# Women and Migration

## Responses in Art and History

EDITED BY

DEBORAH WILLIS, ELLYN TOSCANO AND KALIA BROOKS NELSON

To access digital resources including:
blog posts
videos
online appendices

and to purchase copies of this book in:
hardback
paperback
ebook editions

Go to:
https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/840

---

Open Book Publishers is a non-profit independent initiative.
We rely on sales and donations to continue publishing
high-quality academic works.

OPEN ACCESS

OpenBook Publishers
Knowledge is for sharing

# WOMEN AND MIGRATION

# Women and Migration:
# Responses in Art and History

*Edited by Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano and Kalia Brooks Nelson*

GLOBAL INSTITUTE FOR
ADVANCED STUDY
NYU

OpenBook
Publishers

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

© 2019 Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano and Kalia Brooks Nelson
Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapters' authors.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text and to make commercial use of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano and Kalia Brooks Nelson (eds.), *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2019, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit, https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/840#copyright

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at https://archive.org/web

Updated digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/840#resources

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-565-4
ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-566-1
ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-567-8
ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-568-5
ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-569-2
ISBN Digital (XML): 978-1-78374-674-3
DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0153

Cover image: Sama Alshaibi, Sabkhat al-Milḥ (Salt Flats) 2014, from the '*Silsila*' series, Chromogenic print mounted on Diasec, 47' diameter. © Sama Alshaibi and Ayyam Gallery. Cover design: Anna Gatti.

All paper used by Open Book Publishers is SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative), PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes) and Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC® certified).

# Contents

List of Contributors xi

Introduction: Women and Migration[s] 1
*D. Willis, E. Toscano and K. Brooks Nelson*

**Part One: Imagining Family and Migration 11**

1. Between Self and Memory 13
   *Ellyn Toscano*
2. Fragments of Memory: Writing the Migrant's Story 23
   *Anna Arabindan-Kesson*
3. A Congolese Woman's Life in Europe: A Postcolonial Diptych of Migration 39
   *Sandrine Colard*
4. Migrations 47
   *Kathy Engel*

**Part Two: Mobility and Migration 55**

5. Carrying Memory 57
   *Marianne Hirsch*
6. Making Through Motion 71
   *Wangechi Mutu*
7. Strange Set of Circumstances: White Artistic Migration and Crazy Quilt 79
   *Karen Finley*
8. Nora Holt: New Negro Composer and Jazz Age Goddess 91
   *Cheryl A. Wall*

**Part Three: Understanding Pathways** 105

9. *Silsila*: Linking Bodies, Deserts, Water 107
*Sama Alshaibi*

10. My Baby Saved My Life: Migration and Motherhood in an American High School 113
*Jessica Ingram*

11. Visualizing Displacement Above The Fold 121
*Lorie Novak*

12. Unveiling Violence: Gender and Migration in the Discourse of Right-Wing Populism 135
*Debora Spini*

13. A Different Lens 155
*Maaza Mengiste*

14. Reinventing the Spaces Within: The Early Images of Artist Lalla Essaydi 161
*Isolde Brielmaier*

15. Swimming with E. C. 167
*Kellie Jones*

**Part Four: Reclaiming Our Time** 193

16. Kinship, the Middle Passage, and the Origins of Racial Slavery 195
*Jennifer L. Morgan*

17. Black Women's Work: Resisting and Undoing Character Education and the 'Good' White Liberal Agenda 207
*Bettina L. Love*

18. Filipina Stories: Gabriela NY and Justice for Mary Jane Veloso 217
*Editha Mesina*

19. Women & Migrations: African Fashion's Global Takeover 227
*Allana Finley*

20. What Would It Mean to Sing A Black Girl's Song?: A Brief Statement on the Reality of Anti-Black Girl Terror 233
*Treva B. Lindsey*

