have created structures that privilege self-preservationist tactics over collective prosperity. Finally, the 1985 essay critiques Humean understandings regarding the division between self-conception and conception of self, while approaching Kant favorably, but fulfilling a contemporaneous extension surrounding his readings of two *selves*.

5 Adrian Piper, *Escape to Berlin: A Travel Memoir* (Berlin: Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin, 2018), p. 15. Also, beyond traditionally defined "metaphysics", this concept relates to writing on DuBois's double consciousness and José Muñoz's disidentification.

displays Piper's active attempts to reject these expectations. A black and white self-portrait has been digitally altered, giving Piper's skin a grey hue and the edges of her face an orange outline. Below her face, text overlays the image where Piper declares a "change" to her racial and national assignments. Her website reports, "Adrian Piper has decided to retire from being black. In the future, for professional utility, you may wish to refer to her as "The Artist Formerly Known as African-American."⁶ With an obvious nod to the musician Prince, Piper's decision is not a rejection of the people or communities that are categorically designated "black". Instead she denies the category itself—an abstraction rendered real via imperialism and reclaimed by communities. The use of portraiture centralizes her bodily self, and the digital alteration confuses normalized perceptions surrounding racial morphology. Opposing the expectations placed upon her by these constructions, Piper's photographic manipulation unsettles racially based presumptions and aspirations projected onto her work and scholarship.

Both métis women in Figures 1–3 centralize their bodies in the photographs as a means to convey their conceptions of self, asserting their independent and historically layered existences. Through the process of layering family photographs behind them, the women become more than individuals and morph into matriarchal inheritors advancing their lineage, not only through the photograph's creation, but also, its afterlife—collapsing the distance between the past, present, and future. The two women centered in Figure 1 are the living result of their ancestors' choices and desires for maintaining sociopolitical power. The image assists in mythologizing the family and fabricating a projected identity, highlighting strength through material objects—such as photographs, clothing, accessories, and East Asian prints. The body becomes material, not because these women are not real, but because they activate their figure to harness visual language and transmit specific significations. Acknowledging the métis women's mental processes shifts the photo series from monotonous representations of self into schemas, mapping fluctuating conceptions of the self. Unlike Piper, these women do not reject their categorization; instead, their bodies operate within image indices to transmit specific information, but this

6 "News – September 2012", Adrian Piper Foundation, http://www.adrianpiper.com/news_sep_2012.shtml.

does not mean the pieces cannot be considered together. The differences between Humean and Kantian ontological explorations become a point of focus for Piper's philosophical scholarship, influencing *Thwarted Projects*. Piper recognizes that a cohesive self that reconciles both self-conception and conception of self is a human aspiration deeply tied to rationality and social norms. She writes, "[a]s we do to other natural phenomena, we respond to the phenomenon of the self by trying to make it rationally intelligible to ourselves in socially conditioned, norm-governed terms."⁷ Bearing this in mind, the *métis* women are enacting cognitive dominance over their image, producing photographs that express unique relationships to power. Prita Meier argues that "[w]hile photography was and is a technology of empire, it is also a technology of self—a site of embodied performance."⁸ This expansion beyond photography's evidentiary nature into intra-African and global power dynamics allows for the expansion of a photograph's lifespan. As photography holds an inherently reductive relationship to self-conception, considering an image as a "site of embodied performance" imparts a liminal space rearticulating the role that photography plays within discourses of the real and authentic. Situating these two unknown *métis* women as performers allows us to reject minimizations of their carefully crafted images and aesthetic understandings. Just as social identity is staged, a photograph becomes a way to perform the conception of self.

By recognizing photographs as "socially salient objects", reading the trio of images as intellectually driven, rational pieces of evidence becomes a logical conclusion.⁹ The women pose in manners similar to some of the photographed figures hanging behind them on the wall. Contrastingly, the tradition of posing with an entire wall filled with images is rendered modern since no image behind them carries the same formal quality. Layering traces of the past upon one another provides a glimpse into the subjects' familial and photographic lineage. The viewer gains a mini-formalist lesson on how *métis* families' conception of their

7 Adrian Piper, "Two Conceptions of the Self (1984)", *Philosophical Studies*, 48/2 (September 1985), 173–97, republished online at [http://www.adrianpiper.co.uk/docs/Website2ConceptionsOfTheSelf\(1984\).pdf](http://www.adrianpiper.co.uk/docs/Website2ConceptionsOfTheSelf(1984).pdf) (p. 21).

8 Prita Meier, "The Surface of Things: A History of Photography from the Swahili Coast", *Art Bulletin*, 101/1 (2019), 48–69 (p. 48).

9 Elizabeth Edwards, "Thinking Materially/Thinking Relationally", in *Getting Pictures Right: Context and Interpretation* (Köln: Köppe, 2004), pp. 11–23 (p. 15).

self(s) changed over time, rather than how their self-conception(s) may have evolved. Obscuring some photographs behind them, both subjects embody, relate, and place themselves in direct engagement with the images framing them. Not overpowering their ancestors' images, the women, instead, seem to reassert their familial power, gesturing to unseen social, political, and economic worlds beyond the photograph's two-dimensional frame.

Historically, as photography became a nineteenth-century commonplace in Saint-Louis, Senegal, images held an essential role in everyday home spaces.¹⁰ As technology advanced, portraits became symbols of social status, thereby tethering the medium to Senegalese class dynamics. Frédérique Chapuis writes, "Elegance and a pronounced taste for self-representation were part of daily life. People adored having their photographs taken."¹¹ By the time these sitters were photographed, Senegalese families had engaged with photographers for over fifty years. Rather than reading the images as different manifestations, they emerged from a unique and specific "aesthetic vocabulary", as described by Giulia Paoletti and Yaëlle Biro.¹² Photography had become an economic enterprise for practitioners and a symbolic form of power for sitters. As image economies have demonstrated, photographs are not divorced from broader economies and cultural assertions. Figures 1–3 serve to reflect the métis women's active agency in developing both a unique aesthetic model and conception of self. Ultimately, it would be unethical to articulate less because it would presume that the métis had not constructed a unique, three-dimensional, visual language. And considering them solely as having circumvented Euro-originating visions would maintain the centralization of imperialist optical attitudes surrounding what photographic production could emerge in Africa at large. Since photography first appeared in early 1840s Senegal, there have been numerous local visual negotiations, both known and unknown. Inevitably, a century spent designing a signification system influences practice, including métis photographic operations and the creation of aesthetic forms that hold multiple purposes. Signs of

10 Christaud Geary, "Roots and Routes of African Photographic Practices", 84.

11 Chapuis, "The Pioneers of Saint-Louis", p. 56.

12 Giulia Paoletti and Yaëlle Biro, "Photographic Portraiture in West Africa: Notes from 'In and Out of the Studio'", *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 51 (2016), 183–99 (p. 184).

power in the women's clothing, poses, and choice of which objects to include are calculated and deliberate, escorting the viewer towards particular conclusions. As the women merge their political reality and understanding of sensory experience, they are performing their conception of self each time the snapshot is displayed, privately or publicly. In their afterlife, the photographs are actively supporting the women's perpetual reclamation of authorship over the socio-politically permitted freedom of expression.

Figures 1–3, through aesthetically informed performances, become atemporal commemorations for both women's conception of self. Serving as their distinctive image and images of images, the photographs' layering of familial archival materials provide a glimpse into specific families' photographic lineages. There are different poses, dress styles, formal layouts, framing techniques, and sitters' ages, each articulating layers of familial history and experience. Jean Borgatti warns against Euro-centric understandings of how the self is represented in images, writing, "[t]he context of portraiture is memory."¹³ She distinguishes between modernism and African artists, articulating that photography must be divorced from merely Christian, positivist representational understandings. For Figures 1–3, the two women demonstrate an active consideration of memory via their desires to be remembered in a specific way, while simultaneously remembering their own predecessors. A singular self is not emphasized, but more precisely the recognition of a collective body being strategically advanced, both socially and politically. As it is not possible to recover the sitters' memories, the photographs reflect sociohistorical negotiations and remembrance. Hilary Jones describes the fact that "[women helped shape] a vision for modern Senegalese politics that differed from that imagined by the colonial state."¹⁴ Despite the *métis* grasping power provided by French colonialism, *métis* women assisted in creating this "vision", engaging their nuanced understanding of public and private life in Senegal and France. This knowledge constituted the overarching threat that *métis* women posed to French imperialists, solidifying their role as irritants

13 Jean Borgatti, "Likeness or Not: Musings on Portraiture in Canonical African Art and Its Implications for African Portrait Photography", in *Portraiture Photography in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 320.

14 Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*, p. 65.

to white colonial agendas. Figures 1–3 provide only a calculated insight into a conception of self, defined by the sitters' relationships to their families and early thought around Senegalese nation building.

When considered as historical and social documents, the photographs become intertwined with aspects of broader Senegalese existence, rather than merely images within a family album or private collection. While it would be easy to articulate an argument that the images discussed in this paper serve as a personification of opposition to European domination, this would deny their three-dimensionality. Instead, the photographs act as performances of two women's conceptions of self within early twentieth-century Senegal. Despite the unidentified photographer, it seems the women maintain a sense of authorship over their representation, conveying flagrant messages regarding their familial power. Almost one hundred years after their production, these photographs have a presence in both public and private spheres—scholarly writing, family archives, and private collections. By sustaining the optical presence of these photographs, the optical messages both women sent while performing for the camera are still relevant, intriguing, and present.



Fig. 1 *Untitled*, unknown photographer from Saint-Louis-du-Senegal (ca. 1915–30), courtesy of *Revue Noire*.



Fig. 2 *Untitled*, unknown photographer from Saint-Louis-du-Senegal (ca. 1915–30), courtesy of Revue Noire.



Fig. 3 *Saint-Louisienne assise dans une chambre*, unknown photographer from Saint-Louis-du-Senegal (ca. 1915–30), courtesy of Revue Noire.

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34. *Sankofa* and the Art of Archiving Black Atlantic Migrations

Gunja SenGupta

For women of African descent in the Atlantic World, migration has served at once as a source of trauma, a mode of resistance, a resource for regeneration, and a path to diasporic consciousness born of struggle and solidarity. As such, it has supplied a foundational trope in forging a liberatory art and politics of representation that debunks mythologies of female slavery, challenges metanarratives of the nation that rationalized such lore, and offers alternative diasporic visions of Black women as subjects of history. Haile Gerima's 1993 film *Sankofa*¹ portrays mobile Black Atlantic women in multiple places framed by an African diasporic metaphysics of "spiral" temporalities and "pidginized" imagery. Such dynamism links ancestors with the unborn in a Pan African story of "becoming" through belonging, forged in the crucible of interplay between history and memory.

In the pages that follow, I place Gerima's depiction of Black women in motion across time and place in conversation with fragments of enslaved resistance from official archives to ask: in what ways might films serve as what the French scholar Pierre Nora famously called *lieux de mémoire* (formal sites of remembrance), for women of the Black Atlantic? How might they constitute a repository of raw materials for exploring the mutual workings of history and memory in the construction of diasporic

1 *Sankofa*, dir. by Haile Gerima (Mypheduh Films, 1993).

identities? How might we use the concept of “sensibility” to translate cinematic languages of story-telling into documents for fleshing out elusive subaltern subjectivities? How do filmic projections of an activist, contingent, and open-ended vision of history that invests the future with the promise of creative fragmentation and continuous rejuvenation, challenge historians to rethink the frontiers of the traditional archive?

Framing Transfiguration

The opening scenes of the Ethiopian-born film-maker Haile Gerima’s 1993 classic, *Sankofa*, set the stage for a deployment of the trope of migration as a strategy for transfiguration.

The first frames project the figure of a woman, cast in wood, her intricately braided head inclined toward the child gazing up at her; a symbol perhaps of Mother Africa where it all began, or her daughters dispersed across the Atlantic World which they had in large part built through their work and reproductive labor.

There follows a montage of images that invokes a far-flung diaspora of ancestral spirits cemented by the trauma of racial slavery. An urgent voiceover summons these ancestors to emerge “from the wounds of the ship”, and tell their story. On the heels of an image of the Akan symbol of the “Sankofa” bird, sitting atop a staff with its head turned backward, the camera takes in American cane fields juxtaposed with West African slave castles, overlaid in shadow by a close-up of a “divine drummer.” These visuals synchronize with the soundtrack of beating drums, incantations, and an exhortation to action. “Lingering spirit of the dead,” urges the Voice as it rises gradually to a pitch, “rise up and possess your bird of passage.” These spirits once inhabited the bodies of “stolen Africans,” who had been “shackled in leg irons,” “raped,” “castrated,” “tarred and feathered,” from “Brazil to Mississippi,” Jamaica, “the fields of Cuba,” the “swamps of Florida, the rice fields of South Carolina,” and “from Alabama to Suriname, up to the canes of Louisiana.” The drummer urges them to “step out of the ocean” and reclaim their history. In this context, the Akan motif of “Sankofa” assumes a meaning well suited to a diasporic project of recovery: travel back to the past, and own it in order to advance. Close-ups of a buzzard in these early scenes launch the metaphorical refrain of this “bird of passage” in the rest of the film,

guiding the protagonists on their journeys through time and place. The vulture might also signify decomposition—an essential prerequisite for the fragmentation and renewal about to come.

Moments later, we meet Mona, a self-described “American” model shooting on location in the slave castles hugging Ghana’s Atlantic coast. Clad successively in haute couture animal-print beachwear, a strawberry-colored wig, and a resplendent wrap and headdress rendered in *Kente*, she laughs and poses for a white photographer against the backdrop of foreign tourists milling around within view of the camera. These scenes invest the site with an aura of both fashion and commodified commemoration that the configuration of sound and images in the inaugural frames promise to deconstruct. That expectation materializes when the self-appointed guardian of that “sacred ground”, the “divine drummer”, places himself in Mona’s path. “Return to your source”, he commands.

And she does, albeit unwittingly. She wanders into the sunlit dungeons which had once served as holding cells for chained captives on the eve of their descent into the dreadful holds of slave ships bound for the horrors of the “Middle Passage.” As the voice of the official tour guide—a representative of the neocolonial state—delivering his neatly packaged narrative to the visitors, fades in the distance, Mona is about to embark on an altogether different sort of experiential voyage into the past of which he speaks. It is one that brought her forebears to the Americas. She disappears in a deafening sound of thunder and an explosion of darkness, to reappear before the solemn faces of human chattel bound in chains—women, men, and children—visible by firelight. They advance toward her as she runs backwards into the tunnels of the slavers’ catacombs, only to be crowded in on all sides by the spirits of her ancestors, appearing to come out of the walls.

The screen fades to black, punctuated by Mona’s screams and sounds of banging on some faraway door of no escape as she fades into a dark passage of time. She has arrived at the start of her journey of “becoming”, when everything she knew about herself has to be fragmented into parts. The film-maker visualizes this process at different points in the film by cutting away to extreme close-ups of faces, eyes, and other body parts. Mona’s eyes are about to transform her gaze upon Africa from the impression of a picturesque, exotic locale for a fashion shoot into

an archive of personal and diasporic history, the key that will unlock her migration to subjectivity. Her African-ness is about to establish its presence even as she is transposed into the epic saga of her people's objectification. We encounter her next in the custody of armed European slave traders, stripped naked to her waist. We flinch at the searing pain of a branding iron that marks her as chattel.

It is, however, at this traumatic moment of history's rewind, when Mona is transformed from an American model into an African captive, and transported as Shola the slave to a sugar plantation in Louisiana, that the authorial voice in the movie shifts to her. It is her point of view that Gerima privileges as he demolishes the portrait of the antebellum plantation as a patriarchal paradise filled with benevolent masters and happy slaves depicted in films like the 1939 classic *Gone with the Wind*. Through her eyes, and the sound of her voice, the spectator witnesses the violence of New World slavery and the inner life of enslaved resistance. And it all culminates in the closing frames of the film in a transfiguration of both Mona and the meaning of the slave castles that once served as the location of her photo shoot. Mona the individual, Mona the (American) national, splinters into Shola as she travels through the wringer of an African diasporic metaphysics of spiral time and plural places. As the curtains go down, she re-emerges in the closing frames of the film, reassembled with a whole new consciousness of self and community that exists in tension with fixed temporalities and nation-state boundaries.

Politics of Representation in the Atlantic World

The Atlantic slave trade marks an appropriate moment to launch Mona's path to diasporic consciousness as one of Africa's daughters named Shola. For that centuries-long commerce laid the basis for the Atlantic World's rise as a theater of violent encounters and cultural exchanges, of population redistribution and disease dissemination, of wealth creation and poverty generation, of technological innovation and *différance* production. New systems of power and knowledge reconfigured the identities of the people involved in these transactions, not simply through the structures of political economy and nation building, but also through new modes of representation which included, as I have

co-written elsewhere, “word and visuals, architecture and rituals, and sound and motion.”²

Within this new politics of representation woven into forced border crossings, history emerged as a major strategy of dominance, resistance, and negotiation. Technologies that re-invented people as chattel, wiped out their pre-enslavement histories, incorporating them instead as eternal subordinates into meta-narratives of new nations emerging

2 On an overview of Atlantic historiography, see Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities”, *American Historical Review*, 111 (June 2006), 741–57. A few examples of Atlantic history include Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hebrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris eds., *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2018); Dylan C. Penningroth, “The Claims of Slaves and Ex-Slaves to Family and Property: A Transatlantic Comparison”, *American Historical Review*, 112 (October 2007), 1039–069; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Gender and Reproduction in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Bayo Halsey, *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Joseph Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivory: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); John W. Sweet, “The Subject of the Slave Trade: Recent Currents in the Histories of the Atlantic, Great Britain, and Western Africa”, *Early American Studies* 7 (Spring 2009), 1–45; Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); Awam Amkpa and Gunja SenGupta, “Picturing Homes and Border Crossings: The Slavery Trope in Films of the Black Atlantic”, in Ana Lucia Araujo (ed.), *Paths of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Interactions, Identities, and Images* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011); Gerald Horne, *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1480–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Joao José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, trans. Arthur Brakel (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

in the New World. African slavery shaped constructs of “race” as the “ultimate trope of difference”³ to rationalize power relations between “masters” and “slaves.” Defenders of racial slavery portrayed peoples of African descent as inherently incapable of participating in the linear progress of reason and individual freedom that defined official national histories and historiographies. Planters of the American South, for instance, sought to shroud the brutalities of “slavery’s capitalism”—of the institutionalization of enslaved people as not simply labor, but as liquid capital, credit and collateral—in a comforting mythology of feudalism-inflected paternalism. The imagery of the plantation as a big, happy household portrayed African-descended women in slavery as promiscuous temptresses *à la* Jezebel, or as faithful, asexual nurses and household managers lovingly styled “Mammy.” Both constructs served to buttress the structures of patriarchy and white supremacy, of the practices of sexual abuse and labor exploitation, of the foundation of violence and dehumanization that propped up the sordid infrastructure of racial slavery in antebellum America.⁴

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- 3 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Editor’s Introduction: Writing “Race” and the Difference It Makes”, *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985), 1–20; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race”, *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992), 251–75.
- 4 On “slavery’s capitalism”, see Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman (eds), *Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). On the mythologies of female slavery, see Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985). On enslaved women in the U.S. South through the Civil War era, see the “Introduction” by Jennifer L. Morgan, the essays by Diana Ramey Berry, Stephanie M. H. Camp, Leslie M. Harris, Barbara Krauthamer, and Jessica Millward, and the response by Deborah G. White in the Roundtable, “The History of Women and Slavery: Considering the Impact of *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*”, *Journal of Women’s History* 19 (Summer 2007), 138–69. A sample of the rich and voluminous literature on enslaved women in the U.S. South includes Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 21–43; Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Sophie White, *Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Rebecca J. Fraser, *Courtship*

But what of the enslaved in the New World? How did Atlantic slavery reconfigure African-descended people's self-understandings? Scholars have shown that shared historical experiences of violent uprooting, forced migration, chattel bondage, and racism welded disparate cultural and political groups from West and West Central Africa into a common consciousness of diaspora. The African Studies scholar Paul T. Zeleza defines "diaspora" as a complex community created by "real or imagined genealogies and geographies" and a "process-cum-space" for navigating multiple belongings.⁵ It is key to the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy's conception of the "Black Atlantic" as a dynamic space defined by migration and cultures born of engagement between roots (home or imaginings of home), and routes (places you have been; paths you have traveled). Migration determined what it meant to be "Black" in the New World. Subsequently, scholars and artists addressed the limitations of Gilroy's Anglo-Atlantic focus by writing Africa and gender into Black Atlantic narratives. They located the emergence of Afro-Atlantic cultural identities within the transnational and intercultural spaces produced by

and Love Among the Enslaved in North Carolina (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007); Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Cynthia M. Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston's Urban Slave Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (eds), *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Daina Ramey Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Wilma King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts", *Journal of African American History* 92 (Winter 2007), 37–56; Brenda Stevenson, "The Question of the Slave Female Community and Culture in the American South: Methodological and Ideological Approaches", *Journal of African American History* 92 (Winter 2007), 74–95; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Mary E. Frederickson, Darlene Clarke Hine and Delores Walters (eds), *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Kit Candlin and Cassandra Pybus, *Enterprising Women: Gender, Race, and Power in the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015); Alexandra Finley, "'Cash to Corinna': Domestic Labor and Sexual Economy in the 'Fancy Trade'", *Journal of American History* 104 (September 2017), 410–30.