**Part Five: Situated at the Edge** **241**

21. Fredi's Migration: Washington's Forgotten War on Hollywood 243
*Pamela Newkirk*

22. Julia de Burgos: Cultural Crossing and Iconicity 247
*Vanessa Pérez-Rosario*

23. Sarah Parker Remond's Black American Grand Tour 265
*Sirpa Salenius*

24. Making Latinx Art: Juana Valdes at the Crossroads of Latinx and Latin American Art 273
*Arlene Dávila*

25. Moving Mountains: Harriet Hosmer's Nineteenth-Century Italian Migration to Become the First Professional Woman Sculptor 283
*Patricia Cronin*

**Part Six: Transit, Transiting, and Transition** **299**

26. Urban Candy: Screens, Selfies and Imaginings 301
*Roshini Kempadoo*

27. Controlled Images and Cultural Reassembly: Material Black Girls Living in an Avatar World 323
*Joan Morgan*

28. Supershero Amrita Simla, Partitioned Once, Migrated Twice 331
*Sarah K. Khan*

29. Diaspora, Indigeneity, Queer Critique: Tracey Moffatt's Aesthetics of Dwelling in Displacement 345
*Gayatri Gopinath*

30. The Performance of Doubles: The Transposition of Gender and Race in Ming Wong's Life of Imitation 363
*Kalia Brooks Nelson*

**Part Seven: The World is Ours, Too** **377**

31. The Roots of Black American Women's Internationalism: Migrations of the Spirit and the Heart 379
*Francille Rusan Wilson*

32. 'The World is Ours, Too': Millennial Women and the New Black Travel Movement 395
*Tiffany M. Gill*

33. Performing a Life: Mattie Allen McAdoo's Odyssey from Ohio to South Africa, Australia and Beyond, 1890–1900 415
*Paulette Young*

34. 'I Don't Pay Those Borders No Mind At All': Audley E. Moore ('Queen Mother' Moore) — Grassroots Global Traveler and Activist 439
*Sharon Harley*

35. Löis Mailou Jones in the World 453
*Cheryl Finley*

**Part Eight: Emotional Cartography: Tracing the Personal** **471**

36. The Ones Who Leave… the Ones Who Are Left: Guyanese Migration Story 473
*Grace Aneiza Ali*

37. The Acton Photograph Archive: Between Representation and Re-Interpretation 491
*Alessandra Capodacqua*

38. Reconciliations at Sea: Reclaiming the Lusophone Archipelago in Mónica de Miranda's Video Works 505
*M. Neelika Jayawardane*

39. Transnational Minor Literature: Cristina Ali Farah's Somali Italian Stories 533
*Alessandra Di Maio*

40. Seizing Control of the Narrative 555
*Misan Sagay*

41. Migration as a Woman's Right: Stories from Comparative and Transnational Slavery Histories in the North Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds 561
*Gunja SenGupta*

42. The Sacred Migration of Sister Gertrude Morgan 581
*Imani Uzuri*

List of Illustrations 605

Index 619

# List of Contributors

**Sama Alshaibi's** work explores spaces of conflict and the power struggles that arise in the aftermath of war and exile. Drawing from her experiences as a Palestinian-Iraqi naturalized US citizen, she uses her body as an allegorical site that makes the byproducts of such struggles visible. Alshaibi's monograph, *Sand Rushes In* (2015) presents her Silsila series, which probes the human dimensions of migration, borders, and environmental demise. Silsila was exhibited at venues including the Venice Biennale, Honolulu Biennale, and Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. Alshaibi has also exhibited in solo and group shows at MoMA, Bronx Museum, Denver Museum of Contemporary Art, Ayyam Gallery, and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival. She received a Fulbright Fellowship to Palestine (2014–2015), and was named University of Arizona's 1885 Distinguished Scholar as a Professor of Photography.

**Grace Aneiza Ali** is an independent curator and a faculty member in the Department of Art and Public Policy, Tisch School of the Arts, NYU. She has organized two major exhibitions in the US focused on contemporary Guyanese artists at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art and the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute. Ali is also the Editorial Director of the award-winning OF NOTE magazine, an online magazine that features global artists using the arts as catalysts for activism and social change. Ali is a Fulbright Scholar, World Economic Forum Global Shaper, and Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts Curatorial Fellow. She was born in Guyana and lives in New York City.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson** is an assistant professor of African American and Black Diasporic art with a joint appointment in the Departments of African American Studies and Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. Born in Sri Lanka, she completed undergraduate degrees in New Zealand and Australia, worked as a Registered Nurse in the UK and finally moved to the United States in 2007 to begin a PhD in African American Studies and Art History at Yale University. In her teaching and research, she focuses on African American, Caribbean, and British Art, with an emphasis on histories of race, empire, and transatlantic visual culture in the long nineteenth century. She is currently completing a book entitled *The Currency of Cotton*: *Art, Empire and Commerce 1780–1900* examining processes of cultural exchange underpinned by histories of colonialism, and the legacies of these encounters in contemporary art practice. She has been the recipient of several fellowships, including from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Winterthur Library, Museum and Gardens and the Paul Mellon Center for Research in British Art. She was awarded an ACLS Collaborative Research Fellowship along with Professor Mia Bagneris of Tulane University, to complete a book entitled *Beyond Recovery*: *Reframing the Dialogues of Early African Diasporic Art and Visual Culture 1700–1900*.

**Isolde Brielmaier**, a scholar and curator, is Assistant Professor of Critical Studies in the Department of Photography, Imaging and Emerging Media at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University where she focuses on contemporary art and global visual culture, as well as media and technology as platforms within which to rethink storytelling, the politics of representation, and mobility in its broadest sense. She also serves as Curator-at-Large at the Tang Museum. Isolde has written extensively on contemporary art and culture, including numerous exhibition catalogue essays, journal articles, and reviews as well as books. Among her distinctions, Isolde has received fellowships from the Mellon and Ford foundations as well as the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). She serves on several non-profit boards and sits on the Board of Trustees of the New Museum. Isolde is deeply committed to the promotion of arts education, global women's issues, and criminal justice reform. She holds a PhD from Columbia University.

**Kalia Brooks Nelson** is a New-York-based independent curator and educator. Brooks Nelson is currently an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Photography and Imaging at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Brooks Nelson holds a PhD in Aesthetics and Art Theory from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts. She received her MA in Curatorial Practice from the California College of the Arts in 2006, and was a Helena Rubinstein Fellow in Critical Studies at the Whitney Independent Study Program 2007/2008. She has served as a consulting curator with the City of New York through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Gracie Mansion Conservancy. Brooks Nelson is also an ex-officio trustee on the Board of the Museum of the City of New York.

**Alessandra Capodacqua** is a photographer, teacher and a curator who lives and works in Florence, Italy. As an artist, she works with a variety of devices, from pinhole, toy, and digital cameras, to mobile to alternative printing process. She teaches photography in Italian and in English for national and international schools and colleges. Alessandra has curated exhibitions of photography and helped organize festivals of photography in Italy and abroad, such as the International Triennial Festival of Photography Backlight in Tampere, Finland and SI Fest 2016 in Savignano sul Rubicone. Her main area of interest is documentary photography, photojournalism, street photography, and visual storytelling. She is frequently invited to jury International Photo Awards and Prizes, and is a regular contributor to the LensCulture website. Her photographs are shown nationally and internationally. Her work is in private and public collections, including the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris, the MUSINF in Senigallia, and the Museo di Montelupone. Major publications include: *Autoritratto in Assenza* (2016); *Il Palazzo Magnifico* (2009); *Autori — Esperienze di fotografa stenopeica*; *Zone di Frontiera Urbana* (2007); *Valdarno, una visione in movimento* (2005); *Firenze Fotografa* (2000). www.alessandracapodacqua.com.

**Sandrine Colard** holds a PhD in Art History from Columbia University, and a MA in Africana Studies from New York University. She is a historian of Modern and Contemporary African Arts and Photography, with a focus on Central Africa. Based on research conducted in Belgium, Kinshasa and Lubumbashi (DRC), her current book project examines the history of photography in the colonial Congo (1885–1960). She has also published on the 'archival turn' in African arts, and in particular on the work of contemporary Congolese artist Sammy Baloji. She has taught and lectured at Columbia University and Barnard College, and has co-curated the exhibition *The Expanded Subject: New Perspectives in Photographic Portraiture from Africa* at the Wallach Art Gallery (2016). Among others, Sandrine's research was supported by fellowships from the Belgian-American Educational Foundation (BAEF), the Musée du Quai Branly, and the Pierre and Maria-Gaetana Matisse Fellowship Fund for 20th Century Art. Before joining NYU, Sandrine was a post-doctoral fellow at the Institut National d›Histoire de l›Art in Paris, affiliated with the 'Globalization and Emergence of New Creative Scenes in Africa' project.