5 Paul Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic", *African Affairs* 104/414 (2005), 35–68 (p. 37).

the experience of diaspora both within and outside Africa. Diasporic sensibilities rendered the historical memory of violent border crossings, as well as the “roots” that pre-dated that history, a principal motif in the construction of a counter-politics of liberation, and the art forms that embodied these politics.⁶

Gerima himself acculturated to an African diasporic sense of self through experiences of anti-Black racism shared with African Americans in the United States—Chicago and LA—where he had moved to pursue graduate work in theater.⁷ Influenced by the independent Black film movement at UCLA, he appeared to view historical consciousness as vital to the project of creating an activist art. Such art necessarily engaged the nexus between power and knowledge production, offering memory as a crucial resource for historicizing identity formation.

History, Memory, Sensibility: Archives and the Art of the African Diaspora

We might locate *Sankofa* within a Black Atlantic methodology of history-telling through film. Such methodology counters the “epistemic violence” embedded in official documents that recorded the transformation of “people into prices”⁸—the instruments of finance, commerce and correspondence maintained by slave traders; the letters, journals, and literature produced by slaveholders; the records of state,

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- 6 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). For a recent perspective on the politics of Black Atlantic scholarship, see Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Patrick Manning, “Africa and the African Diaspora: New Directions of Study”, *Journal of African History* 44 (2003), 487–506. Gilroy has been criticized for neglecting the roles of both Africa and gender in shaping modernity; privileging the racialized “minority” paradigm of the African American experience whereas the Caribbean is predominantly Black; and decrying essentialism while constructing the Atlantic world as “Black.” See Zeleza, “Rewriting the African Diaspora”, 37. On the diasporic nature of Africa itself, see Charles Piot, “Atlantic Aporias: Africa and Gilroy’s Black Atlantic”, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100 (Winter 2001), 155–70.
- 7 Diane D. Turner and Muata Kamdibe, “Haile Gerima: In Search of an African Cinema”, *Journal of Black Studies* 38 (July 2008), 968–91 (p. 969).
- 8 I borrow the expression “people into prices” from Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

law and church confounded by the conundrum of “animate chattel.” A deafening silence often greets the professional historian listening hard for marginalized voices in traditional archives—voices freed from the dominant discourses that produced them.⁹

Enslaved rebels in particular rarely lived to tell their tales of resistance, let alone in their own voice. Archival fragments offer only fleeting glimpses of commodified lives at the moment of their brush with structures of law, discipline and punishment.

Consider for example, the well-known case of nineteen-year-old Celia, pregnant and enslaved on a Missouri farm in 1855, amid heightening sectional tensions over the fate of slavery in the trans-Mississippi West. Her middle-aged master, Robert Newsom, had acquired her at the age of fourteen, and raped her repeatedly until one night in June, she clubbed him to death in her cabin. She was discovered, tried and condemned to death by an all-male jury that included slaveholders. Archival sources on her trial tell her story in the words of men with power over her. Her sworn statement before a justice of the peace, for instance, notes,

Celia, a slave, duly sworn, belonging to Robert Newsom says that she killed her master on the night of the 23rd day of June 1855—about two hours after dark by striking him twice on the head with a stick, and then put his body on the fire and burnt it nearly up, then took up the ashes on the morning after daylight. After breakfast, the bones were not entirely burnt up. I took up the ashes and bones out of the fireplace in my cabin where I burnt the body and emptied them on the right hand side of the path leading from my cabin to the stable. Sworn to + attested before us on this 25th day of June 1855. D. M. Whyte J.P.¹⁰

What thoughts and emotions plagued this enslaved teenager in the last months of her life? Did she wonder what would become of her two children, born in slavery, one of them sired through rape by the man

9 On issues of agency and epistemic violence, see Saidiya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). See also Morgan, *Laboring Women*, and the references on gender and slavery in footnote 2.

10 “Famous Trials”, by Professor Douglas Linder, <https://famous-trials.com/celia/184-statement>. On this case, see also Wilma King, “‘Mad’ Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts”, *Journal of African American History* 92 (Winter 2007), 37–56.

she executed? What of her enslaved lover George, who had reportedly instructed her to resist her master's assaults, or the stillborn child she delivered in custody? Did scenes from her childhood, spent on a neighboring farm before her sale to Newsom, flash before her mind's eye as she awaited the gallows? Did she weep for the family and community she might have left there?

We shall never know the answer to these questions. The empirical limits of the state archives stand as a wall of silence denying us access to the interiority of "Celia, the Slave" even as reports of her deeds dominated the public sphere of her time and place. How then to overcome epistemic dehumanization? How to reclaim what the historian Marisa Fuentes has recently described as "dispossessed lives" from formal erasure?

In this context, we might think of Black Atlantic films as belonging in a corpus of cultural productions and oral histories that compensate for archival occlusion by delving deep into communal reserves of collective memory, and the artifacts that memorialize them. The French historian Pierre Nora distinguished between *milieux de mémoire* ("real environments of memory"—when memory is part of everyday experience) and *lieux de mémoire* (formal sites of remembrance, like museums, monuments, holidays) which societies manufacture when ruptures with the past cause real environments of memory to fade.¹¹ In interviews, Gerima assigned to his *Sankofa* project the purposes of what we might think of as a *lieux de mémoire*. *Sankofa* underscores the "importance of remembering [...] and the therapeutic power of history", he noted in an interview.¹²

Whereas Gerima saw history and memory as sharing a symbiotic relationship, leading scholars of slavery have sometimes made a distinction between the two. Thus the US historian Ira Berlin set memory apart from history by arguing that memory, unlike history,

11 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*", *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 7–25. See also the Introduction by Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn in this special issue of *Representations* on Memory and Counter-Memory. On a critique of Nora's conception of the difference between history and memory, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory", *American Historical Review*, 106 (June 2001), 916–20.

12 Cited in Michael T. Martin, "Podium for the Truth? Reading Slavery and the Neocolonial Project in the Historical Film: *Queimada! (Burn!) and Sankofain Counterpoint*", *Third Text* 23 (November 2009), 717–31 (p. 718).

“rejects a skeptical, detached reconstruction of the past”, and that it “speaks [...] to personal, individual understandings based on the most intimate experiences in families, churches, and communities. It is conveyed through symbols and rituals...”¹³ Yet history and memory are more interdependent than this formulation suggests. Official and professional histories often mediate the meanings that people give to their memories, while professional historians seek to gain access to non-literate worldviews through symbols, rituals, spiritual songs, folk tales, and other cultural productions of the powerless.

Indeed, Gerima, in his endeavor to construct a redemption story for Afro-Atlantic peoples through a recovery of their memories of the past, consulted professional histories about the everyday lives and resistance of the enslaved in the New World. For instance, he drew upon scholarship that revealed the reverberations of the Haitian Revolution from port to plantation in far corners of the Atlantic World, conveyed through the medium of Black sailors, that may have influenced a Denmark Vesey to rise in rebellion in faraway Virginia.¹⁴

Critics who have treated *Sankofa* as a documentary have criticized it for its alleged lack of fidelity to “facts.” They contend that Gerima erased the role of Africa and Africans in the making of Atlantic slavery, and the complex and hybrid nature of Africa itself, that he embraced essentialist ideas of race, and romantic notions of an “organic past.” They have decried the absence of fixed moorings of location and chronology, noting that configurations of geography and economics shaped specific forms of enslaved resistance.¹⁵ Yet, rather than debate whether a purportedly historical film represents “good history” judged by standards of traditional, archive-based empiricism, why not mine the possibilities of Black Atlantic films as primary sources on African diasporic identity formation predicated upon shared histories of migration and exchange?

Such shared histories of the marginalized become legible within shifting matrices of memory, raising the questions: what do we select to remember? What do we forget? What is transformed? The concept of

13 Ira Berlin, “American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice”, *The Journal of American History* 90 (March 2004), 1251–268 (p. 1264).

14 Turner and Kamdibe, “Haile Gerima”, 972–73.

15 For instance, see Sylvie Kande, “Look Homeward, Angel: Maroons and Mulattoes in Haile Gerima’s *Sankofa*”, *Research in African Literatures* 29 (Summer 1998), 128–46 (pp. 130, 140).

“sensibility” offers a promising framework for understanding how the dynamism of memory affects the translation of history into a language and politics of filmic representation.

Daniel Wickberg has explained the usefulness of the concept of “sensibility” for cultural historiography by noting that it brings together “the elements of sense perception, cognition, emotion, aesthetic form, moral judgment, and cultural difference.” Historians, he wrote, “have frequently overlooked the terms of perception and the forms of expression, both of which embody the linkages between, say, ontological commitments and pre-cognitive dispositions, moral values and categories of sense perception, ideas and emotion. But sensibilities are not organized in archives and conveniently visible for research purposes; they are almost never the explicit topics of the primary documents we use. We need a concept that lets us dig beneath the social actions and apparent content of sources to the ground upon which those sources stand: the emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and moral dispositions of the persons who created them. That concept is sensibility.”¹⁶

If, as Wickberg suggests, we dig through to the ground upon which a cultural text such as the film *Sankofa* stands, to the “emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and moral dispositions” of its architect, Gerima, what do we find? What we possibly unveil is an African diasporic metaphysics of plural times and places, transformed into semiotic spaces that exist in tension with national and nationalistic narratives. In this context, it is important to note that in this essay, I use the term “place” in its traditional sense as a geographical location, while I see “space” as a “dynamic, constructed” site of contests over tropes of difference and discourses of power such as race, gender, sex, sexuality, class, and nationality. “Space” serves also as a theater for identity formation.¹⁷ Plurality not only served as a survival strategy in slavery times, but functioned to cement intergenerational bonds of belonging and foster solidarities in struggles for self-determination and human rights among Afro-Atlantic peoples flung far from each other by period

16 Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New”, *The American Historical Review*, 112 June 2007), 661–84 (p. 669).

17 This discussion is drawn from Kathryn Beebe, Angela Davis and Kathryn Gleadle, “Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: feminist history and the spatial turn”, *Women’s History Review* 21 (September 2012), 523–32 (p. 524).

and place. It also recalls Kaiama Glover's description of "spiral time" in the context of Haitian literature: an oral tradition in which "stories unfold cumulatively or cyclically" without following a linear trajectory, involve conflicted characters who "move back and forth in time and space" and muddy the concept of "time's linear passage" by implicating the past in present conditions.¹⁸ Shifting temporalities, moreover, signify fragmentation and revitalization. In *Sankofa*, Mona enters a different time, place and body, fragmenting into a past that explains how she came to be American while restoring her relationship with the African diaspora.

Visualizing Spiral Time, Plural Places

Sankofa counterposes sounds and images of slavery's everyday violence against intergenerational traditions of African diasporic resistance on a space-time continuum that moves between different planes of existence. The affective and material tropes of abolitionist slave narratives are encased in an aesthetic of spiral time and multiple locations. Props like nooses, stocks, pillories, whips and guns; flashbacks to scenes of rape, references to auction blocks, and images of Black bodies bloodied and scarred by thrashing and branding; sounds of beating and cries of anguish, all convey the terror of the chattel principle on the Louisiana sugar plantation where the passage to her past has taken Mona-turned-Shola. Moreover, Catholic symbols and images serve as metaphors for slavery's project to strip the enslaved of all vestiges of African culture. This motif culminates in the matricide of an Akan mother by her devoutly Catholic, biracial son, born of rape.

Yet, the diasporic community that Gerima constructs on the plantation manages to transcend the constraints of the here and now by sharing memories of the there and then. It includes Şango, named after the Yoruba god of retributive justice, who has arrived from the West Indies where he was sold for being a "trouble-maker." He wears dreadlocks and speaks a creative patois. But African-born Nunnu is this enslaved

18 Kaiama L. Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. viii-ix. See also Allyson Nadia Field, "To Journey Imperfectly: Black Cinema: Aesthetics and the Filmic Language of *Sankofa*", *Framework: The Journal of Cinema & Media* 55 (Fall 2014), 171-90.

community's rock. She is dark-skinned, displaying her natural curls on her bare head proudly and defiantly. She is said to have supernatural powers, having bewitched a white man to death by simply staring at him. A catalyst for Shola's rebellious transformation, she remains in full possession of her Akan soul, experiencing her body as a liability as long as it remains trapped in the wrong place and time.

Nunu weaves imaginaries of other times and places, of shared experiences of "roots" and "routes" into ties that bind the living with ancestors and the unborn. In one sequence of scenes, she circles the mangled body of the pregnant Kuna, a runaway who got caught, as she lay suspended from a post. Wielding a machete, Nunu breaks into the performance of an Akan ritual, invoking ancestors—warriors, saviors of nations—and consults the Akyemfo, the Akan oracle. Nunu assumes the role of both midwife and priestess, bringing Kuna's child into the present world in a communal ceremony that is at once funerary, a call to arms, and the welcoming of a new child. She thanks Nana Akonadi, a deity for women, for the baby's safe arrival. Onscreen, the infant's cries merge into Mona's screams of terror as the scene cuts back to the moment of her metamorphosis as Shola in a collective birth into community cemented by the trauma of enslavement. Time is manipulated to synchronize these new beginnings of life, and of the birth of diasporic consciousness.

Other scenes depict Nunu regaling the enslaved community with tales of Afriye, the Porcupine girl, who presumably like the Ashanti description of the porcupine as warrior, wears an indestructible armor of spines. And she speaks of the "beautiful Kotoko girl"—the warrior girl, daughter of a powerful medicine woman who saved many lives with her root potions. While initiating members into a secret rebel society, Nunu offers Akan incantations, making reference to anti-colonial heroes and sacrificial drinks: "O, Almighty God. Mother Earth. The spirits of Asona ancestors. Come here's your drink... You deserve the Obirikisi, Birim and Okrikraaku that we sacrificed for you... The spirit of Prempeh, Ani Abena, come and eat with us."¹⁹

These scenes illustrate how artists might select and adapt memory to forge a usable past while consolidating time into chain links of

19 On Akan symbols in *Sankofa*, see Sandra M. Grayson, *Symbolizing the Past: Reading "Sankofa," "Daughters of the Dust," and "Eve's Bayou" as Histories* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

subjectivity. Gerima harnesses the Akans' skills in warfare for the purposes of rebellion. In doing so, however, the film-maker erases the Ashanti's complicity in the Atlantic Slave Trade, honoring them instead for their role in combating British imperialism. The heroes Nunu invokes belong in the future. Yet, the film's structure and artistic language of spiral time makes it possible to integrate struggles against slavery and colonialism into a shared genealogy of diasporic solidarity and the quest for freedom.

Spiral time is closely linked of course, with both the transgression and the transcendence of place. In the process, Nunu is constructing a space of defiance which keeps time differently than the material world of the plantation. African symbols and Akan heroes invest this space with the meaning of resistance. For instance, Shola's transformation into insurgent is realized only when her lover, Şango, places a wooden carving of the "Sankofa" bird around her neck while tending the wounds that she has sustained from a whipping as punishment for associating with rebellious "heathens" in the woods. These forests represent space that mobility has reconfigured on an immediate and local level. While denial of the right to move freely was a hallmark of slavery, the enslaved on Lafayette Plantation are voting with their feet to transgress plantation space. They congregate secretly in woods and caves to plan an armed rebellion for freedom with maroon communities. Among them is a dissembling head slave, who cracks his whip with his master during the day, but is "all mixed up with field hands" in the caves plotting rebellion at night.

Along the vein of plurality, the climactic scenes move rapidly in a loop between time and place: Şango advancing through cane fields, machete in hand—his work tool turned into a weapon of resistance; an enslaved woman confronting a white overseer with his own gun; Shola cutting cane overseen by her sneering white master on horseback; a closeup of Mona/Shola in the dungeon; enslaved rebels in hot pursuit of a white tormentor to the beat of drums; cries of terror; a flashback to a rape scene; Shola's master alighting from his horse, circling her as you would prey, until she cuts him down with a machete, and runs accompanied by sounds of the rebels' pursuit by guns, horses, and dogs, until we hear the drum beat of the divine guardian and watch the skies fade into the blue waters of the Atlantic off the coast of Ghana. The drumbeats keep pace

with Shola's voiceover telling us that the next thing she knew, she was flying high above, making the return journey to the land of the Akan. As the camera moves in on a close-up of Cape Coast and into the dungeon, now brightly lit by sunlight, Shola appears in the frame, her naked body silhouetted against the entrance to the dungeon. She staggers out, reborn to a new consciousness of "home", which the spectator suspects signifies less a physical place than a particular meaning that the hallowed ground of the slave castles have now assumed, with all their implications for community. Home is a repository of cultural resources to forge subjectivity. It is a platform from which to develop an imaginary of belonging. The courtyard of the slave castle is a setting for that sense of community, the members of which, dressed in African robes, arrayed before the drummer, the buzzard and Sankofa, include Nunu who died by her biracial son's hand back in America. This then is a community anchored in the historical experience of the Atlantic slave trade. Time has come a full circle. The moment of insurrection in Louisiana does not dismantle the system of New World slavery but it creates a voluntary community formed of struggle and survival, of historical memory and contingency.

Epilogue: An Archive of Black Atlantic Migrations and Diasporic Discourses

Asked whether there was such a thing as a "Black aesthetic", Gerima compared the cinematic structure of *Sankofa* to jazz.²⁰ This essay has, of course, characterized such an aesthetic as a "sensibility" of spiral time and plural spaces shaped by African metaphysics and diasporic consciousness. The Akan presence in *Sankofa* assumes special significance in light of scholarly insights into the group's association with qualities of heroism among enslaved Jamaicans.²¹ Moreover, as John Thornton has noted, the Akan or Twi language group formed the basis for linking the enslaved from different parts of Africa, landed on the Gold Coast, and dispersed among estates in North America, the

20 Turner and Kamdibe, "Haile Gerima", p. 983.

21 Robert P. Stewart, "Akan Ethnicity in Jamaica: A Re-examination of Jamaica's Slave Imports from the Gold Coast, 1655-1807", *Maryland Historian* 28 (2003), 69-107.

West Indies and Brazil, where it assumed the cultural group signifier, “Coramantee.”²²

Sankofa's score offers a *mélange* of sounds born of Black Atlantic migrations across time and place: African ritual music, divine drumming, Gospel, and spiritual, spelling alienation and renewal. The editing is sometimes nostalgic with slow pans on things which signify passage: oceans, sitting and soaring birds, and the topography of the New World. It is shot entirely outdoors, for the Big House, demographically dominated by the presence of the master class, is no place for subjectivity. If the point of Shola's time travel is to find her Pan African identity and community, it can only happen among field hands in the slave quarters from sundown to sunup.

Moreover, as a cinematic language, Gerima's sensibility extended the work of strengthening diasporic ties into the public theaters and communal venues exhibiting the film. For it embodied “a set of signifying practices”²³ that African and African American audiences could decode in order to make sense of the past, practices that linked film-maker with spectators in a shared project of meaning-making, across “local and national landscapes.” The politics and economics of *Sankofa*'s production and distribution constituted a community discourse in which audiences could interpret the significance of “rituals, symbols, the language structures, and the historical frameworks that these narratives imbed.” Thus, Akan symbols could become dynamic signifiers of something new.²⁴

It is the dynamism of this meaning-making—in keeping with the trope of creative fragmentation and renewal—that lends *Sankofa* its interactive, open-ended, and contingent aspect. As story, and as community discourse, this species of Black Atlantic art extends the archive for understanding diasporic formation into spaces of performance and audience reception across Pan African terrains. And it is an archive, that like the diaspora itself, is in a constant state of regeneration.

22 John Thornton, “The Coromantees: An African Cultural Group in Colonial North America and the Caribbean”, *Journal of Caribbean History* 32 (1998), 161–78.

23 Quotation from Jay Winter, “Film and the Matrix of Memory”, *AHR Forum, American Historical Review*, 106 (October 2001), 863–64.

24 Martin Mhando and Kenyan G. Tomaselli, “Film and Trauma: Africa Speaks to Itself through Truth and Reconciliation Films”, *Black Camera* 1 (Winter 2009), 30–50 (pp. 38, 37).

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35. 'These Bones Gonna Rise Again'

A Womanist Reclamation

Michelle Lanier

This story begins with dirt, spit, and a visitation.

In the predawn darkness of 19 October 2020, my eyes flashed open from a dream I couldn't name. I had been spending the autumn months of the pandemic tending a lingering garden of late herbs and cherry tomatoes, ripe with climate change, too sweet with the determined warmth.

Kudzu still hummed with cicada, a sistrum sound of the Eleusian Mysteries. In this case Demeter and Persephone were played by Black and Southern women, linked as mother and daughter, and rooted in red clay earth and stolen topsoil.

That morning was exactly four months after the Juneteenth Uprising of Raleigh, North Carolina, pulled bronze Confederate statues down to eye level.

By October, the grass under their obelisk perch had been re-sodded in unassuming grass by Black, Coharie Indian, and Lumbee Indian hands. My own Blackness joined the chorus of Confederate dismantling work. More than twice we napped in our cars, well past midnight with snipers watching overhead.

In the hot afterglow of taking down symbols meant to press me small, sleep was a slippery fish, slick to slide out of my grasp.

Sleepless solace came in the form of diving into the ocean that is genealogy.

Under dark and full moons I searched, found, and met ancestors in census records, phonebooks, military registration cards, birth certificates,

newspaper articles, marriage licenses, and death certificates. I also found even more of my people and myself in my own DNA, including a long-lost uncle. I had spit in a vial for science and learned that my roots were a virtual snapshot of the Carolina slave trade: Nigeria and England, Mali and Spain, Cameroon and Norway, all swimming in my veins, and more. There are at least sixteen nations listed in my DNA results, all directly touched by the routes of slaving ships. Like many, it appears I am, through and through, the daughter of those pulled across the sea.

One English-descendant man, named Benjamin Bunn, it was confirmed through DNA, is my Great-great grandfather.

He was a Confederate officer and his daughter Leah Lindsay (of Edgecombe County, North Carolina) is my Great-grandmother, born of a Black woman, named Sallie. Benjamin was married to a white woman, but had one, perhaps two daughters by Sallie.

I told the spirit of Benjamin he owed us.

I went to his Black daughter's grave, Leah Lindsay, and told her tombstone that the crumbling monuments were for her.

This conversing with ancestors is not new to me, nor is it new to what I call my AfroCarolina and AfroSouthern people.

We believe, without irony, that our ancestors talk to us in the presence of a red bird, the sudden burst of rain, a kiss of a breeze, a hawk overhead, and in dreams.

Frances Birdsall McCullers woke me with a dream. In it she asked, "You're not gonna check on me? You only care about the shiny negroes?"

My eyes opened.

I had been puttering around the Internet for genealogical clues, when a chilly awareness grabbed my attention. My personal research had avoided my father's father's people, the McCullers. A sojourning people, a people of black cauldron laundering, cinder block churches, sharecropping, widow work, and journey stories, they were fairly mysterious.

Here's what I know. It comes down to dirt.

There is a township called McCullers, in Wake County, North Carolina. Once rural, this piece of earth now boasts impatient drivers, multi-lane roads and fast-food biscuit spots. It is supposed to have held the plantation once populated by my people. I am still in search of this land.

The first McCullers in our family, I am told by my father, was given as a wedding present, delivered to a Carolina, slave-owning bride, all the way from Mississippi.

The elders said his name was once Boylan, but was changed to McCullers, a tribute to their white wedding vows, like an engraved silver dish. The tether to Mississippi and her sister, Alabama, was greed, white cotton, and black dirt.

Wagon trains of enslaved agricultural engineers were walked on foot, for the expectation of their laboring hands.

My paternal ancestor was made to walk in reverse, Mississippi to North Carolina, instead of the other way around.

His wife, Frances Birdsall, somehow survived the south-eastern caravan, too. After freedom, Frances became a domestic, a nurse, and a laundress. Her son married Georgianna, widowing her young. She too became a laundress. Georgiana's son, James, went to war in Italy and studied chemistry at Shaw, the oldest HBCU in the South. He jitterbugged, he juke jointed, he met Willie Catherine (the blacksmith's daughter) at an all-Black USO dance, and later worked in administration for the United States Post Office.

The couple left AfroCarolina and her ancestral bones, and went to Philly. Up and down that road they wove a cat's cradle of paths, birthing the babies, bringing them south, raising the babies, bringing them north. I am the daughter of their oldest son, and somehow, I'm the one the dirt called home.

So when Frances woke me, feeling like a tap on the shoulder, accompanied by questions, I dug and found her death certificate, which listed her burial ground as Boylan Chapel Cemetery.

The cemetery is 8.4 miles from my house.

I had never heard Frances's name, nor had I heard of her resting place.

I took marigolds and wore combat boots, for it was cottonmouth snake season, and nearly the Day of the Dead.

The graveyard sat unmarked beside a merciless road. A now-closed motel sat to her right and a rim shop sat to her left. A Jamaican patty food truck lulled in the parking lot. A chiropractor's little office sat watchful and small. An upholstery shop used the old chapel as storage for bolts of fabric.

The overgrowth that held my Frances's unmarked grave was a near solid wall of vegetation. Everywhere was litter, an old shoe, furniture scraps, styrofoam takeout containers, and liquor bottles.

Sunken graves, periwinkle, fieldstones, and a few headstones were hiding behind the green tangle.

Too astonished to weep (who would do this to a graveyard?) I reached out for a watching pine. "I'm here," I said. "I honor you! All of you! I'll fix this!" I said to the air.

The current landowner shared that two McCullers men had grown tired of upkeep and had sold the little chapel in front of the cemetery, to the chiropractor.

Much of the family had moved north. This was forgotten, sacred land.

I came home. Born in upstate New York, where my parents lived for work, grand-parented by a sojourning Army couple and a Pennsylvania-based, freedom-seeking couple, raised in the Southern realm of AfroCarolina, I had returned.

All of my grandparents were born in North Carolina. None of them died here.

I came back.

Lately I've been dreaming of daffodils in honor of Frances and her chapel. I can almost see her, stirring blue soap into white clothes. Glaring into my eyes.

I find myself saying to her, "I will fix this. I will fix this."

36. Being Beyond—Aesthetics of Resistance

Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach

Bettina Gockel

Annemarie Schwarzenbach (born in 1908) was a professional Swiss writer and photographer from the late 1920s and 1930s until her early death in 1942. Her travels in Europe and to the Far and Near East; to the United States during the Great Depression (where she visited the industrial Northeast and several states in the South, specifically: Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama); and to Africa (where she journeyed to the Belgian Congo and to Morocco) were the basis for her artistic work. They were also deeply shaped by her own understanding of migration and exile in the historical context of European Fascism and worldwide migration. Today, photographs and papers from her estate are available digitally (in part) at: <https://www.nb.admin.ch/snl/en/home/about-us/sla/estates-archives/focus/schwarzenbach.html>.

Against Her Final Will

Annemarie Schwarzenbach's final will directed that Anita Forrer—a friend who was herself an ambitious writer and correspondent of Rainer Maria Rilke, another modern poet and traveler—take care of her estate. But this proved impossible because the task was jointly assigned to Forrer and Erika Mann, the daughter of Thomas Mann and sister of Klaus Mann—both of whom had been close, beloved, and at times

contentious friends of Schwarzenbach. (Anita Forrer and Erika Mann, however, did not like each other; and more importantly, they were unable to focus their attention on executing Schwarzenbach's will because of their own disparate lives in different countries.) This is why it was only in the 1980s that the impressive writings and photographs left behind by Schwarzenbach after her death first became accessible to researchers worldwide. One of the facts of Schwarzenbach's working life as an artist and of her legacy is that her mother and grandmother largely destroyed her correspondence and diaries, despite knowing about her last will. Both of these women came from families with a storied military history, and both took deep pride in this tradition, including in the male military identity at its core. Schwarzenbach's grandmother, Clara Wille, was even known by the moniker "Frau General Wille", or "Mrs. General Wille"; her mother, Maria Renée Schwarzenbach (1883–1959), was herself a passionate photographer. Military identity and openness to modern media such as photography could thus go hand in hand. For Annemarie Schwarzenbach, though, these two "lines" laid out in her female family could not be linked without problems. Rather, the opposite was the case. Nonetheless, reconstructing the tensions that may have existed between these women is not possible without speculating about the relation between politics, social status, and emotions. And in any case, such speculations would not really contribute to an understanding of Annemarie Schwarzenbach's work as an artist, at least at this historical juncture of newly emerging research into her entire life of creative work and professional ambition.

Career and Network

Schwarzenbach was successful in her time, publishing three hundred journalistic articles, many with her own photographs (her archive encompasses ca. 7000 photographs and negatives together with her meticulous notes which were obviously meant for future use for publications). She moreover wrote literary novels: *Freunde um Bernard* (Bernard's friends) was her literary debut in 1931. Her voice in this work, as a subject and as an artist, was shaped in part by her sexual identity: the work represented a coming out in several senses. First, as an artist who at times broke with heterosexual norms—though the literature

of her day did not clearly define how subjectivity and sexual identity might be expressed through or in a literary or lyric voice. In her social and professional circles at the time, categories such as homosexual or lesbian were mostly used only furtively or inexplicitly. She nevertheless grew up with social and sexual practices that corresponded to these emerging identities, and this was reflected in her writing. And second, this was a coming out in her desire to live among avant-garde artists such as Erika and Klaus Mann, or the legendary Ruth Landshoff-Yorck and Thea “Mopsa” Sternheim—who later became a fighter for the *résistance* and was interned in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp (Figure 1).



Fig. 1 Annemarie Schwarzenbach, Thea “Mopsa” Sternheim, June 1933, Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv, Swiss National Library, Bern, Estate Annemarie Schwarzenbach.

Schwarzenbach’s global network among women was wide and included professional travelers, writers, photographers, and archaeologists such as Gertrude Bell, Marie Alice “Ria” Hackin (a member of the Corps des Volontaires Françaises), the impressively athletic Ella Maillart, and the American writer Carson McCullers, who dedicated her novel *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941) to Annemarie Schwarzenbach. In her posthumously published autobiography *Illumination and Night Glare*, McCullers portrays Schwarzenbach (whom she met in Erika Mann’s suite at the Bedford Hotel, the famous New York locale at 118 East 40th

Street that served as home in flux for exiled Europeans at the time) as a rational, hardworking woman with a doctoral degree from the University of Zurich. Both women wrote to each other after Schwarzenbach's return to Europe, and Schwarzenbach urged McCullers not to forget their real vocation, namely creative writing. Interestingly, McCullers does not downplay Schwarzenbach's addiction to morphine, but she does point out the ability of the writer and photographer to work professionally in spite of it. Indeed, Schwarzenbach tried several times herself to get rid of these substances, morphine and "Eukodal". And from 1940 onwards even her truly skeptical family was convinced that she had triumphed over an addiction that was almost cultivated at the time as a habit among artists, intellectuals, and scholars—especially because the full effects of these substances were not really known, and often these opioids were paradoxically even used to treat individuals who had problems with addiction.

Those who traveled with her—such as Ella Maillart (1903–97), a participant in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 and a globetrotter like Schwarzenbach, or the women mentioned above—often belonged to a high-middle-class or upper-class milieu that these representatives of a "jeune fille rangée" (Simone de Beauvoir) transformed into a bohemian existence with an exalted lifestyle. The experience of exile and migration was very present in these circles from the beginning of the 1930s onwards. This not only sometimes hindered their attempts to live a stylish life with a great deal of fun—for instance in Schwarzenbach's case, while driving as one of the first women ever on a field trip to the southern US states, together with the journalist and photographer Barbara Hamilton-Wright (Figure 2), who was employed by the Farm Security Administration and had visited the Highlander Folk School with Schwarzenbach. Moreover, it is possible to see the way in which these women held on to beauty and fashion as an expression of resistance in times of political and cultural-political hardship, comparable to how many Parisian women explicitly maintained an elegant appearance as a sign of moral superiority over the Nazi occupiers. In contrast to these Parisian women, however, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, like many of her German and American friends, preferred androgynous styling—sometimes long trousers and sometimes shorts, combined with stylish blazers, buttoned-up shirts, and a tie.



Fig. 2 Annemarie Schwarzenbach, *Barbara Hamilton-Wright*, n.d. (between 1936 and 1938), Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv, Swiss National Library, Bern, Estate Annemarie Schwarzenbach.

Working Beyond

Schwarzenbach's literary writing unfolds in a style of stunning hybridity (seen as a weakness by many who have written or who write about her and her work), moving unflinchingly between autobiographical experiences, passages that are documentary in nature or informed by history, the genre of a road movie report, and a kind of lyrical fiction that comes close to an individual form of magical realism. In an American context, I would see her writing of a kind with Joan Didion and John (Jack) Kerouac; they would have appreciated her work and would have enjoyed her company, I imagine. Her photographs go beyond the social documentary photography of her days—she was acquainted with New Vision photography and the works of the F.S.A. photographers—and they are in line with the much later photography of Robert Frank, namely his famous *The Americans* (1958–59).

She seems to have lived so far beyond social and artistic conventions that the way she chose to live her life was almost unbearable for those closest to her, especially her Swiss family. Historians of art, literature, and photography have also found it difficult to include her in scholarly narratives. In fact, there is such a counter-narrative to her persona and

work that even those who write about her in scholarly terms tend to affirm her status as the incarnation of a stereotyped “other”, while simultaneously exposing her “otherness” as something that came to her not only naturally but as a matter of social prestige. She was the daughter of one of the richest families in Switzerland—how could someone with that status claim to challenge the system? It was all a self-flattering existence, wasn’t it? Including a posh bank account, with nothing to worry about. A serious artist—that would have been, and still would be, worrisome. But this worrisomeness that makes Schwarzenbach’s art so interesting has yet to be discovered. It is quite amazing that the very first photography exhibition of her work in a prestigious museum, the Centre Paul Klee in Bern, Switzerland, did not take place until 2020, following a 2008 exhibition in a local museum for literature in Zurich, the Strauhof Museum. Annemarie Schwarzenbach has certainly not “arrived” in the art world, especially not her whole oeuvre. As an artist, her driving force was not arrival—it was the farewell. However, her splendid and faithful archive gives evidence that one should not confuse her migratory existence with her will to create an oeuvre that was meant to be integrated in the system of the arts as a form of visibility for those who migrate, move, travel on, and for those who can do this only in their imagination.

Androgynous persona

Contemporaries were stunned by her beauty, an androgynous persona shaped in no small part by portrait photography and her own posture as a melancholic artist. Although Schwarzenbach is not well known internationally, the photographic portrait shot by Marianne Breslauer (1909–2001) in 1931 in Berlin (see Figure 3) has the status of an international icon created to build up a legend even while Schwarzenbach was still alive. Schwarzenbach commented on this photograph, the most famous from the shoot, by noting her mother hated it, because the photograph of her face—half in light, half in shadow—suggests a visual stereotype of a split persona, indeed of a pathological, schizophrenic personality, a diagnosis that was in fact applied to Schwarzenbach. Annemarie Schwarzenbach was clearly an “outsider” among her family and a disturbing authority in her own right as someone who published and who was admired as a counter-figure

by her social “milieu”. But one complicated aspect of the relationship between mother and daughter is that this pathologization played almost no part in the ways her family tried to come to terms with their daughter and sister. In that sense, nobody wanted to lock her away, although she was in fact institutionalized several times (in Switzerland and in the United States—interestingly, in psychiatric clinics far away from the urban centres). But that is another story.