**Patricia Cronin**'s work examines issues of gender, sexuality and social justice and has been exhibited in the US and abroad, including *Shrine For Girls* at the 56th Venice Biennale that traveled to The FLAG Art Foundation, NYC and The LAB, Dublin, Ireland. Other solo exhibitions were presented at the Capitoline Museum's Centrale Montemartini Museum; Newcomb Art Museum, Tulane University; and Brooklyn Museum. Cronin is the recipient of numerous awards including: the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant and two Pollock-Krasner Grants. Her works are in numerous museum collections, including the National Gallery of Art and Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC and Gallery of Modern Art and Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow, Scotland. She is the author of *Harriet Hosmer: Lost and Found, A Catalogue Raisonné* (2009) and *The Zenobia Scandal: A Meditation on Male Jealousy* (2013) and is Professor of Art at Brooklyn College/CUNY.

**Arlene Davila**'s work explores cultural politics in Latinx/Latin America focusing on issues of consumption, visual culture, urbanity and political economy. Davila is Professor of Anthropology and American Studies at New York University.

**Alessandra Di Maio** is Associate Professor of English and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Palermo, Italy. She divides her time between

Italy and the US, where she taught at several universities after earning her PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research includes postcolonial, black, diasporic, migratory, gender studies and transnational cultural identities. Her recent projects include a study of African Italian literature and the Black Mediterranean. She has been the recipient of a Fulbright scholarship, a UCLA Mellon postdoctoral fellowship, and a MacArthur Research and Writing Grant. Among her publications are *Tutuola at the University. The Italian Voice of a Yoruba Ancestor* (2000); *An African Renaissance* (2006); *Wor(l)ds in Progress. A Study of Contemporary Migrant Writings* (2008); and *Dedica a Wole Soyinka* (2012). She has translated into Italian Nuruddin Farah, Chris Abani, Caryl Phillips, and Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka.

**Kathy Engel** is Associate Arts Professor and Chair of the Department of Art & Public Policy, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Between 1980 and 2008, she co-founded and worked as an organizer, director, cultural worker, producer, communications and strategic consultant for numerous social justice projects and organizations, locally, nationally, and internationally. Her poems and essays have appeared widely in journals and anthologies. Books include *Ruth's Skirts* (2007); *The Kitchen*, accompanying the art of German Perez (2011), and *Banish the Tentative* (1987). She co-edited *We Begin Here*: *Poems for Palestine and Lebanon* with Kamal Boullata (2007). She is co-producer of the videos *talking nicaragua* (1983), and *On The Cusp* (2008). For more information, visit www.kathyengelpoet.com.

**Allana Finley** hails from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Before moving to Johannesburg in 2001 from Los Angeles/New York, she worked in fashion for such brands as Eileen Fisher, Tiffany & Co and Gucci America. While living in Los Angeles, she honed her skills as a fashion stylist, focusing on product placement and the marketing of fashion brands through celebrity client relationships. She served as Head of Wardrobe in Oxygen Media's inaugural year of operation, and dressed the likes of Candice Bergen and Tasha Smith during that time. Over the past fifteen years, her focus has been on business development and strategic marketing for leading event and designer development platform African Fashion International; a malaria elimination initiative founded by Robert Brozin, Goodbye Malaria; founding board member of the first ever South African Menswear Week; leading African designers Stoned Cherrie, CHULAAP, Rich Mnisi and online platforms oxosi.com and KISUA.com. She is a contributor to the book *African Catwalk* by Per Anders Pettersson (2016) which showcases an unexpected side of the African continent as it examines the fast growing fashion industry in Africa. This book is the first time the emerging African fashion industry has been documented in exclusive behind-the-scenes photographs.

**Cheryl Finley** is Associate Professor and Director of Visual Studies in the Department of the History of Art at Cornell University. She was trained in the History of Art and African American Studies at Yale University. Her chapter in this volume, 'Löis Mailou Jones in the World', is taken from her work examining the global art economy, focusing upon artists, museums, pedagogy, biennials and tourism. A longtime scholar of travel, tourism and migration, Finley is also engaged in the collaborative project 'Visualizing Travel, Gendering Diaspora' with Leigh Raiford (University of California, Berkeley) and Heike Raphael-Hernandez (University of Würtzburg) funded by the American Council of Learned Societies. Finley's research has been supported by the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, the Ford Foundation, the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Karen Finley** works in a variety of mediums such as installation, video, performance, public and visual art, music, and literature. She has performed and exhibited internationally. She is the author of eight books, including her latest, the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of *Shock Treatment* (2015). Her work includes 'Mandala: Reimagined Columbus Circle', an interactive walk that examines the symbols and history of Columbus Circle; 'Artist Anonymous', a self-help meeting for those addicted to art; 'Written in Sand', a performance of her writings on AIDS; 'Open Heart', a Holocaust memorial at Camp Gusen, Austria; 'Unicorn, Gratitude Mystery', a solo performance that explores the psychological portrayals of power that drives American election politics; and 'Sext Me if You Can', where Finley creates commissioned portraits inspired by 'sexts' received from the public. *Grabbing Pussy* was published in 2018. A recipient of many awards and grants, including a Guggenheim

Fellowship, she is an arts professor in Art and Public Policy at New York University.

**Tiffany M. Gill** is the inaugural Cochran Scholar and Associate Professor in the Department of Black American Studies and the Department of History at the University of Delaware. Her research and teaching interests include African American History, Women's History, the history of black entrepreneurship, fashion and beauty studies, and travel and migration throughout the African Diaspora. A graduate of Georgetown and Rutgers Universities, she is the author of *Beauty Shop Politics*: *African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (2010) which was awarded the 2010 Letitia Woods Brown Memorial Book Prize by the Association of Black Women Historians. In addition, she has served as a subject editor for African American National Biography, and has had her work published and reprinted in several journals and edited volumes. Before joining the faculty of the University of Delaware, Gill taught at the University of Texas at Austin and was a recipient of the 2010 Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award for excellence in undergraduate education. Currently, she is at work on a book manuscript chronicling the history of black international leisure travel since World War I.

**Gayatri Gopinath** is Associate Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies in the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University, and Director of the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality. She is the author of *Impossible Desires*: *Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005), and has published numerous essays on gender, sexuality and diaspora in journals such as *GLQ*, *Social Text*, *positions*, and *Diaspora*. Her book, *Unruly Visions*: *The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*, was published in 2018. Her recent articles and book chapters related to this project include: 'Queer Visual Excavations: Akram Zaatari, Hashem El Madani, and the Reframing of History in Lebanon' (2017); '"Who's Your Daddy?" Queer Diasporic Reframings of the Region' (2013); 'Archive, Affect and the Everyday: Queer Diasporic Re-Visions' (2010) and 'Queer Regions: Locating Lesbians in Sancharram' (2007).

**Sharon Harley**, Associate Professor in the African American Studies Department at the University of Maryland, College Park, researches and teaches black women's labor history and racial and gender politics in the African Diaspora. A leading scholar in the field of black women's history, she is the editor and a contributor to the noted anthologies *Sister Circle*: *Black Women and Work* (2002) and *Women's Labor in the Global Economy*: *Speaking in Multiple Voices* (2007). Her most recent essay is titled 'The Solidarity of Humanity: Anna Julia Cooper's Personal Encounters and Thinking about the Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Oppression.' As a fellow at the Harvard's Hutchins Center, she examined the political activism and romance between W. E. B. Du Bois and his second wife, international political and cultural activist Shirley Graham.