Fig. 3 Marianne Breslauer, *Annemarie Schwarzenbach*, Berlin, 1931, © Walter & Konrad Feilchenfeldt / Courtesy Fotostiftung Schweiz.

Pathologization

Ironically and with an acute awareness of the practices and discourses that have been used to pathologize modern artists, Schwarzenbach wrote that she looked “crazy” in this photograph, in the sense of that word at the time. (We can, however, be very sure that she was not “crazy”). Photographs showing her at work, for instance in Turkey, or depicting her spending time with her homosexual husband in Iran and Morocco give evidence of a life with moments of joy, relaxation, fun, and concentration shaped by a clear capacity to observe the world with alertness, as well as deep sympathy for the people she met during her tours. Indeed, it is easy to overlook the difference between the artistic mask of coolness and indifference, itself a posture of resistance, and the everyday liveliness and decisiveness of a woman who prepared for

her travels with detailed research, often under contract with magazines to report on her journey. As a trained historian—she finished her dissertation at the age of twenty-three—she routinely prepared for her trips with in-depth research into the history of the countries she was about to visit. While publications about her notoriously insist on her sadness and unhappy fate, the strength and sheer output of her work show that her migrations were very thoughtfully reflected upon, and that they provided her with more enjoyment than we can possibly reconstruct. Looking behind the mask is never easy, but it is worth trying in order to break free from deep-rooted stereotypes.

Cult Status after Death

After her death, she was long forgotten, not least because friends who wrote about her used fictional names, such as “Christina” in Ella Maillart’s book about their trip to Afghanistan. Klaus Mann referred to her as the “Schweizerkind” (Swiss child); this was a way of infantilizing her, even as she financed his anti-facist literary review journal *Die Sammlung* (a title that might be translated as “anthology”). And when she was mentioned by her actual name, the fact that she was a married member of the Clarac-Schwarzenbach family was suppressed, as if this name alone opened a window into an all-too-complicated life that was impossible to include or integrate in established narratives of a woman’s life.

Rediscovered in the 1980s and 1990s, she gained cult status as a model of lesbian identity and stylishness, and as an example of a woman who tried to free herself from so many different repressions and stereotypes in order to live her life as a woman with homosexual inclinations, as a forerunner of humanist photography, and as an anti-facist activist—but not least as an artist with a talent for writing and photography. Editions of her literary works, too, are often problematic, as Walter Fähnders rightly pointed out in a short essay on the occasion of her one-hundredth birthday, because they often reflect an attitude of “correcting” her style by eliminating supposed errors. Her montage-like style has yet to be grasped—together with her aesthetic of dissolving narratives and rejecting modes of explanation and logic while also claiming that this precise approach contributed to an understanding of the feelings and existence of human beings during a worldwide crisis.

The state of research is even more challenging when it comes to her photographs. Images that might at first look like failed compositions in fact prove to be successful attempts to reject a purely documentary style, as well as expectations of what travel photography was in her days (see Figure 4). The columns in Persepolis tend to fall to the side; landscapes are represented as spaces of emptiness; the viewer's perspective seems to be high in the air, or digging in the earth.



Fig. 4 Annemarie Schwarzenbach, *Persia, Persepolis: Ruins*, 1935, Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv, Swiss National Library, Bern, Estate Annemarie Schwarzenbach.

And all of this happens in the context of a revealing explanation at the beginning of her novel *Death in Persia*. I quote it here, in the finale of this essay, and provide one of her photographs in place of an interpretation, in order to allow her voice to be heard:

This book will bring little joy to the reader. It will not even comfort him nor raise his spirits [...] But this is not even the worst part—the reader will forgive the author much less for never making it clear why a person should drift as far as Persia only to surrender to nameless conflicts. There is talk more than once of deviations, escape routes and errant ways, and those living in a European country today know how few are able to bear such terrible tension—a tension that comes from the personal conflict between a need of personal calm and a need for decisiveness, or from financial hardship, whether minimal or overpowering, and the most fundamental, most pressing, political questions about our economic, social and cultural future in which no one gets off lightly [...].

(Annemarie Schwarzenbach, *Death in Persia*, translated by Lucy Renner Jones, London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2013, pp. 3–4)

In 1942 she photographed a dog in the harbor of Lisbon as an icon for the manifold dimensions of migration (Figure 5). This is not a dog left behind, as one might think at first sight, nor is it “just” that. By naming this anonymous dog “Tyras”, Schwarzenbach opens up a whole political and personal genealogical history. It was Reichskanzler Bismarck, no less, who was known for introducing a breed of Great Danes known as “Reichshunde”, and for his own personal dogs, Tyras I and Tyras II (the latter a gift from the emperor). Schwarzenbach’s father, Alfred Schwarzenbach, also owned a dog named Tyras and the family had ties to Bismarck’s genealogical line. Two years after the death of her father, facing migration and exile, Schwarzenbach seems to say: What? That poor dog is part of the journey? More questions pose themselves to us: Is this an uncompromising image of things she did not want to take with her on her travels? An image of political turmoil, of power so merciless that it does not hesitate to use innocent creatures for its own purposes? Can horror be staged in the image of a fragile creature? As a warning: stay out, stay away. I still imagine the photographer as an emphatic observer. Annemarie Schwarzenbach was aware of photography’s multi-layered messages. And she represented this dog with her own loving devotion. In that sense, in one single image Annemarie Schwarzenbach expressed what Susan Sontag took decades to understand.

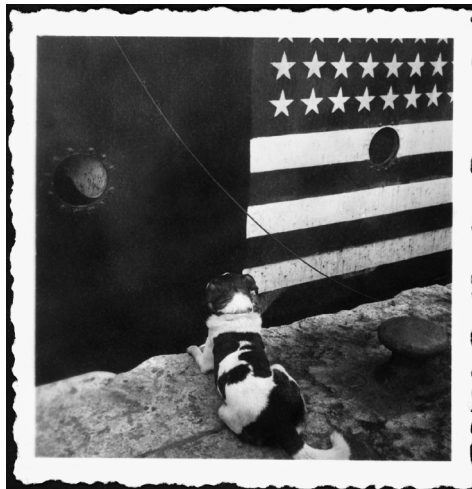


Fig. 5 Annemarie Schwarzenbach, *No Place for Tyras*, May 1941, Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv, Swiss National Library, Bern, Estate Annemarie Schwarzenbach.

Migrant against Her Will

Historically, it would not have been unexpected for Annemarie Schwarzenbach to leave Switzerland, especially since she received a French passport after her marriage to Claude Clarac and regarded herself as being in exile. Considering that this gave her the status of a migrant when she traveled to the United States, her impulse to return home—literally to her childhood home—was a tragic mistake and an irony of fate. No one welcomed her in Switzerland, especially not her family. At the end of her short life, she came upon the idea of settling in what was known as the Jägerhaus in Sils Baselgia, not far from where Friedrich Nietzsche had lived. This was to be a refuge where she would be able to pursue writing as a form of meditation. However, life there was not as lonely as this ideal notion might have implied, since Thomas Mann liked to visit her for tea. For her, it was to become a hermitage for writing and living, in the Swiss sense of a place far away from one's parental home, but with many friendly guests. Before the purchase of the house (made possible by an inheritance from her paternal grandmother) could be finalized by a notary, Schwarzenbach had a fatal bicycle accident. She ultimately died owing to the resulting injuries to her head and brain. The medical treatment and isolation of this "outsider" who always sought to be included, without wanting to adapt and submit socially, sexually, and intellectually, is from today's perspective an exceptional social, medical, and ethical catastrophe. Previously diagnosed as "schizophrenic", Schwarzenbach was treated for her supposed psychological conditions rather than for the neurological injuries caused by her accident.

But even this tragedy of an early death need not necessarily have led to her artistic work being forgotten. Today, we could have before us a body of work with some seventy years of research and reception—except for the fact that no one in her family or circle was willing to manage her estate and make it available for research. It is to her great nephew, Alexis Schwarzenbach, that we owe credit for having taken on this labor as a family member and trained historian. He wrote the first monograph about her life and work under the title *Auf der Schwelle des Fremden: Das Leben der Annemarie Schwarzenbach* (Collection Rolf Heyne, Munich 2008), drawing from numerous new sources not accessible outside the family. It is also thanks to his

initiative that the photo exhibition in Bern was realized in 2020/21. In this respect, international research on the passionate migrant and cosmopolitan Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach is only now beginning.

37. Mom Rose

Melvina Lathan

I am a Philly girl. And yet the longer I live, the more I continue to learn about who I really am. Throughout the history of our people, we have been faced with constant adversity. We have been plagued with the misfortunes of displacement, involuntary migration, and the agonizing separation of families. And yet my life growing up in this diverse, post-war group has been like what Zora Neil Hurston describes as “flower dust and springtime sprinkled all over it”!

I was pampered and coddled, loved and protected, inspired and introduced to fine music and fine arts and treated as the young princess who could do no wrong. I had the absolute, divine pleasure of knowing my grandparents and my great-grandparents. While there is much to say about the men of the family, especially my great-grandfather, ‘Pop’ Foreman, who fought in the Spanish American War, I was more impressed and influenced by the women; the great aunts, my mother’s sisters, and the GRANDmamas of our family. I remember when Pop Foreman passed on at a ripe old 100 years. Or was it 102? Who knew? Most of the records of Black men born during the 1800s can’t be verified.... what’s a birth certificate anyway? Pop Foreman was a big man, strong, proud, and strict and he signed his name with an X while his wife, Catherine, was well educated, and charged with teaching the children of the slave master for whom they worked. Pop Foreman worked long and hard laying tracks for the railroad to take care of his large brood... sixteen of ‘em to be exact... At the time of his transition, there were only three Spanish-American-War Vets left alive in this country and joined by the bonds of war, and the other two traveled to Philadelphia to join the family in mourning. Both were way up in age and very frail. One was in a wheelchair while the other steadied himself precariously on a

walker as he made his way down to the casket to offer that final salute. Both Soldiers were proud and bound in spirit and, like Pop, peacefully awaiting their death. Both were White...

My grandmothers were different kinds of heroes. Family Heroes. They were businesswomen, artists, jewelry makers, chefs, quilters, dressmakers, gardeners... all while caring for their household, their children and their husbands. We were heavily influenced and surrounded by their warmth, tenacity, and ingenuity. For the sake of this story, I'd like to focus on one particularly colorful grandmother, Mom Rose, born in Tillman, South Carolina, 1900. She was born to Kitsy and John Frost. Kitsy, a native American, possibly Catawba, and John, the son of the Englishman and owner of the cotton plantation.

As a child living on the plantation, she was not allowed to work in the fields like the other children. Both she and her mother were given special treatment by her father, who lavished her with gifts, fancy clothes, and food. For her thirteenth birthday she was gifted with her very own pony, and was even photographed with it to commemorate the occasion! As a child, I vividly recall her sharing that photo with me. "I was so proud of that pony", she told me. She learned to care for her pony and ultimately ride. Sadly, that photo was lost somewhere along life's road once she died at age eighty-six.

When John Frost died a young man, Kitsy migrated, finding work in the cotton fields of Savannah, GA. Among their belongings was her most prized possession; her sewing machine. Rose learned survival from Kitsy... how to sew, grow vegetables, can, make quilts, make corn liquor and bootleg whiskey. Rose found work in one of the many shrimp packing houses popping up along the Savannah River. From that point on, they had shrimp, crab, and/or oysters nightly. Feisty Rose eventually married my grandfather, Lee Benson, an Inuit and Naval Officer, and had five sons of her own. A bit of a rebel, she owned the first Model T Ford ever seen in Savannah, GA and smoked cigarettes on an ivory, rhinestone-studded cigarette holder and worked non-stop. She designed and made clothing for the locals, even as she continued to work the shrimp packing job and was later employed by the US Army as a transport truck driver.

As a private bootlegger, she used the army transport vehicle to make her early morning 'deliveries' and made hundreds of extra dollars per

week from her very own preparation of corn liquor or moonshine, and a variety of wines. Her husband, Lee, was a very 'proper' gentleman and as a Naval Officer, was away a great deal of the time. He disapproved of her 'extra work', but with five sons and a sick mother to care for Rose welcomed the additional income, secretly stashing away whatever she could, whenever she could. She bought a full-length mink coat and began to painstakingly sew her stashed thousands in one-hundred-dollar bills into the lining. During the late 1920s her beloved mother, Kitsy, passed on and shortly thereafter she left town with her fur coat, Model T, and five boys in tow, leaving her husband and all else behind. Making her move to New York, she lived in Harlem when Harlem was in vogue and taught herself to make silver jewelry. Some of her pieces were sold while many were gifted to special people in her life. She found steady employment in the kitchen of the Savoy Hilton Hotel. There, being a light skinned, pretty Negro, she moved about freely, catering to the finicky eating habits and whims of many of the early movie stars and entertainers. Among the many who stayed at the Savoy Hilton, she would mention encounters with Dean Martin and Sammy Davis, Jr.

She was a fabulous cook and was always in the kitchen throwing together simple yet luscious country meals. I never saw her use a recipe. Ever. I have two recipes to share, both indicative of her Native American and Southern heritage.

SHRIMP n GRITS

We ate grits for both breakfast and dinner, savoring the varieties of gravies and sauces. It was either grits or rice... Hot sauce is important too. Ours was always homemade. I never saw a store-bought bottle of hot sauce in our home. The sauces varied in color depending on the type of peppers and spices available at any given time (yellow, red, green) but all were tangy, delicious, and h o t, spooned out of a jar. This was one of my favorite dishes ever and Mom Rose would happily make it for me whenever I asked. My mom called me spoiled but Mom Rose paid her no mind. I was special, and I knew it.

I don't include salt in the recipe of ingredients. The ham, sausage, butter, shrimp and bacon grease all have a fair amount of salt, so use sparingly to maintain the integrity of the fresh combination of flavors.

Ingredients

Grits

(Use chicken broth instead of salted water). Follow directions, using a whisk, and cook the desired amount. Once cooked, add some butter and about 4 oz of cream cheese (just do it!). Stir until melted and creamy, cover and set aside.

Shrimp

Mom Rose always used small to medium shrimp for this dish. Bypass the giant varieties. The smaller ones are sweeter and allow you to get a forkful without using a knife. (she liked to eat with a spoon)

Ham (best use for leftover ham or may use kielbasa, or andouille sausage cut in small pieces)

Garlic (minced)

Red bell pepper (finely chopped)

Onion (chopped)

Parsley (chopped)

Butter

Method

1. Heat oil (butter, olive oil or bacon grease) Sauté ham or meat choice until cooked through
2. Add chopped bell pepper and chopped onion, cook until translucent, then add garlic (do not allow garlic to brown)
3. Turn heat up to high, thoroughly toss in shrimp, cover tightly and immediately remove from heat source. Allow shrimp to 'cook' (up to two minutes) while preparing the grits. Toss in the parsley just before serving. Top with fresh ground black pepper. (cheese optional)

YUM!

SWEET POTATO BREAD

This recipe can be as simple or as elaborate as you would like it to be. It can be used for dinner rolls and loaf as is or turned into cinnamon-raisin swirl loaves. This is a multi-purpose dough only limited by your imagination. This is super easy dough.

Ingredients

- 1 cup warm milk + 1 package of active dry yeast
- ½ cup light brown sugar
- ¾ cup mashed sweet potatoes
- ¼ cup softened butter
- 1 egg
- ½ tsp salt
- 4-4 ½ cup flour
- Melted butter

Method

1. Dissolve the yeast in the warm milk
2. Add sugar, salt, softened butter and mashed sweet potatoes. Mix well
3. Add egg. Mix well
4. Add flour ½ c at a time, blending thoroughly until you have a stable sticky dough. Oil your bowl, cover, and let rise in a warm space for 1 hour or until double in bulk.
5. Punch down and turn dough out onto floured surface. With floured hands knead dough until smooth and easy to handle. Here you can get creative, making dinner rolls, etc. For our purposes, divide dough into two balls.
6. Roll each ball of dough to fit into a well-oiled loaf pan, brush with melted butter and let rise for another hour. Pre-heat oven to 475.
7. Lower temperature to 375 and bake approximately thirty minutes or until browned.



Fig. 1 Rose Mae Benson (Mom Rose), 1955. Image author's own.



Fig. 2 L-R: Rose Mae Benson, Melvin Dewayne (Mom Rose, baby brother aged 2 yrs), 1950. Image author's own.



Fig. 3 L-R: Rose Mae Benson, Melvina, Lillian Holman (Mom Rose, Melvina, Grandma Lil), 1986. Image author's own.

38. She Carried with Her Neither Memory Nor Archive

Ellyn Toscano

She carried with her neither memory nor archive. Even if the migration—the deracination—nearly completely erased her birth and eradicated any memory that young life could hold, a trace remained.

That trace, my conductor.

Uncanny, this memory of a past of which I was unaware.

Her hands trembled slightly, maybe a scar of her loss, an instantiated trauma, an absence speaking.

I was tempted by the gap between the seen and unseen, the spoken and left unsaid. Maybe nothing was withheld. Maybe I just never thought to ask questions.

I knew very little about my grandmother—I did not grow up around her and visited her no more than a week or so every summer. I knew my mother and she were very close, despite the infrequency of our visits. When we visited, they would close themselves in my grandmother's room and talk for hours. All we heard were quiet, conspiratorial giggles. They were happiest in each other's company.

On July 18, 1904, Father Thomas F. Hopkins, retired pastor of St. Mary of the Annunciation Catholic Church in Charleston and a recent resident of Summerville, South Carolina boarded the Clyde Line Steamship Comanche to sail to New York City. Traveling with him was his housekeeper, Mary Hussey. Their passage was noted in the *Charleston Post and Courier* on 19 July 1904, along with the names of other notable Charlestonians. Not listed among the passengers, but with the pair, was a six-year-old Black child whom Father Hopkins called Mary Godfrey.

One month later, on 22 August 1904 Father Hopkins died in Bad Nauheim Hesse, Germany. As reported in the Charleston papers, he had been sick and had travelled “to try the healing qualities of the famous German resort.” His obituary, entitled “Safe, Safe at Rest” rhapsodized about him:

Doctor Hopkins was more than an ordinary man. He was an extraordinary priest. A scholar, a student, an orator, a theologian, a zealous priest, he was learned to an eminent degree. There was no subject worth knowing, his friends have said, upon which he could not well converse. Stately in style, his movements were majestic to a most admirable degree, and in his ministrations before the altar, he brought all the dignity that was in the power of his soul to do honor to the God whom it was his mission to serve.

What Mary Hussey did in New York is unclear, as are the circumstances of her travel back to Charleston, where she died of gastritis two months later, on 2 October 1904. She died in the home of Father Hopkins in Summerville that he had devised to her in his will along with his personal effects.