**Marianne Hirsch** writes about the transmission of memories of violence across generations, combining feminist theory with memory studies in global perspective. Her recent books include *The Generation of Postmemory*: *Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012); *Ghosts of Home*: *The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (2010), co-authored with Leo Spitzer; and *Rites of Return*: *Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (2011), co-edited with Nancy K. Miller. Hirsch is the William Peterfield Trent Professor of Comparative Literature and Gender Studies at Columbia University. She is one of the founders of Columbia's Center for the Study of Social Difference. She is a former President of the Modern Language Association of America and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Jessica Ingram** is a photo-conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to power, race, and American history. She uses photography, video, and audio to explore the ethos of communities and the power of belonging. She received her BFA from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and her MFA from California College of Arts & Crafts in San Francisco. Her traveling solo exhibition 'Road Through Midnight' was exhibited at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, The Tennessee State Museum in Nashville, and the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. She was included in the exhibition 'Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art' at the Nasher Museum, traveling to the Speed Museum in Louisville. Her collaborative projects have been featured at the Sundance Film Festival and installed publicly at the

Oakland International Airport, The Birmingham International Airport, and The Oakland Museum of California.

**M. Neelika Jayawardane** is Associate Professor of English at the State University of New York-Oswego, and an Honorary Research Associate at the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa (CISA), University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa). She is a founding member of the online magazine, *Africa is a Country*, where she was Senior Editor from 2010–2016. Her scholarly publications focus on the nexus between South African literature, photography, and the transnational/transhistorical implications of colonialism and apartheid on the body. Jayawardane contributed the introductory essay for the South Africa pavilion's 57th Venice Biennale catalogue, and essays for The Walther Collection's publication (2017) and other artists' catalogues. Her writing is featured in Al Jazeera English, Transitions, Aperture, Contemporary&, Art South Africa, Contemporary Practices: Visual Art from the Middle East, Even Magazine, and Research in African Literatures.

**Kellie Jones** is Associate Professor in Art History and Archaeology and a Faculty Fellow with the Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS) at Columbia University. Her research interests include African American and African Diaspora artists, Latinx and Latin American Artists, and issues in contemporary art and museum theory. Jones has received numerous awards for her work from the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, Harvard University; Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant and a term as Scholar-in-Residence at the Terra Foundation for American Art in Europe in Giverny, France. In 2016 she was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow. Jones's writings have appeared in exhibition catalogues and such journals as NKA, Artforum, Flash Art, Atlantica, and Third Text. She is the author of two books, *EyeMinded*: *Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (2011), and *South of Pico*: *African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (2017). Jones has also worked as a curator for over three decades and has numerous major national and international exhibitions to her credit. Her exhibition 'Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980', at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, was named one of the best exhibitions of 2011 and 2012 by *Artforum*, and best thematic show nationally by the International

Association of Art Critics (AICA). She was co-curator of 'Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the 1960s' (Brooklyn Museum), named one the best exhibitions of 2014 by *Artforum*.

**Roshini Kempadoo** is an international photographer, media artist and Reader at the University of Westminster, London, creating photographs, artworks and writings that interpret, analyse and reimagine historical experiences and memories as women's visual narratives. Central to this is to reconceptualise the visual archive, the subject of her monograph *Creole in the Archive*: *Imagery, Presence and Location of the Caribbean Figure* (2016). Roshini is a cultural activist and advocate. She was instrumental in establishing the association of black photographers Autograph ABP, established at Rivington Place, London and contributed to the development of *Ten.8 International Photographic Magazine* (1986–1990). Roshini studied visual communications and photography, creating photographs for exhibition including the seminal digital montage series 'ECU: European Currency Unfolds' (1992), Laing Gallery, Newcastle. She was a member of Format Women's Picture Agency (1983–2003). Roshini's artwork *FaceUp* explores taking selfies, mobile technology and diasporic urban life for the exhibition 'Ghosts: Keith Piper and Roshini Kempadoo' (2015), Lethaby Gallery, London. Her project 'Follow the Money' revisits the question of economic migration and inequality, women's bodies and European diaspora narratives. She is an editorial board member of *Small Axe*: *A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*.