Mary Godfrey was left in New York. On 20 July 1904, two days after the three departed Charleston, Mary Godfrey, was “surrendered” to St. Benedict’s Home for Destitute Colored Children in Rye, New York by Rev. Thomas Hopkins, Summerville S.C. The document recording her admission indicated that Mary was six years old, “colored”, born in South Carolina and baptized. Her date of birth was unknown or unrecorded. The verso of the card listed her mother as Mary F. Washington, a Catholic, and deceased, but failed to name her father, noting only that he was alive and Protestant. “Father. Living. Protestant.”

If they knew Mary Godfrey’s father was alive and Protestant, they must have known who he was. Why was his name not recorded?

Mary made her communion and confirmation at St. Benedict’s Home in 1908 and took the name Angeline as her confirmation name. She stayed at the home until she was twelve, when children were discharged from St. Benedict’s, into service. She was discharged to another Irish priest, Rev. Thomas O’Keefe, pastor of St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church on 53rd Street in Manhattan. An entry in St. Benedict’s Home’s Numerical Register for the years 1887 to 1907, a conclusion to the record initiated with her admission in 1904, states that on 2 March 1910, Mary

Godfrey was “adopted by Mrs. Noonan, Great Barrington, Mass.” The “adoption” was more in the nature of an indenture and the 1910 census more accurately lists her in the household of Mary Noonan in Great Barrington as the fifteen-year-old “colored servant.” The next records of Mary Godfrey, found within the records of St. Benedict’s Church, were her 1921 marriage certificate and the record of the baptism two years later of her daughter Margaret, my mother.

This is the sum of the documentary evidence of the early life of Mary Godfrey. That’s all there is, a few records, created by bureaucrats charged with recording lives for public purposes unrelated to the inner life of the subjects. Somebody at St. Benedict’s Home for Destitute Colored Children, a registrar with fluid, cursive handwriting, noted Mary’s arrival and the incomplete information about her parents in the Numerical Register, a green, cloth-covered accounting ledger with numbered pages, lines and columns. Credits and Debits. Somebody typed that woefully inadequate information on a 3x5 index card, front and back, and put the card, in alphabetical order, in a long, gray metal card box.

Surely there was more to tell. Clearly things were omitted. A small child, a maternal orphan, just arrived from a two-day steamship voyage up the eastern coast of America, at sea, doubtless frightened and cautious in the company of people in what relation to her? Most certainly there was more to say. What was she wearing? Did she carry any belongings—a doll, a toy, a picture of her mother?

Memories float haphazardly over conscious work, slowly pushing down into thought, gaining in strength and substance, obstinate.

It wasn’t until I was living and working in Italy, in another world—a voluntary, desired, privileged life but also an uprooting, a migration, and yes, like hers, an opportunity—that I divined this descent—mine, my heritage. It was not really a surprise that people in my life were not what they seemed. I knew there was a mystery.

Could it be that the homogeneity of the quotidian world I inhabited as a child prevented me from recognizing what was plain? My grandmother was never more or less than my grandmother, the beloved, respected mother of my beloved mother. I am the daughter of Margaret, who called herself Margo. I am the granddaughter of Mary Godfrey. Both were strong women who celebrated strong women and insisted on an unyielding matriarchal line that I now know reaches back through Mary F. Washington. Where did it begin? Mary Godfrey’s

exile removed her from the sources of her history and annihilated her knowable past, leaving her to imagine herself as the single subject of her own life.

A line untethered from memory, origin, history.

I knew my grandmother and as I look at pictures of her now (of which I have very few), I should have been able to understand something that had never been brought to my attention.

But stories are powerful and complacency is destructive of doubts.

If Mary Godfrey was indeed six at the time of her admission to St. Benedict's, she would have been born in 1897 or 1898. While my grandmother's name, as it was given to me and recorded in the records of St. Benedict's, was not particularly unusual, the fact of her Catholicism carried the potential to limit the range of possibility.

In the suffocating Southern heat of the summer of 2019, I traveled to Charleston to devote some time to the archives. I had communicated with the archivists in the Diocese of Charleston, who were welcoming and discouraging. Over the course of a week, I pored through the parish records, beginning with the records of St. Mary's, the church of Father Hopkins, and expanding the search through all of the Mixed Sacrament Registers for all of the parishes within the diocese in the closing decade of the nineteenth century.

There is no Mary Godfrey in the records of baptisms in diocesan records, no record of Mary Washington as the mother of a child being baptized in the church in the relevant years. Records of St. John the Beloved Catholic Church in Summerville, founded in 1898 (the year of Mary's birth), begin in 1909. In the rural areas outside of Charleston, Catholic sacraments were administered informally, by traveling priests from other parishes, and frequently noted in records maintained by the diocese of Charleston. But there is no Mary Godfrey in any of those sacramental records.

The following week, I started on the municipal records. Again, no Mary Godfrey in the municipal records of births or "colored" births in Charleston in the years 1897 to 1900. Birth records were not kept in Summerville until 1915, so it is impossible to say whether a child was born with that name in those years.

Since Mary Godfrey was born in or around 1898 and her mother Mary F. Washington had died by the time she was surrendered to St. Benedicts, the death occurred between the years 1898 and 1904. I

searched the municipal death records for the death of a black woman named Mary Washington of child-bearing age who died and whose death was necessary to record. One woman fit this description. Mary E. Washington, a twenty-two-year-old Black woman who died of septicemia on 9 April 1901 in the City Hospital and was buried in "ColScotch." The death certificate stated that Mary E. was born in the city of Charleston to parents who themselves were born in Charleston, and lived there her full short life. She was Black and married. All that remains of the Colored Scotch Cemetery are a few old stones, leaning haphazardly against a fence that encloses the property of the St. James Church. Who Mary E. was, to whom she was married and from whom she descended cannot be determined from the single record of her life. Whether she had a child is also impossible to know.

I take the scant records as authoritative, though I have no reason to trust their reliability. Mary Godfrey's mother's name was specific and substantial, differentiated with a middle initial: Mary F. Washington. The name of her father was withheld. Was his name Godfrey? Is that a distraction? Was that name fabricated, a gift of the Catholic priest or the nuns who admitted her to the Home for Destitute Colored Children, a red-herring, a loyal reference to an omnibenevolent god? A god who freed?

I walked the streets of Charleston following an itinerary of addresses: the opulent homes of Father Hopkins and the beneficiaries and executors of his will; the homes of all of the Mary Washingtons I found in the records of deaths; the cemeteries, or remains of cemeteries reserved for Black Charlestonians. I don't know what I expected to find, or to feel.

I walk from my hotel on Wentworth Street two blocks to St. Mary's church on Hasell Street. I walk slowly through the cemetery to the side and behind the church looking for Godfrey or Washington or anything else that might have relevance.

Finding nothing, I go into the church, arriving just in time for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Do this in memory of me.

The congregation is devout and attentive, and noticeably White. The church is full, including the balcony. There was one Black family in the congregation and a Black altar boy. The rest—White families dressed in their Sunday dresses, and suits with ties. There are five White priests serving mass—how is this still possible?

I sit alone in the back of the church, on the right, very conscious of Rev. Thomas F. Hopkins buried a few rows ahead of me, in a place of honor in the aisle. I watch the well-dressed children walking back and forth across his marker, during communion and at the conclusion of the mass.

The single Black altar boy joins the only Black family outside the church.

I have come all this way to find silence, a haunting void, 120 years after the birth of my grandmother in an historical obscurity that cannot be overcome by determination.

But the obfuscations have their own revelations.

Perhaps Father Hopkins's documented life, however replete with intriguing gaps and inconsistencies, might provide some clue to my grandmother's early life. What did Father Hopkins and Mary Hussey have to do with Mary, and why did they bring her north to New York in 1904?

According to the records of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston, Father Hopkins was pastor of St. Mary of the Annunciation from 1894 until 1901, when he retired due to ill health. For the first year of Father Hopkins's retirement from active service to the church he lived on Rutledge Avenue, in Charleston. In 1902 he moved to 100 Marion Avenue in Summerville, bringing with him his housekeeper of many years, Mary Hussey. He did not spend much time in that house, instead traveling for three months in 1903 in Italy, meeting with Pope Pius X in Rome and visiting Florence, Venice, Genoa and Milan.

St. Mary was the first Roman Catholic Church established in the Carolinas or Georgia, by Irish immigrants and French refugees from the West Indies fleeing the 1793 slave insurrection in Santo Domingo. In 1866 Bishop Patrick N. Lynch, the slave-owning bishop of Charleston, purchased a Jewish synagogue on Wentworth Street, three blocks from St. Mary's, and established St. Peter's Catholic Church to serve the Black Catholic community. In 1880, a second parish was established for Black Catholics, the Immaculate Conception Chapel.

With two parishes for Black Catholics, it would have been unlikely for Mary Godfrey's mother—Mary F. Washington—to have been a parishioner in Father Hopkins's church. Indeed the sacramental records of the church contain no records of Mary F. Washington. Neither can this name be found in the records of either St. Peter's or Immaculate Conception.

While the Catholic Church in Charleston had established parishes for Black Catholics, the orphanage that the church maintained did not admit Black children. Neither did the municipal orphanage—the Charleston Orphan House, founded in 1790. The one orphanage for Black children, the Jenkins Institute founded in 1891 on Franklin Street—adjacent to the city jail—had insufficient records to know with certainty whether Mary Godfrey was, or could have been, an inmate.

If Mary could have been placed in an orphanage in Charleston, why did Father Hopkins take her from South Carolina? A researcher in the diocesan archive suggested that he would have removed her from Charleston, or Summerville, if she was in some kind of danger. Her imagination was as vivid and alive as mine.

Perhaps Father Hopkins was a heroic priest, aware of the desperate context into which this promising child had been born and determined to take part in creating a more hopeful future, after her mother Mary F. Washington died. I returned to the records of St. Benedict's to see if Father Hopkins brought other children north. Mary was the only one. If his concern was with children in poverty and strife, surely his work would have expanded beyond the fate of a single child.

Why Mary Godfrey? What did he know of Mary Washington? The only documentary evidence I have been able to find connecting Father Hopkins to anybody named Washington was found in documents submitted to the court during proceedings to probate his will in 1905. A single entry in "Statement of Receipts & Disbursements" refers to a disbursement made to "Phoebe Washington—Caretaker Hopkins Villa." Could Phoebe be the grandmother of Mary Godfrey and the mother of Mary F. Washington referred to in the record of her admission into St. Benedict's Home?

The 1880 Federal Census records Phoebe Washington, resident of Summerville, twenty-seven years old (born about 1853), Black, with a listed occupation of "cook." Phoebe is listed as the head of the household (unmarried, with no adult man recorded) which consisted of her with three children, a brother and sister. One of those children is Mary Washington, age six. Mary, according to the record, was born about 1874, which would have made her twenty-four in 1898, the year of Mary Godfrey's birth.

The next record of Phoebe was in 1900, when she is listed with a husband and one adult child in the household, with his wife. There is no

listing, in the 1900 census, of Mary or Flora. However it does reflect that Phoebe was the mother of eight children, only six living in 1900. Mary and Flora could have died. Mary Washington would have died between 1898 (the year of Mary Godfrey's birth) and 1904 when Father Hopkins listed her as deceased.

The dates and locations align and the connection to Father Hopkins is direct. Phoebe could be my great-great grandmother. I think she is. I think she is the mother of Mary F. Washington, who is the mother of Mary Godfrey, who is the mother of my mother. Phoebe, the caretaker, the mother of two daughters who died and one granddaughter who was stranded, maybe in danger from or at best rejected by an unnamable father. This was a time when the truth could be very dangerous.

Phoebe's Mary could not be the Mary E. who died of septicemia because the dates do not align but I will hold both in my mind; I will keep the incitement aroused and honor the instincts. There is no need to settle all the rich possibilities. These were lives, deprived for a time of the celebration of their power and resonance. But Phoebe's life may have precipitated all that ensued, inexorably though mysteriously. That is a wonder, even if a compensation for something nobody had the right to take.

Cardaneto, Umbria. The beauty is indescribable and impossible to hold in my mind. It seizes my attention and holds me unconscious, unable to contemplate what I see. It is unnecessary to try.

A kind of suspension.

There is something worryingly melancholy, isolated, alone. I cannot successfully experience it together with others.

The wind moves through the silence, people sometimes intervene but it is a silent, and affective experience that is solitary, forsaken, uncompanionable.

Were the people who settled on that hill, or this, conscious of creating beauty when building battlements to hide behind?

How many people have stood on this side of the valley, looking over to the encampment on the top of the opposite hill, across time, wondering who is looking back across?

She is looking back, tugging the line, pulling it taut.

Calling me to witness.

39. Meaning and Roots in Copper

Winifred Mason in New York and Haiti

Terri Geis

Thirteen hand-made, lustrous copper leaves looped into small circles form the chain of a necklace, while a brass and copper cuff-bracelet poetically evokes a drum;



Fig. 1 Winifred Mason, Copper and Brass Cuff, ca. 1945. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

both pieces were inspired by the cyclical forces of nature and spiritual practices in Haiti. The artist of this jewelry, Winifred Mason, circled back and forth between New York and Haiti from the 1940s to the early 1960s, a U.S.-born modernist consistently seeking to reflect in metal the commonly-found but often ephemeral patterns of Vodou—including

the plant-symbol *vèvès* of the Lwa Loko, Legba, and Ayizan, and the repeated sounds of the wood-carved peg-drum during ceremonies. As Mason explained in a 1946 profile for *Ebony* magazine:

I started investigations into the origins of basic patterns used by the Haitian people in arts such as weaving and jewelry. Whenever I found a design I sought to discover its meaning and roots. Everywhere there were primitive designs in the native dress, on the voodoo drums and decorating native musical instruments.¹

These symbols recurring “everywhere” across the art and material culture of Haiti, as well as the oral patterns in song and story have been noted by the Martinican poet Édouard Glissant as encompassing “an art of repetition”, and he reflects that, “such a discourse therefore gains from being repeated at leisure, like the tale recounted evening after evening.”² Mason participated in this slow conveyance and deepening of Haitian tales through her jewelry, using certain motifs in endlessly imaginative variation.

According to *Ebony*, Mason’s inspiration to work with her hands had emerged during her childhood in Brooklyn when her mother—an émigré from Saint Martin—taught her to sew, knit, and embroider.³ These are artforms that often extend back across multiple generations of women as their hands moved in repetitive motion together, and these are also practices carried across waters on migratory journeys. Mason later enacted a reverse migration from that of her mother, seeking further embodied knowledge of the African Diaspora in the West Indies as a joyous and creative conduit, looking to the past and present to enact future change. The tactile experiences of Mason’s investigations led to jewelry that sought to express freedom, and it adorned defiant visionaries such as Billie Holiday, who appeared in a photograph accompanying the *Ebony* article, wearing a Mason-designed necklace, cuff bracelet, and earrings while singing in a 52nd Street nightclub.⁴

1 Winifred Mason in interview in “Copper for Christmas”, *Ebony* (December 1946), pp. 19–23.

2 Édouard Glissant, “On Haitian Painting”, in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), pp. 155–57.

3 “Copper for Christmas”.

4 *Ibid.*

During the early 1940s, Mason spent long hours in her Greenwich Village studio hammering lustrous biomorphic visions in copper of plant tendrils, sunbursts, and sea algae; *Ebony* described her as “possessed of a relentless energy that kept her working ten to fourteen hours a day.”⁵ Located on West Third Street next door to what is now the Blue Note Jazz Club, Mason was not far from New York University, where she had been a student of English Literature and Education in the 1930s. As fellow jewelry-maker Art Smith later recalled of working for Mason in this studio, in a neighborhood that was a “little Bauhaus possessed of compatible and interesting people”, such as Talley Beatty, Ralph Ellison, and Gordon Parks.⁶ Like these colleagues in an extended network of creativity that also included émigrés such as experimental filmmaker Maya Deren, Mason pushed the boundaries and technologies of her chosen medium. When her tools wouldn’t stretch to her innovative purposes, she fabricated new ones, explaining in an interview: “A lot of jewelry that comes out of my shop is made with a simple ball peen hammer and other improvised tools [...] and it is because we depend so much on improvised tools and methods that our products have not been restricted to standard effects and designs.”⁷

In 1945 Mason was awarded a grant through the Rosenwald Fund to “gather folk material and basic art patterns” in the Caribbean and to “express these feelings in jewelry.”⁸ Mason was among a significant group of women who received such grants for research in Africa and the West Indies, including Margaret Bonds, Katherine Dunham, and Pearl Primus. Mason’s chosen medium in metal makes her unique among this group of performing artist/anthropologists, yet her practice exists as part of the consistent migrations to and from the Caribbean archipelago that were formative for many Black modernists in New York. As painter Romare Bearden evocatively put it, “Art will go where the energy is. I find a great deal of energy in the Caribbean... It’s like a volcano there; there’s something unfinished underneath that still smolders.”⁹ And

5 Ibid.

6 Charles L. Russell, *Art as Adornment: The Life and Work of Arthur George Smith* (Parker: Outskirts Press, 2015), p. 41.

7 “Copper for Christmas”.

8 Edwin R. Embree, *Julius Rosenwald Fund: Review for the Two-Year Period, 1944–1946* (Chicago, 1946), p. 25.

9 Sally Price and Richard Price, *Romare Bearden: The Caribbean Dimension* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

many, including Mason, were particularly inspired by Haiti's history of uprising; she reflected, "it seemed to me that people whose ancestors fought so valiantly for freedom must have a rich heritage."¹⁰

The exact details of Mason's journey to Haiti through her grant are uncertain; Marbeth Schon has suggested that she arrived in July of 1945 and spent five months on the island: "She was received by the president at that time, Élie Lescot, and touted in the Haitian press as '*une distinguée congénère*.'"¹¹ As was the case for so many local and visiting artists, Mason was impacted by the activities of the deeply influential Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince, which mounted a solo exhibition of her work in October of that year.¹² It was likely during this time that Mason met the Haitian artist and Centre d'Art co-founder Jean Chenet; within a few years the two married and also entered into a deeply productive creative relationship. From this time on, Mason signed her jewelry *chenet d'Haiti*, indicating the degree to which the country was central to her identity and the space from which she grounded her practice. As an artist working predominantly in copper, a metal that comes to the earth from massive stars that have exploded, the meaning of "chenet"—a type of andiron for a fireplace—would have surely held symbolic weight for Mason. Her brother-in-law, the Senegal-based artist Gerard Chenet, has poetically mused that "the family Chenet is an ancient family that practiced solar rituals."¹³ The multi-layered, vibrant sunbursts that regularly formed a central motif in Mason's earrings, necklaces, and bracelets take on a deeper significance through their materiality in copper, alongside the Chenet name and history.

Gerard Chenet has also noted the role of Vodou within his family, specifically describing his mother's participation. And Jean's other brother, Jacques Chenet, has described how its symbols manifest in Mason's work: "Each Loa has a certain symbol called a vèvè. Using powdered chalk, vèvès were drawn on the ground before the Vodou ceremonies began. These are the symbols (the intricate designs) that

10 Margaret Mara, "Voodoo Doesn't Scare Her: Designer of Exotic Jewelry Finds Haiti Has a Thing or Two", *Brooklyn Eagle*, 28 June 1948, p. 11.

11 Marbeth Schon, "Winifred Mason: Extraordinary Coppersmith" *Modern Silver*, undated, online journal, no longer accessible, accessed on 6 June 2022.

12 Archives of the Centre d'Art, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

13 Author interview with Gerard Chenet, Toubab Dialaw, Senegal, 20 June 2016.

they used on their jewelry.”¹⁴ It is unclear if Mason was still in Haiti learning about these sources through the Chenets and others at the beginning of 1946, a significant moment in which other international artist-exiles arrived on the island and also engaged with Vodou practices and arts. Cuban artist Wifredo Lam exhibited a series of large canvases inspired by Afro-Caribbean religion at the Centre d’Art, and the leader of the surrealist movement, André Breton, also in the country, wrote of Lam’s work in terms of vèvès, nature, and freedom: “the marvellous, ever-changing rays of light from the delicately worked stained-glass windows of tropical nature that fall upon a mind freed from all influences and predestined to make the images of the gods rise up out of these gleams of light.”¹⁵ It is of course also the case that Haitian artists engaged the vèvè at this time, including the painter André Pierre, a close colleague and Vodou informant for Maya Deren when she also arrived on the island in 1946. Art and politics were closely interconnected at this time; Breton’s presence in Haiti served as a main inspiration for a popular uprising initiated by a collective associated with the Marxist student newspaper *La Ruche*; this rapidly spread and led to the overthrow of U.S.-backed Lescot. Gerard Chenet was a central figure in the student group and confirms that he met Breton; it is possible that these transformative dialogues and currents of political and aesthetic freedom also influenced the direction of Mason’s work and her decision to adopt and adapt vèvès.¹⁶

Mason and Chenet’s migrations between Haiti and New York had continued by 1948, when Chenet received an art history/arts administration fellowship through the Rockefeller Foundation. As Lindsay J. Twa has recounted, he studied with René d’Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, and also carried out investigations at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, among other U.S. cultural institutions.¹⁷ Around the same time, Mason opened a shop in her Greenwich Village studio called Haitian Bazaar, where she sold her jewelry and other hand-

14 Ibid; Jacques Chenet in interview with Marbeth Schon, *Modern Silver*, undated, online journal, no longer accessible.

15 André Breton, “Wifredo Lam: At Night in Haiti...”, 9 January 1946, in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Artworks MFA Publications, 2002), p. 172.

16 Author interview with Gerard Chenet, Toubab Dialaw, Senegal, 20 June 2016.

17 Lindsay J. Twa, “The Rockefeller Foundation and Haitian Artists: Maurice Borno, Jean Chenet, and Luce Turnier”, *Journal of Haitian Studies* 26/1 (Spring 2020), 37–71.

made items woven in Haiti. An extensive article about Mason and her store appeared in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, and it combines an interest in the vogue of the hand-made items with a contrasting emphasis on the exotic or even dangerous, describing Mason's jewelry as inspired by a "mystic cult."¹⁸ The title of the piece, "Voodoo Doesn't Scare Her: Designer of Exotic Jewelry Finds Haiti Has a Thing or Two", confirms the degree to which Vodou was perceived with both suspicion and condescension in the US. And Mason's jewelry certainly demonstrates some of the shifting, multi-faceted significations of the religion both within and outside of Haiti. On the one hand, her work was a commercial enterprise adapting and interpreting Vodou motifs for an international audience; she also sold her jewelry through department stores including Lord & Taylor and Bloomingdales. At the same time, her incorporation of the symbols exists within contemporaneous Haitian dialogues of sovereignty. As Twa has expressed it specifically of Chenet and his colleagues: "Haitian intellectuals believed that their nation could escape the straitjacket of European and US colonialism through the study and understanding of their folkways and African heritage."¹⁹

Mason particularly gravitated towards the depiction of two fundamental aspects of Vodou: nature and percussive sound. A beautiful example of the former is a pair of silver earrings that feature the vèvè of the Loa Loko—god of healing, plants, and trees—etched on round medallions that dangle from small, abstracted leaves.



Fig. 2 Winifred Mason, Silver earrings with Vodou vèvè. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

18 Mara, "Voodoo Doesn't Scare Her".

19 Twa, "The Rockefeller Foundation and Haitian Artists", p. 45.

The artist as spiritual conduit of the natural world had been explored by Chenet in a 1948 piece he co-authored on the Haitian painter Hector Hyppolite exploring his “double life” as an artist and Vodou priest. Hyppolite described himself as a healer with plants, and he states that to “be a good painter”, one must “know plants.”²⁰ Mason’s consistent use of leaf motifs partakes of a similar synthesis of nature; in another set of earrings, she returns to the symbolism of Loko, this time with a leaf form mounted by an abstracted snake. Wonder in natural detail is typical to her work, as seen in a necklace of twenty-eight overlapping brass and copper leaves, each one bearing uniquely patterned details.

Mason’s interest in evoking sound/rhythm is also apparent throughout her jewelry, both in its construction and its symbols. One bracelet and necklace design features round charms with etchings of multiple vèvè—from Erzulie to Agwé to Ayizan. When worn on the wrist, the charms would chime against each other, referencing the profound role of both sound and flashes of light as attractors of the Loa. And Mason repeatedly drew upon imagery of drums—from the abstracted cuff bracelet mentioned earlier, to figurative earrings and bracelets formed from small drum charms. By selecting this motif, Mason engages African ancestry; as Gèrdes Fleurant has described of the role of drums within Vodou:

Drumming is the heartbeat of the *lakou* (Vodou community), and indeed according to its practitioners, it is the voice of the ancestors, for it leads to transcendence and propels the people to a level that connects to their roots in Africa.²¹

Mason may have also chosen the drum as a symbol of defiance. Her work in Haiti began not long after the formation of the Bureau d’Ethnologie, which sought to preserve and protect Vodou material culture against the destruction of anti-superstition campaigns that were exacerbated by the lengthy U.S. occupation; drums were particularly vulnerable during this time.

Throughout the 1950s, Mason and Chenet resided predominantly in Haiti, where Chenet was central to the founding of the Foyer des Arts

20 Phillipe Thoby-Marceline and Jean Chenet, “La double vie d’Hector Hyppolite: artiste et prêtre vodou”, *Conjonction: bulletin de l’institut français de Haïti* 16 (August 1948), 40–44.

21 Gèrdes Fleurant and Kate Ramsey, “A Vodou drum at the British Museum”, British Museum Blog—Objects in Focus, 16 March 2018, <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/a-vodou-drum-at-the-british-museum/>.

Plastiques, a space to train artists outside of the perceived aesthetic restrictions of the Centre d'Art. As Marta Dansie and Abigail Lapin Dardashti have described, it made extensive room for expertise such as Mason's:

[The Foyer] sought greater freedom in terms of training and experimentation than the Centre's emphasis on the "primitive" would allow [...] The Foyer not only included media traditionally associated with high art such as painting and sculpture, it also offered studio experience in jewelry, ceramics, woodworking, textiles, and basketry.²²

However, counter to this sense of artistic freedom and innovation, the rise of the Duvalier dictatorship in the final years of the 1950s led to deep repression. Twa has uncovered documentation by the Rockefeller Foundation administrator John Marshall of a visit with Chenet and Mason in New York in 1959:

Chenet related the disruption and falling-off of tourism that made it increasingly difficult to earn a living in Haiti through their jewelry. Additionally, the police intensely scrutinized the Chenets because of their etching and plating processes: authorities visited their shop periodically under the pretense of ensuring that they were not using acids and other casting equipment to make bombs.

"Their account of the situation in Haiti is indeed dismal. Everyone is afraid of everyone else", Marshall recorded. "They see no hope for improvement."²³ In horrific irony, Mason's jewelry and the "meanings and roots" that she sought to uncover and expand through her investigations in Haiti had become a tool of deep restriction, and subsequently worse. In 1963, Chenet was assassinated outside of their home by Duvalier's Tonton Macoute. Mason subsequently fled the country and is described as living a quiet life in the US until her death in an unknown year.

Mason's story and artistic production have received little in-depth analysis, perhaps in part due to the tragic outcome of her migration to Haiti: a violent silencing and exile. Yet her story, alongside that of Chenet, grows in resonance and recognition, and it continues to be recounted.

22 Marta Dansie and Abigail Lapin Dardashti, "Notes from the Archive: MoMA and the Internationalization of Haitian Painting, 1942-1948", MoMA Blog, Notes on Art in a Global Context, 3 January 2018, <https://post.moma.org/notes-from-the-archive-moma-and-the-internationalization-of-haitian-painting-1942-1948/>.

23 Twa, "The Rockefeller Foundation and Haitian Artists", p. 47.

Swiss-Haitian artist Sasha Huber has commemorated Chenet (who was her mother's godfather) through a 2014 portrait in her ongoing *Shooting Stars* series, while the Oakland, California-based contemporary metal artist Karen Smith has noted the influence of Mason on her practice. Smith reflects that Mason's "tenacity and verve cannot be dulled by her near erasure from historical record."²⁴ Mason's jewelry powerfully encompasses migrations, detours, and returns home, through cultural heritage transformed into adornment as a mode of celebration and resistance.

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24 Karen Smith, "The Desired Effect: Winifred Mason Chenet", We Wield the Hammer Blog, 7 November 2020, <https://www.wewieldthehammer.org/blog/2020/the-desired-effect>.

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40. Coconuts and Collards

Recipes and Stories from Puerto Rico to the Deep South¹

Von Diaz

La Cocina de Tata

I had my last guava the day we left Puerto Rico. It was large and juicy, almost red in the center, and so fragrant that I didn't want to eat it because I would lose the smell. All the way to the airport I scratched at it with my teeth, making little dents in the skin, chewing small pieces with my front teeth so I could feel the texture against my tongue, the tiny pink pellets of sweet.

Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican*

Already an insomniac at age eleven, I had a hard enough time sleeping in my air-conditioned room back home in Georgia. Now in Puerto Rico, I was on a hard mattress on the floor, with a rusty box fan blowing hot air across my body. It was impossible to sleep there. Most nights I just stared at the cracks in the ceiling and worried. *How many awkward conversations in broken Spanish will I have? Who's going to make fun of how gringa I am?*

It was my second full summer in PR, and things at home were a mess. The last thing I remembered before getting on the plane—this is

¹ Recipes from Von Diaz, *Coconuts and Collards: Recipes and Stories from Puerto Rico to the Deep South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018). Reprinted with permission of the University Press of Florida.

back when folks could take you all the way to the gate—was the dark circles under my mother’s eyes and my little sister sobbing.

I hadn’t wanted to go to Puerto Rico that summer. I wanted to stay home, watch television, and hang out in the playground with the other kids in our apartment complex. But my mom couldn’t afford camp and I was too old for daycare, so I was shipped off to PR... to suffer. My parents had split up earlier that year, and—still in the Army at that time—Papi had been given orders to go to Korea. He’d already been pretty absent, but he was literally on the other side of the world from me at that time.

It wasn’t *all* bad. I liked traveling, and the beach, and (most of) my family. But more than anything else on the island, I *loved* Puerto Rican food and my grandmother Tata. And as I reluctantly boarded the plane, my thoughts turned to *bacalaitos*, *alcapurrias*, *aguacates*, and *chicharrón*. And Tata, my favorite person in the world, was a beacon of light in my otherwise dismal prepubescence.

On that particular morning in Altamesa, sweaty and miserable, I let a smile creep across my face because it was Saturday—Tata’s day off. I caught a whiff of her Benson & Hedges cigarettes and the pungent, burnt smell of the *cafetera* sputtering. I got up, put on my pink plastic-rimmed glasses and my *chancletas*, and shuffled out to greet her.

Tata was standing in the living room wearing a loose-fitting pink cotton tank top and pale orange shorts, her hair in rollers, a cigarette in her mouth as she finished her morning routine. She’d already watered the dozen or so plants on her *marquesina* (front patio) and hosed down and squeeged the tile floors and concrete walls.

Her *marquesina* was a mini botanical garden. Seven spider plants hung side by side on the railing, their leaves making it difficult to see the street. The floor, side tables, and shelves were covered with potted ferns, bromeliads, and philodendrons. The entire porch was surrounded with a decorative grate painted white, its bars forming an intricate interlocking geometric pattern. Its front door was wound with a heavy-duty steel chain and two padlocks because she’d been robbed four times in the last three years. The wooden cocktail bar against the right side of the porch, facing the street, was decorated with figurines, photographs, and paintings of Boxers, her favorite dog, which she spent much of my mother’s early childhood breeding, training, and exhibiting.

“Ay, mira quien esta despierta!” (Look who’s awake!), Tata said, giving me a toothy smile. I learned later those weren’t her real teeth. *“Que te preparo?”* (What can I make for you?)

Because I never slept well, I rarely woke up hungry. But when I was in Puerto Rico, I ate whenever there was food.

“No se Tata,” I replied slyly, with a yawn. *“Que hay?”*

“Conflake?”

“No...” I replied.

“Una tostada con jelly?”

“Eh, no. I’m not really hungry. Don’t worry about me,” I lied.

“Ay, yo se!” she said, her eyebrows bouncing mischievously. *“Un sanguich de picadillo!”*

A meat sandwich for breakfast?! Yes.

Most folks are familiar with a handful of Puerto Rican foods. Mofongo, pernil, and picadillo. If you don’t know the latter, it’s ground beef cooked with sofrito and other spices, with green olives and (sometimes) raisins added. It’s often stuffed into empanadas and other *cuchifritos* (deep-fried snacks), but my grandmother always kept some on hand like other folks keep lunchmeat. And I usually just ate it straight out of the fridge—cold, with a spoon.

I sat on a bar stool at the counter and watched her carefully orchestrated movements. Tata’s kitchen was incredibly modest—only slightly larger than the one I would later have in my early thirties in New York’s East Harlem, with one counter, a small sink, and a four-burner gas range. She spread butter on a piece of white sandwich bread, then placed it in the center of a sandwich press. Next came a slice of Kraft American cheese, a heaping scoop of picadillo, and another slice of cheese. Then she topped it all off with more buttered bread and pulled down the press handle to toast. The whole time I talked, telling her about my latest dream, mouth watering as I rattled on to pass the time. She opened the press and there were two perfect triangles with crisped edges, the caramelized filling clinging to tiny eruptions in the bread.

I marveled at how a woman born in the Dominican Republic, who lived most of her life in Puerto Rico, could make what was ultimately a perfect grilled cheese sandwich. But then I remembered her roots.

Tata was born Sara Canario Linares in the Dominican Republic in 1936, when Rafael Trujillo was at his height of power. My great grandfather Faustino was the owner of Santo Domingo Motors, which was one of the only car dealerships in the DR at the time. One night, when my grandmother was six years old, three men came to the house and shot her father. She, along with her mother and sister, Zora (whose mother was their housekeeper, though they had the same father), fled the country in the trunk of a Cadillac and ended up in Biloxi, Mississippi, where two of her aunts lived. She spent most of her childhood and teenage years living in that small coastal town in the Deep South.

Her life after was a whirlwind. She studied pre-med at Loyola in New Orleans, had a short-lived marriage to an Italian military officer that resulted in my aunt Sara, and ultimately landed her in Puerto Rico—where she lived most of her life. And where she became the best cook in the world.

That morning in Puerto Rico, we returned to the *marquesina*, me with my breakfast on a small white plate and Tata with a cigarette and a strong, sugary, black cup of coffee. I took a bite of my *sanguich* and molten cheese burst out of its toasty, buttery casing, burning the roof of my mouth with creamy, salty-sweet filling. I didn't care.

The air was hot and thick with the smells of car exhaust and hot asphalt, coffee, cigarette smoke, and cheesy meat. I took another bite and got a briny pimento-stuffed olive, a sweet, plump black raisin in the next. Tata watched me intently, with the eyes of a chef who knows a good eater. I chattered on in broken Spanglish between bites, because I'd been practicing my Spanish and she spoke perfect English.

I finished, wiping off my beaming, euphoric face with a paper towel. She smiled slyly.

"Quieres otra?" (Do you want another?), she asked.

I was stuffed and wasn't even hungry to begin with. "Si," I replied, grinning.

The rest of my summer in Puerto Rico went pretty much the same. Folks fed me too much; I ate everything and got round.

But when I wasn't eating or talking to Tata (or both), I was pretty miserable. I sulked, complained, sat as close to the fan as I could, craved TV, read *Jurassic Park* for the fifth time, and become agoraphobic. Kids my age and adults alike constantly mocked my shitty Spanish, and even though they jokingly said my mispronunciations and misused words

were cute, they also laughed at me when I used *usted* instead of *tu*. When I went to stores by myself, I never seemed to move fast enough, and cashiers would impatiently yell at me so rapidly that I couldn't figure out what I had done.

The island seemed to be against me. I was constantly sunburned, whereas my family members never seemed to even get pink. Mosquitoes loved me, even biting my eyelids. The oppressive heat made me sweat constantly, which meant I was always self-conscious, grumpy, and exhausted. It all made me feel incredibly insecure and alone on the island where I was born but no longer felt I belonged—although I wanted to badly.

But Tata seemed to get it, and she understood that food was a way home for me and a strong bond between us. In many ways, I think food was a similar comfort for her.

That summer, she started teaching me how to cook well. I had some basics under my belt, but she took me on a journey full of new discoveries. First, she let me make *mojo caliente*, a warm sauce made by mashing garlic and salt in a *pilón*, or wooden mortar and pestle. Together we brought olive oil to a low simmer and she showed me how to carefully pour the oil into the *pilón*; garlic sizzled, filling the air with its smell and that of seasoned wood. We added lime juice and black pepper and saved it for dinner when we'd pour it over yucca or dip in some bread.

Each day, she showed me something new. She drove out of the way to get the best *mantecaditos*—a cookie similar to shortbread, often made with lard and decorated with rainbow sprinkles—from a hidden bakery in Guaynabo, and took me all the way to the coast to have *alcapurrias de langosta*, a root vegetable fritter stuffed with lobster.

On one of those weekend trips to Luquillo, Tata spotted a *kiosko*, or roadside food stand, along the highway and said it looked like a good one.

"Why this one?" I asked. It was barely a shack; four wooden poles held up a thatched palm leaf roof and a limp sign read COCO FRESCO, BACALAÍTOS. A man and woman sat in white plastic chairs under the shade of a palm tree next to a large bin filled with ice and green coconuts, their little shack outfitted with two deep fryers.

"Tu ves ahí," (You see there) she said. "They only have coco and *bacalaítos*. That means they're experts at that."

We pulled over; palm trees lining the road to our left, the coastline peeking through. I leapt out of the car and was hit with a burst of salty sea air. The vendors looked in my direction, startled by this enthusiastic child running full-speed toward their stand.

“*Un bacalaíto, por favor,*” I said, breathless, having perfected that phrase.

“*Uno nada más?*” the vendor asked, winking. How did he *know*?