**Sarah K. Khan**, a multimedia artist/journalist, focuses on women, migrants and food. Sarah makes visible their invisible lives via photography, cartography, film and writing. She partners with like-minded organizations and individuals to provoke thought about social injustices related to food, gender, culture, and the environment. Her arts training includes drawing in Mughal/Persian miniature techniques under Bashir Ahmed, Pakistan and The Prince's School, London, UK; paper- and bookmaking at Haystack Mountain School of Art, Maine; and with Mary Hark, Madison WI; letterpress printmaking intensives with Amos Paul Kennedy Jr., Gordo AL; photography mentoring from Faisal Abdu'Allah, Madison WI; collaborations with Meeta Mastani on handmade paper, block prints and textiles, Rajasthan India. Sarah earned a BA in Middle Eastern history/Arabic (Smith College), two

Masters (public health, nutrition, Columbia University) and a PhD (plant sciences, NY Botanical Garden/ CUNY). She has received grants and fellowships to pursue her work. She is fluent in French, proficient in Urdu/Hindi and Arabic and is based in NY, NY/Madison, WI.

**Treva Lindsey** is an Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Ohio State University. Her research and teaching interests include African American women's history, and black popular and expressive culture, black feminism(s). Her first book is entitled *Colored No More*: *Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington D.C.* (2017). She is the inaugural Equity for Women and Girls of Color Fellow at Harvard University (2016–2017). She is currently working on a book project tentatively titled 'Hear Our Screams: Black Women, Violence, and The Struggle for Justice'. She is the recipient of several awards and fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the National Women's Studies Association, and the Coca Cola Critical Difference for Women Committee. She is a guest contributor to forums such as Al Jazeera, BET, Complex Magazine, and Cosmopolitan.

**Bettina L. Love** is an award-winning professor at University of Georgia. Her research focuses on the ways in which urban youth negotiate Hip-Hop music and culture to form social, cultural, and political identities to create new and sustaining ways of thinking about urban education and intersectional social justice. For her work in the field, in 2016 Love was named the Nasir Jones Hiphop Fellow at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University. In April 2017, Love participated in a one-on-one public lecture with bell hooks focused on the liberatory education practices of Black and Brown children. In 2014, she was invited to the White House Research Conference on Girls to discuss her work focused on the lives of Black girls. She is the author of the book *Hip Hop's Li'l Sistas Speak*: *Negotiating Hip Hop Identities and Politics in the New South* (2012).

**Maaza Mengiste** is a novelist and essayist. Her debut novel, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, was selected by the Guardian as one of the ten best contemporary African books and named one of the best books of 2010 by *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Globe* and other publications.

Maaza's fiction and nonfiction examines the individual lives at stake during migration, war, and exile, and considers the intersections of photography and violence. Her work can be found in *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, BBC Radio, *World Literature Today*, *Words Without Borders*, *Lo straniero*, and *Lettre International*, among other places.

**Editha Mesina** was born in Quezon City, Philippines. Her photographs have been exhibited at the Cuchifritos Gallery, New York, Artist Space, New York; Clocktower Gallery, New York; Ceres Gallery, New York; A.I.R. Gallery, New York; Parrish Art Museum, Southampton; Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown; Philip Slein Gallery, St. Louis; Palais De Glace, Buenos Aires. Mesina is a member of the Faculty at NYU, Tisch's Department of Photography and Imaging. She is a 2006 Alex G. Nason New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow in Photography.

**Jennifer L. Morgan** is Professor of History in the department of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University where she also serves as Chair. She is the author of *Laboring Women*: *Gender and Reproduction in the Making of New World Slavery* (2004) and the co-editor of *Connexions*: *Histories of Race and Sex in America* (2016). Her research examines the intersections of gender and race in in the Black Atlantic world. She has published articles on women in the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade entitled 'Accounting for Excruciating Torment: Trans-Atlantic Passages' and 'Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism'. She is currently at work on a project that considers colonial numeracy, racism and the rise of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade tentatively entitled 'Accounting for the Women in Slavery'.