Bacalaítos are flat salty codfish funnel cakes—crisped and golden brown on the outside, moist and chewy on the inside. The batter is subtly sweet with a hint of funky fishiness that accentuates the sweet/savory combination that is such a signature of Puerto Rican food.

We walked across the highway to the ocean, taking our fritters and coconuts with us. The vendor had cut the tops off our coconuts and sliced pieces of hard shell off the sides for us to use as scoops. We sipped from our coconuts, then scooped bits of coconut meat out, licking our fingers. The fresh coconut meat tasted more like avocado than sweetened grated coconut—creamy, rich, and barely sweet.

Tata and I sat side by side on the sand and looked out past the sea. If I have one regret, it’s that I didn’t share more with her about what was going on in my life back home and how much I struggled to feel like I belonged on the island. I wanted so badly for her to think I was okay. And maybe part of me thought that if I stuffed myself with Puerto Rican food, with *her* food, I could somehow unlock the secrets of that place, that identity, its history, and this nagging sense that I belonged there even though it didn’t seem to want me. I think she would have understood what I was going through much better than I could have imagined.

Recipes

The recipes in this chapter are largely adaptations of classic Puerto Rican dishes. They are inspired by cookbooks including *Cocina Criolla* (Carmen Aboy Valldejuli, 1954), *Cocine a Gusto* (Berta Cabanillas, 1954), and *Cocinando en San Germán* (Marina Martínez de Irizarry, 1989), as well as my family’s home recipes. My goal of this chapter is to lighten up heavy dishes and make the flavors brighter and more balanced.

If you’re looking for the kinds of meals a Puerto Rican abuela might have made, here’s where you’ll find it. You can pick and choose from

among these recipes or make a fabulous, complete classic Puerto Rican banquet.

- Culantro Chimichurri
- Salsa Ajili-Mojili
- Picadillo
- Sanguiches de Picadillo (Picadillo Sandwiches)
- Brussels Sprouts with Chorizo Sofrito
- Sancocho
- Boliche (Chorizo-Stuffed Beef Roast)
- Chuletas a la Jardinera (Pork Chops with Garden Vegetables)
- Pescado en Escabeche (White Fish Escabeche)
- Buñuelos de Viento en Almibar (Fried Doughnuts in Cinnamon Syrup)
- Pie de Limón (Lemon Meringue Pie)
- Mami's Bizcocho de Ron (Mami's Rum Cake)
- Coquito (Coconut Eggnog)

Culantro Chimichurri

Tata loved vegetables *and* meat. One of her favorite condiments to have ready in the fridge or make on the fly was *chimichurri*. She often served it with green beans or Brussels sprouts and alongside a steak cooked medium-rare or a roast chicken. It's a great quick sauce you can use like Tata did, or with grilled vegetables and meat.

Makes 3{1/2} cups

1 large garlic clove

1 cup chopped fresh culantro

1 cup chopped fresh cilantro

1 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

{1/4} cup white or red wine vinegar

{1/3} cup olive oil

{1/2} teaspoon salt

Place the garlic in a small food processor and process to finely mince it.

Add the culantro, cilantro, parsley, vinegar, oil, and salt and pulse into a fine paste, scraping the sides as needed to make sure the ingredients are fully incorporated.

Scrape into a bowl and serve immediately.

Note: Chimichurri is best eaten the same day, though it will keep up to a week in the refrigerator (the color will change from bright green to brown after a few days).

Salsa Ajili-Mojili

This sauce is extremely versatile and pairs particularly well with steamed or lightly sautéed vegetables, avocado, white beans, and seafood. I've added a variation in honor of a good friend who has a garlic allergy, which is just as delicious and a good substitute if you don't enjoy raw garlic or want a milder flavor.

Makes 1{1/2} cups

3 garlic cloves, minced (or 4 scallions, whites and greens, thinly sliced)

{1/2} cup *aji dulce* chiles, seeded and finely chopped

2 tablespoons fresh lime juice

{1/2} cup olive oil

1 teaspoon salt

{1/8} teaspoon ground black pepper

Combine all the ingredients in a medium bowl and mix well. Let sit for at least fifteen minutes or up to an hour before serving. It will keep in the refrigerator for up to a week, though it is best within the first couple days.

Picadillo

This was one of a handful of dishes always found in Tata's refrigerator. As a kid I would sneak into the kitchen at night when I couldn't sleep and eat it out of a container with a spoon. It can be eaten as a main course

alongside rice and beans or root vegetables, but it's also commonly used as a stuffing in empanadas, fritters, and *pastelón*. I prefer turkey, but beef is traditional.

Makes 3 cups

2 tablespoons olive oil

{1/2} cup Sofrito (page 000)

{1/2} cup tomato sauce

1 tablespoon Sazón (page 000)

2 bay leaves

1 pound ground turkey or beef

{1/4} cup pimento-stuffed manzanilla olives, halved

1 tablespoon drained capers in brine

1 tablespoon raisins (optional)

{1/2} teaspoon salt, or to taste

{1/8} teaspoon ground black pepper, or to taste

Heat the oil in a large, deep sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the sofrito and cook for five minutes, stirring frequently.

Add the tomato sauce, sazón, and bay leaves to the pan and cook for about five more minutes, stirring frequently, until the sauce darkens and the liquid is mostly evaporated.

Reduce the heat to medium and fold in the ground turkey, breaking it up and mixing it into the sauce. Cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, for ten minutes (fifteen minutes if using beef), or until the meat is fully browned, the liquid is completely reduced, and a thick sauce is created.

Add the olives, capers, raisins, salt, and pepper and cook for two more minutes to heat through. Taste and add more salt and pepper if needed.

Sanguiches de Picadillo (Picadillo Sandwiches)

This bomb of a breakfast sandwich will stay with you all day. It's decadent and incredibly flavorful. If you don't own a sandwich press, make it like you would a grilled cheese.

Makes 2 sandwiches

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, plus more as needed

4 slices white bread

4 slices American cheese

6 to 8 tablespoons Picadillo

Butter one side of each slice of bread. Place two slices of bread, butter-side down, on a large plate.

Layer each of these two slices with one slice of American cheese, then top each with three to four tablespoons picadillo. Stack each with a second slice of American cheese. Top with the remaining bread slices, butter-side up.

Place in a sandwich press and cook until the cheese is melted, three to five minutes. The cheese may begin to creep out of the edges, which is okay.

Let rest for one minute before eating (the cheese is molten and can burn the roof of your mouth).

Brussels Sprouts with Chorizo Sofrito

Of all the things my grandmother cooked, the one that Mami said she hated and refused to eat was brussels sprouts. It appears Tata used frozen, whole brussels sprouts (likely the only ones she could find in Puerto Rico at the time). She would boil them and then toss in *chimichurri*, *salsa ajili-mojili*, or another sauce. Sadly, Tata was the only one who liked them. This recipe pays homage to Tata's good intentions. I think she would have loved it.

Serves 4 as a side

1{1/2} tablespoons olive oil

{3/4} cup Sofrito (page 000)

{1/2} cup finely minced Spanish chorizo

1 pound Brussels sprouts, trimmed and thinly sliced

{1/2} cup Chicken Stock (page 000)

1 teaspoon fresh lime juice

{1/2} teaspoon salt, plus more if needed

Cracked black pepper

Heat the oil in a large skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add the sofrito and chorizo and cook, stirring frequently, for seven minutes, or until the mixture is browned and the liquid is mostly evaporated.

Lower the heat to medium and add the Brussels sprouts and stock. Bring to a simmer and cook for seven to ten minutes, until the brussels sprouts are tender.

Turn off the heat, add the lime juice and salt, and season with pepper. Taste and adjust the salt and pepper if needed.

Sancocho

This stew is eaten across the Caribbean and has every imaginable variation. When I traveled to Cuba as a graduate student, I ate it at a *rumba* (an all-day dance event based on Yoruba spiritual practices). There, it's called *ajiaco* and is often served from a giant pot on the porch with a ladle, meant to keep us all energized (or sober us up). In Puerto Rico, my family makes *sancocho* a number of different ways. My father makes his with beef and noodles; Mami prefers chicken breasts and lean pork; Tata used beef, chicken, and pork on the bone. Here's my take, but I encourage you to adapt it to include whatever meats and vegetables you love.

Serves 8

1 medium yucca

1 medium yautía

1 green plantain

1 ripe yellow plantain

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 pound boneless chicken thighs

1 pound boneless pork stew meat, trimmed of excess fat

{1/2} cup Sofrito (page 000)

10 cups Beef and Pork Stock (page 000)

3 bay leaves

- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 cup thinly sliced Spanish chorizo
- 2 cups 1-inch cubes peeled *calabaza* (pumpkin) or kabocha squash
- 1 ear sweet corn, husk removed and cut into 1-inch slices

Peel and cut the yucca, yautía, green plantain, and yellow plantain into one-inch pieces. Put in separate bowls, add water to cover, and set aside until ready to use. This keeps them from turning brown while you prepare the rest of the soup.

In a large stockpot, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook until browned on both sides, about five minutes total. Remove to a plate. Add the pork to the pan and cook until browned on both sides, another five minutes or so. Remove to the plate with the chicken.

Reduce the heat to medium and add the sofrito to the same pot, scraping up any browned bits of meat and incorporating them into the mix. Cook for five to seven minutes, stirring frequently, until the mixture is browned and the liquid is mostly evaporated.

Return the chicken and pork and any accumulated juices to the pot. Add the bay leaves and salt, increase the heat to medium-high, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for about ten minutes, stirring occasionally, until the stock is slightly reduced. Stir in the chorizo.

Add the remaining ingredients in order of firmness (to keep softer vegetables from falling apart), leaving each for five minutes before adding the next: first the yucca, then the yautía, followed by the green plantain, then the yellow plantain, pumpkin, and, finally, the corn, for a total of thirty minutes cooking, or until the meat and vegetables are tender enough to break apart with a fork.

Remove from the heat, taste, and add more salt if needed. Serve with fresh bread or white rice on the side.

Note: Root vegetables such as yucca and yautía can be difficult to find in basic supermarkets, though you may be able to find them in the freezer section. There's no real substitute for the rich, earthy flavor of these tubers, but potatoes can be used. Reduce the cooking time by half if using potatoes.

Boliche (Chorizo-Stuffed Beef Roast)

My mother might as well be a vegetarian. Growing up she hated meat and was vocal about it. But on special occasions, Tata made *boliche*. It's a Cuban dish in which a whole eye of round roast is stuffed with a mixture of Spanish chorizo, *sofrito*, spices, and vegetables, then marinated overnight and braised. The end result is an incredibly tender, flavorful roast with a bright filling in the center that's gorgeous when served. To this day, if I even say the word *boliche*, my mother licks her lips.

Serves 8

- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 bay leaf
- 1{1/2} tablespoons fresh orange juice
- 1{1/2} tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 2 teaspoons salt, or to taste
- {1/4} teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 carrot, thinly sliced
- 2 small Spanish chorizos, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 (5-pound to 6-pound) eye-of-round beef roast
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce

Prepare a marinade by combining the garlic, oregano, cumin, bay leaf, orange juice, lime juice, wine, salt, and pepper in a container large enough to hold the roast.

Place the bell pepper, carrot, and chorizos in a small bowl and toss to combine.

Trim the meat of excess fat, rinse it, and dry with a paper towel. Using a long knife with a sharp tip, slice into the roast lengthwise until you reach the other end. Cut through several more times from end to end,

making an X-shaped cut and rotating the knife back and forth inside the cut to make space.

Place the roast in a large bowl, cut-side down, and stuff it with the chorizo mixture. Begin with about one tablespoon of the mixture and push in with your thumb, then use the end of a wooden spoon to push down farther. Rotate the roast to make sure both sides are equally stuffed. Place the roast in the container with the marinade, turning several times to coat fully in the marinade, then return it to the refrigerator. Marinate for at least one hour or overnight if possible.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed saucepan with a cover, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Sear the meat for about eight minutes total, until thoroughly browned on all four sides.

Add the marinade left from the meat, cover, and place in the oven for two and a half to three hours, until the meat is tender and falls apart easily when pierced with a fork. Transfer the meat to a cutting board and let rest for five minutes.

Meanwhile, add the tomato sauce to the marinade in the pot. Place over medium heat, bring to a simmer, and simmer for three to four minutes. Add any juices released from the meat while it is resting.

Carve the meat into half-inch slices, divide among plates, and serve topped with the tomato sauce.

Chuletas a la Jardinera (Pork Chops with Garden Vegetables)

This one-pot dish is traditionally made with canned veggies but using fresh ones makes it bright and surprisingly light. Serve over plain white rice.

Serves 6

6 bone-in, center-cut pork chops (about 3 pounds)

3 batches Adobo for Pork (page 000)

1 tablespoon olive oil

{1/4} cup Sofrito (page 000)

1 large onion, diced

- 2 medium carrots, diced
- 4{1/2} cups peeled and diced tomatoes
- 1 large ear of corn, shucked, kernels cut off the cob
- {1/2} pound fresh green beans, ends trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 cup fresh or frozen green peas

Place the pork chops in a large bowl and pour the adobo over them, rubbing them well to fully incorporate it. Transfer the pork chops to a large zip-top bag or plastic container with a lid and marinate in the refrigerator for at least thirty minutes, or overnight if possible.

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Brown the pork chops well on both sides for five minutes total, then transfer to a plate.

Reduce the heat to medium and add sofrito. Cook, stirring frequently, for about five minutes, until the mixture starts to brown and the liquid is mostly evaporated, then add the onion and carrots and cook for five minutes more, or until the onion starts to turn golden. Add the diced tomatoes, scraping up any browned bits stuck to the bottom of the pot.

Return the pork chops to the pot and nestle them into the tomato sauce, spooning the sauce over them to cover. Bring to a simmer, then lower the heat, cover, and cook for thirty to forty minutes, stirring lightly every ten minutes to keep the sauce from burning, until the pork chops are tender and almost falling apart.

Transfer the pork chops to a clean plate and tent with foil. Add the corn, green beans, and peas to the sauce and cook for five minutes, or until the vegetables are cooked through but still crisp.

Serve the pork chops with the sauce and vegetables spooned on top.

Pescado en Escabeche (White Fish Escabeche)

This is a great summer dish and perfect to make ahead of time for a brunch. Serve with a side salad, salted sliced tomatoes, avocado, or *tostones*.

Serves 4

Marinade

1 cup olive oil

{1/2} cup white vinegar

{1/4} teaspoon ground black pepper

{1/2} teaspoon salt

1 bay leaf

2 large white onions, sliced into thin rounds

Fish

1{1/2} pounds grouper steaks

{1/4} cup fresh lemon juice (about 1 large lemon)

2 teaspoons salt, or to taste

{1/4} cup all-purpose flour

1 cup olive oil

Combine the marinade ingredients in a large bowl.

Line a large plate with paper towels and set it aside.

Rinse the fish well and pat dry with paper towels. Place the fish in a large bowl and pour the lemon juice over it. Sprinkle with the salt and toss well.

Pour the flour onto a large plate. One by one, dredge each fish steak in flour and transfer them to a separate plate.

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until just simmering, about one minute. Do not overheat the oil, or it will burn and turn bitter. Reduce the heat to medium, add the fish steaks, and fry for ten minutes, turning every two minutes or so to make sure they brown evenly.

Transfer the fish to the prepared plate and let sit for five minutes to let excess oil drain, then transfer the fish to a large casserole dish with a lid.

Pour the marinade over the fish, cover, and refrigerate overnight. Taste, add more salt if needed, and serve chilled.

Buñuelos de Viento en Almibar (Fried Doughnuts in Cinnamon Syrup)

These simple doughnuts in syrup were a staple in Tata's house. They can be eaten warm or chilled.

Makes 20 *buñuelos*

Syrup

3 cups sugar

4 cups water

1 cinnamon stick

{1/2} teaspoon vanilla extract

{1/2} teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Buñuelos

1 cup water

4 tablespoons ({1/4} cup) unsalted butter

{1/2} teaspoon salt

1 cup all-purpose flour

4 large eggs

Canola oil for frying

Ground cinnamon for dusting

Make the syrup: in a medium saucepan, combine the sugar and water over medium-high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer, add the cinnamon stick, and cook, uncovered, for eight to ten minutes, until slightly thickened into a light syrup. Add the vanilla and lemon juice and cover until ready to use.

Make the *buñuelos*: While you are cooking the syrup, combine the water, butter, and salt in a large saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Remove from the heat, add the flour all at once, and mix with an electric hand mixer on low speed until combined.

Add the eggs one by one, mixing well until the dough is fully blended, thick, and sticky but not pasty.

Line a large plate with paper towels.

Heat one and a half to two inches of oil in a large deep skillet or wok over medium-high heat until simmering. Drop a bit of dough in to see if it's ready—you'll know once the dough sizzles and rises to the surface.

Use two large tablespoons to scoop small balls of dough one by one into the hot oil (scoop with one and use the back of the other to gently drop the dough into the oil). The doughnuts will float to the surface of the oil.

Fry, turning the balls frequently, for two to three minutes, until they are evenly browned. Remove from the oil with a slotted spoon and place on the prepared plate to drain.

Arrange the *buñuelos* in a nine-by-nine-inch casserole dish and pour the syrup over them. Serve dusted with cinnamon.

Pie de Limón (Lemon Meringue Pie)

Tata was full of stories, but one that would have Mami and me in stitches was the story of the pie de limón. One day, Tata made this pie for a potluck. She was walking through the parking lot to her car, holding the pie up in her right hand like a waitress. Suddenly, a gust of wind came, lifted the pie, and it splat against the nearest car windshield. Tata, in shock, put her hand down, turned, and kept walking. If I'd been there, I would have licked that pie right off that stranger's windshield, because this pie is *that* good.

Serves 8

Pie Crust and Filling

{1/3} cup cornstarch

1 cup sugar

{1/8} teaspoon salt

1{1/2} cups water

{1/2} cup fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon lemon zest

4 large egg yolks

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 (9-inch) prepared piecrust, baked

Meringue

4 large egg whites

{1/4} teaspoon salt

{1/2} cup sugar

Make the filling: Combine the cornstarch, sugar, and salt in a medium saucepan and whisk to incorporate.

Whisk in the water, lemon juice, and lemon zest, place over medium heat, and heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture just begins to boil and thicken. Remove from the heat.

In a small bowl, whisk the egg yolks, then quickly whisk the yolks into the hot filling.

Return the pot to medium heat and bring to a near boil.

Add the butter and stir until fully melted and incorporated.

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Make the meringue: in a large bowl, beat the egg whites and salt with an electric hand mixer on high speed until soft peaks start to form. Continue beating while slowly pouring in the sugar and beat until firm peaks form.

To assemble: pour the hot filling into the prepared piecrust, wiggling to spread the filling out evenly.

Using a rubber scraper, scrape the meringue out of the bowl and into the center of the pie and spread it out evenly to the edges of the crust.

Put the pie in the oven and bake for seven to ten minutes, until the meringue starts to turn golden brown, watching closely to make sure it doesn't get overly browned.

Remove from oven, place on a wire rack, and cool completely, about one hour. Refrigerate until cold and serve chilled.

Note: I hope the bakers out there will forgive my recommending the use of a premade piecrust. It's what Tata used, and I'm sticking as close as I can to the perfection she created.

Mami's Bizcocho de Ron (Mami's Rum Cake)

When my friends found out I was writing this cookbook, several asked if Mami's rum cake would be in it. And so it is. First I give you her original recipe, which uses a boxed cake mix. I highly recommend this

recipe if you need to make something quickly and easily or aren't very comfortable baking. It's perfectly balanced and is my favorite cake to this day. But in homage to Mami, I've adapted her recipe to give it a little more depth, and that version follows. In case you were wondering, my family calls me Bombi.

Special thanks to chef, friend, and mentor Kathy Gunst for her help adapting this recipe.

Serves 6 to 10

Mami's Recipe

Cake

Canola oil cooking spray

1 cup finely chopped walnuts

1 box butter-flavor cake mix

1 (3.4-ounce) box instant vanilla pudding mix

Unsalted butter

Eggs

{1/4} cup white rum

Syrup

4 tablespoons {1/4} cup unsalted butter

1 cup light brown sugar

{1/2} cup white rum

{1/4} cup water

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a Bundt pan with cooking spray and sprinkle in the walnuts.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment or a large bowl using a handheld electric mixer, combine the cake mix and pudding mix, then add the butter and eggs as directed by the instructions on the cake mix box. Add the rum. Beat at medium speed for four minutes.

Pour the batter into the prepared Bundt pan and level it with a spatula.

Bake for thirty-three to thirty-five minutes, until the cake is pale golden in color, slightly risen, and a toothpick or cake skewer comes out clean when poked in its center.

Remove from the oven and place on a wire rack to cool slightly.

Meanwhile, make the rum glaze: combine all the glaze ingredients in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for five to seven minutes, until the sugar is fully dissolved and the glaze thickens just slightly.

While the cake is still warm, poke holes throughout the cake using the same toothpick or skewer you used to test it for doneness. Pour the hot glaze on top; don't worry if the cake doesn't take in the glaze immediately. It takes at least ten minutes for the glaze to be absorbed.

Cover the pan with aluminum foil and allow to soak for at least three hours or up to overnight. Invert onto a plate, then slice and serve.

Bombi's Recipe

Cake

Canola oil cooking spray

1 cup finely chopped walnuts

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1 (3.4-ounce) box instant vanilla pudding mix

{1/2} cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

{1/2} cup milk

4 large eggs

{1/2} cup coconut oil

{1/2} cup white rum

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Rum Syrup

{1/2} cup (1 stick) unsalted butter

{1/2} cup white rum

{1/2} cup light brown sugar

{1/4} cup water

{1/2} teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Grease a Bundt pan with cooking spray and sprinkle in the walnuts.

In a stand mixer with the paddle attachment or a large bowl using an electric handheld mixer, combine the flour, sugar, pudding mix, butter, baking powder, and salt. Mix on medium speed for about two minutes, until fully incorporated.

Add the milk, eggs, and coconut oil and blend on low speed for about two more minutes, until smooth. Pour in the rum and vanilla and blend on low speed for about one more minute to form a thick batter.

Pour the batter into the prepared Bundt pan and level it with a spatula. Bake for fifty to sixty minutes, until the cake is pale golden in color, slightly risen, and a toothpick or cake skewer comes out clean when poked in the center of the cake.

Remove from the oven and place on a wire rack to cool slightly.

Meanwhile, make the rum glaze: combine all the glaze ingredients in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for five to seven minutes, until the sugar is fully dissolved and the glaze is just slightly thickened.

While the cake is still warm, poke holes throughout the cake using the same toothpick or skewer you used to test the cake for doneness. Pour the hot glaze on top. Don't worry if the cake doesn't take in the glaze immediately; it takes at least ten minutes for the glaze to be absorbed.

Cover the pan with aluminum foil and allow to soak for at least three hours or overnight. Invert onto a plate, slice, and serve.

Coquito (Coconut Eggnog)

Coquito is Puerto Rican, coconut-y eggnog. We claim it as our own, but it's beloved by Dominicans and Cubans alike. It's frothy and rich like a traditional eggnog, but it's made lighter by using coconut milk instead of heavy cream and swaps cinnamon for nutmeg and rum for bourbon or brandy.

It certainly was essential in my home over the holidays. Mami isn't much of a drinker, but she loves *coquito*. My dad was always the *coquito* master, and so this is an adaptation of his recipe.

Makes about 2 quarts

1{1/4} cups water

3 cinnamon sticks

8 large egg yolks

1 (13.5-ounce) can coconut milk

1 (14-ounce) can condensed milk

1 (15-ounce) can cream of coconut (Coco Lopez)

{1/2} teaspoon vanilla extract

Pinch of salt

{1/2} teaspoon lime zest

1 quart white rum, or to taste

Ground cinnamon

In a small saucepan, combine the water and cinnamon sticks. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat and simmer while you prepare the remaining ingredients.

Pour the egg yolks into a large blender and blend on high speed for three minutes, or until they thicken into a cream.

Add the coconut milk and blend for one minute, then add the condensed milk and cream of coconut and blend for three minutes, or until thickened.

Remove the cinnamon sticks from the boiling water and reserve them. Pour the boiling water into the egg yolk mixture.

Add the vanilla, salt, and lime zest and pulse once to incorporate. Pour the contents of the blender into bottles or a pitcher.

Pour in the rum and the reserved cinnamon sticks and stir or swirl the bottles to mix well.

Refrigerate until fully cooled, then serve over ice in rocks glasses with a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Note: This can get messy. It's important that you use a large blender, or, alternatively, cut the recipe in half if your blender can't fit this amount of liquid. Plan ahead by reserving a few liquor bottles for storing. A funnel is useful for helping transfer the *coquito* into containers.



Fig. 1 Von Diaz, *Coconuts and Collards: Recipes and Stories from Puerto Rico to the Deep South*. 2018. Photo by Cybelle Codish. Image author's own.

41. How to Look at Silence

Nohora Arrieta

The border, they say, is alive and porous, crossed as if by osmosis, as the cells of an organism feed. Crossing the Guajira Desert in Colombia to get to the state of Zulia in Venezuela is what my maternal grandmother Elvia Mármol did for fifty years. This movement, which was so natural to those of us who grew up surrounded by it, still happened shrouded in silence. First, there is the nationalistic discourse that Colombia as a country is very different and very distant from Venezuela. According to this discourse, this back and forth across the border never happened or only happens now that, due to the crisis in the neighboring country, Colombia is “overrun with Venezuelans.” The other silence arises from the movement itself and from the experiences of the women who moved and who move: what happens at the border? What is life like on the other side? On this side?

Elvia or Mami, as she liked to be called by her granddaughters, was the proud owner of the first telephone in our neighborhood, calle Aurora. This luxury turned the house into a center of communications. The phone never stopped ringing, the ring *tlíiiiiin*, sharp and infinite. “Elvia Mármol’s house, with whom do I have the pleasure?” Mami would answer, mimicking an experienced receptionist. Then she would run to the terrace and yell out: “Fulaaaana, it’s so-and-so from Venezuela, hurry!” The woman would dash across the room to the telephone in its little corner (dark and private, like an oracle) and lift the receiver with her hands still soapy from the Saturday wash. “He is not coming this December”, “he left me for someone else”, “that woman does not care about her children”, “they fired her from work”, Fulana would say after hanging up, her brow furrowed in what could be sadness or anger.

To say "Venezuela" on calle Aurora was to name an extension of the family geography. It was like saying the far corner of the patio, a reachable yet distant place, inhabited by grandmothers, aunts, and cousins who we had never seen or who we saw every three, four or five years. The journey to Venezuela was such a natural pilgrimage for black, indigenous, and poor families of the Colombian Caribbean, that the Cartagena writer Roberto Burgos Cantor depicts it in one of his short stories. In "Stories of Singers", the father of Mabel Lara, an aspiring young bolero singer, sends a letter to his daughter from Caracas telling her about the hardships of migrant life. Mabel's father wants to be a singer too, but while he waits for a lucky break he makes a living as a waiter at a nightclub.

Dear Mabe you don't know how much I missed you at the beginning things were rough and I was getting pissed off that's why I didn't write to you so you and your mama wouldn't worry they don't like Colombians here they're always on you about your papers I took the letter from don Dámaso to the *naiclub* and in the end I started as a waiter it's not what I wanted but something is something and I get to hear the orchestras that play with good singers.

"They don't like Colombians here", Mabel's father writes and with little effort one can imagine the expression of distrust, discomfort or annoyance of a passerby in Caracas or Maracaibo at the frequent sight of a family of poor Colombians.

Colombia and Venezuela share a border of more than two thousand kilometers (more than 1,200 miles). Since the late 1950s, people on the Colombian Caribbean coast have emigrated to the neighboring country in search of what in Colombia were luxuries: work, food, education. In the 1970s, the oil boom, with its promise of jobs in both the countryside and the city, turned Venezuela into the promised land. At the end of the eighties, Colombians already represented about 78% of Latin American migrants in Venezuela. Most of the jobs were in agriculture or domestic work. The favored destination for Colombians was the oil state of Zulia. Mami and Aunt Elvira arrived in Maracaibo, the capital of Zulia, for the first time on 25 April 1961.

Venezuelan visual artist Malu Valerio lived in Cali, Colombia, from August to October 2019. Valerio was invited to Cali as an artist in residence at Lugar a Dudas (Room for Doubt) and during the three months she was there she walked the city wearing seven different pairs of alpargatas, a typical Wayuu footwear. The Wayuu are an indigenous people who live in a territory of the continental Caribbean that extends into both Colombia and Venezuela. Valerio's alpargatas were hand-woven by a Wayuu woman from the El Monte neighborhood in Maracaibo. In Cali, Valerio bought bread wearing those alpargatas; she got on buses that go down calle Quinta; she breathed the fresh air coming down from the mountains that surround the valley where the city is embedded. She put on the alpargatas and attended workshops for Venezuelan migrant women organized by a religious foundation. Valerio and the women drank coffee or agua de panela and sometimes the women painted and sometimes they wrote. Valerio listened to their stories, read their writing, and took notes. Later, she chose words and phrases and embroidered them with colored threads (red, blue, yellow) onto the dusty alpargatas: "parada", "abierta", "nos robaron", "comenzar desde cero" ("stopover", "open", "we were robbed", "starting from scratch").



Fig. 1 *Somos cuerpo Somos territorio Somos (e-in) migrantes*. Malu Valerio, 2020.



Fig. 2 *Somos cuerpo Somos territorio Somos (e-in) migrantes*. Malu Valerio, 2020.

“1961”, says Elvira over the phone. “1959”, my mother writes in a WhatsApp message. The women of my family do not agree on the date. What they do agree on is that Mami and Elvira went to Maracaibo to work as domestic workers and the other daughters were left in the care of their grandmother. We do not know what made Mami return to Colombia seven months later, whether it was missing her other daughters, fearing that an employer would take liberties with Elvira or the fatigue of working all day without earning enough money to even dream of a small house in Cartagena. Four years would go by before Elvira, then a young adult, returned to Venezuela to try her luck. She never came back to Cartagena. Miriam also left.

Half of my generation was born in Venezuela, the children of Elvira and Miriam, as well as half of the following generation. For those born on the Colombian side, Venezuela was the land of plenty. There were new clothes in December, shoes for first communion, telephones, and Whirlpool washing machines. In contrast, in Cartagena all we had was scarcity of food and the fine dust covering calle Aurora. The photographs that Mami accumulated from visits to her daughters and granddaughters on the other side roused in the Cartagena generation the feeling that we were not the chosen ones. In one of these photos, Mami has a short hairstyle, painted nails, a yellow blouse, and a black skirt with a print to match her blouse. She is about to cut a cake (it was

her birthday). The two tiers of the cake, the bouquet of flowers, and the size of the speaker from the sound system in the background were irrefutable proof of what in Cartagena we considered the lavishness of Venezuelan life.



Fig. 3 Mami, Maracaibo (Venezuela), ca. 2000(?).



Fig. 4 Mami, Cartagena (Colombia), 1961(?).

The words embroidered on Valerio's alpargatas do not tell the stories, they compel us to intuit them. The details of the journey will always be a secret, at least for the viewer who, presented with the image, asks: When were they robbed? Where did they stop for the first time? Was the border opened?

The numbers are easily found online. In May 2020, there were one million Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. Half were undocumented. Half were women. But the numbers, as we know, say little and confuse experience with statistics. When referring to Venezuelans, the Colombian media are torn between applause ("a Venezuelan publicist creates jobs", another Venezuelan investor builds a construction project in Bogotá) and contempt ("65 Venezuelans at a party during COVID-19", "ten Venezuelan thieves"). In the midst of the clamor to make Venezuelans into heroes or villains, depending on the needs of the primetime schedule, reports like Andrea Aldana's article published in July 2020 go unnoticed. In *La Trocha*, Aldana interviewed a group of Venezuelan women who were victims of sexual violence and human trafficking in Cúcuta, one of the large cities on the Colombian border. Some of the women had been convinced to travel to Colombia with job offers as house cleaners or caregivers for the elderly.

Mami collected photos. I'm not exaggerating when I say that she was the queen of Instagram and Facebook before Instagram or Facebook existed. But there is not a single photo of her first trip to Venezuela in her album collection. In one of the conversations I had with my mother before writing this essay, she tells me that she remembers Mami setting fire to a bundle of images on the patio. There were no stories either. Mami, who was a great conversationalist and did not miss a chance to talk about her life, never told the story of the trip with Elvira to Maracaibo on 25 April 1961. She did not tell how they crossed the desert in La Guajira to enter Venezuela without papers. She did not speak of the arid desert soil—open like a wound—or of the stagnant pools of water where they pushed aside clouds of mosquitoes before bending to drink, or of the long night when she crouched on all fours over Elvira for fear that one of the guides would rape her eldest daughter while she slept. She did not talk about the first day in Maracaibo, when they wandered for hours until they found a residential neighborhood where she was hired to

clean houses and Elvira was hired to take care of a child. How many times did she see Elvira during those months? Did she have Sundays off to spend with her teenage daughter? How was her relationship with her employers? Who were her employers? If there was ever a moment while cleaning floors in the house on calle Aurora, when Mami remembered those seven months scrubbing floors, washing clothes and silently crying for the three children she had left behind in Colombia, she never mentioned it. Why did she burn the photos from that trip? Why didn't she want to remember? What didn't she want to remember? The loneliness of being a poor migrant woman? Mabel Lara's father's "they don't like Colombians here?" The trip crossing the desert? The fear of rape?

In the mountain of photographs that my younger brother scanned for me with the patience of a saint, I found a black and white photo of Mami in downtown Cartagena. It was taken, I suspect, after her return from Maracaibo, in November 1961. Mami wears a tailored dress, her hair is down and styled, her nails are painted, and her shoes match the buttons on her dress. In her dress, her painted nails, and shoes, I see the Mami I knew, but there is something in her eyes that I do not recognize. I imagine that it is the anxious and obstinate look of someone trying to forget.

Somos cuerpo, Somos territorio, Somos (e-in)migrantes (We are body, We are territory, We are (e-im)migrants) is the title of the art exhibit that Valerio created after her residency with Lugar a Dudas. In one of the pieces, Valerio embroiders onto a white cloth the lines of maps, the states, and the rivers that make up the more than two thousand kilometers (more than 1,200 miles) of border between Colombia and Venezuela. On top of these lines, there are others, those of the routes that migrants take from one place to another. The piece is a body: the routes are the arteries, the veins, the fluids of the body.

The living body that Valerio embroiders has been nourished for decades by the Colombian-Venezuelan families who live on both sides of the border. It was nourished before that by the Wayuu indigenous people, in whose cosmogony such a thing as Colombia or Venezuela does not exist. Bodies, as we all know, can be violated, and it is no feat of mental gymnastics to imagine the reasons for the absence of this

body in what we call Colombia: the omission of the Caribbean and the border regions in a country that imagines itself as Andean; a migrant population with an indigenous or black face in a country that sees itself as white and mestizo; a migration of the poor.



Fig. 5 *Somos cuerpo Somos territorio Somos (e-in) migrantes*. Malu Valerio, 2020.

As a result of the diplomatic crisis of August and September 2015 a total of 1,600 Colombians were deported and approximately 2,000 were displaced. Mami traveled from Colombia to Venezuela in June of that year. Her last trip back to Colombia was in December 2018. This crossing was no easier than the first crossing in 1961, although she was not aware of it. I asked the cousin who traveled with her to tell me again about the return trip: "Okay, so we got on a bus, then in a car, we took a back road, we paid off these people, we paid off those people, we reached the border and then we took another bus. Thank God we're back in Cartagena." My cousin finishes and I ask her: "Whose car was it? Who did they pay off? And Mami? Didn't she get tired? Didn't she complain? Wasn't she afraid?" "Mami slept the whole trip, like now." My cousin does not linger over the details. There is no description of the trip or, if there is, it is minimal. Partly it's due to habit, I think. But in part it's also as if the journey denies a description of itself, as if silence were the only way to name the trip and the way it was done: without papers, taking a back road, paying off these people and those people.

From December 2018 to December 2019, Mami slept, and sleep was the only place where she really was after there was no longer anything in Mami that remembered who she was. In sleep there was no Cartagena or Maracaibo, only a house with a big patio that the family would walk across. In December 2019, Mami went to travel the border endlessly. Remembering her, I think of a poem by the Wayuu poet Vito Apüshana, entitled “Woumain” (Our land):

When you come to our land,
you will rest in the shade of our respect.
When you come to our land,
you will hear our voice, also,
in the sounds of the ancient mountain.
If you arrive in our land
with your naked life
We will be a little bit happier...
and we will seek water
for this thirst for life, endless.¹



Fig. 6 Mami with me, Cartagena, 1988.

1 This essay is for Mami. I thank Nora Elvira, Dinora, Nando and my dear mom for sharing with me their memories. The original version of this essay was written in Spanish. This English one would not be possible without the outstanding translation skills of my friend Lucy McDonald-Stewart. My friends Emma Shaw and Rahma Maccarone also helped me, as always.

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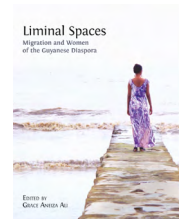


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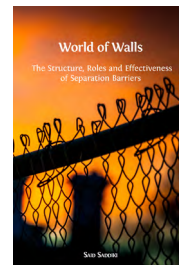


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EDITED BY KALIA BROOKS, CHERYL FINLEY,
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This book draws together contributions from scholars and artists showcasing the breadth of intersectional experiences of migration, from diaspora to internal displacement. Building on conversations initiated in *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History*, this edited volume features a range of written styles, from memoir to artists' statements to journalistic and critical essays. The collection shows how women's experiences of migration have been articulated through art, film, poetry and even food.

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