**Joan Morgan** is an award-winning feminist author and a doctoral candidate in NYU's American Studies program. A pioneering hip-hop journalist, Morgan coined the term 'hip-hop feminism' in 1999, when she published the groundbreaking book, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*. Her book has been used in college coursework across the country. Regarded internationally as an expert on the topics of hip-hop and gender, Morgan has made numerous television and radio appearances — among them MTV, BET, VH-1, CNN, WBAI's The Spin: The All Women's Media Panel and The Melissa Harris Perry Show.

Morgan has been a Visiting Instructor at Duke University where she taught 'The History of Hip-Hop Journalism', a Visiting Research Scholar at Vanderbilt University and Visiting Lecturer at Stanford University's Institute for the Diversity of the Arts where she was the recipient of the prestigious 2013 Dr. St. Clair Drake Teaching Award for her course 'The Pleasure Principle: A Post-Hip Hop Search for a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure'. She is the first Visiting Scholar to ever receive the award. She is also a recipient of the 2015 Woodrow Wilson Women's Studies Dissertation Fellowship, the 2015 Penfield Fellowship and the 2016 American Fellowship Award. Morgan's dissertation is entitled 'It's About Time We Got Off: Claiming a Pleasure Politic in Black Feminist Thought'.

**Wangechi Mutu**, a Kenyan born artist working between New York and Nairobi, studied at The Cooper Union and Yale University School of Art. Mutu participated in the 56th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art, Venice Biennale (2015) and has exhibited in solo shows worldwide including the Deutsche Guggenheim Museum, Berlin; Musée D'art Contemporain de Montréal; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; the Brooklyn Museum, amongst others. Mutu has presented solo exhibitions at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium and The Contemporary Austin, TX. Through a variety of media, including painting-collage, sculpture, performance and video, her work explores questions about self-image, gender constructs, cultural trauma and environmental destruction.

**Pamela Newkirk** is an award-winning journalist and multifaceted scholar whose work addresses the historical absence of multidimensional portraits of African descendants in scholarship and popular culture. Her latest book *Spectacle*: *The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga* (2015) examines how prevalent and pernicious racial attitudes contributed to the 1906 exhibition of a young Congolese man in the Bronx Zoo monkey house. *Spectacle* was listed among the Best Books of 2015 by NPR, The San Francisco Chronicle, The Boston Globe, The Huffington Post Black Voices and The Root, and won the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Non-Fiction Literature and the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation Legacy Award. Newkirk is the editor of *Letters from Black America* (2011) and *A Love No Less*: *More Than Two*

*Centuries of African American Love Letters* (2003), and is the author of *Within the Veil*: *Black Journalists, White Media* (2002). The book, which examines how race overtly and covertly influences news coverage, won the National Press Club Award for Media Criticism. Newkirk holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from New York University and Columbia University, respectively, and is professor of journalism and director of undergraduate studies in New York University's Arthur Carter Journalism Institute. She previously worked at four successive news organizations, including New York Newsday where she was part of a Pulitzer Prize-winning team. Her articles on media, race and African American art and culture have appeared in numerous publications including The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, The Nation and Artnews.

**Lorie Novak** is an artist and Professor of Photography & Imaging at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and Associate Faculty at The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. Her photographs, installations, and Internet projects explore issues of memory and transmission, the relationship between the intimate and the public, and the shifting cultural meanings of photographs. Her work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions, and she is the recipient of a 2016 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Photography. In her 'Above The Fold' project, she has saved the front-page sections of the New York Times from 1999 to the present and categorized them according to content of the photograph above the fold. She is also Director and Founder, Tisch Future Imagemakers, a participatory photography project offering free digital photography classes to NYC area high school students. For more information, see https://www.lorienovak.com

**Vanessa Pérez-Rosario** is Associate Professor of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies and managing editor of *Small Axe*: *A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*. She is author of *Becoming Julia de Burgos*: *The Making of a Puerto Rican Icon* (2014) and editor of *Hispanic Caribbean Literature of Migration*: *Narratives of Displacement* (2010). She recently completed a translation manuscript of Mayra Santos-Febres's 'Boat People' and has edited and translated the manuscript, 'I Am My Own Path: A Bilingual Anthology of the Writings of Julia de Burgos.' Pérez-Rosario is on the board of

Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project at the University of Houston, and former co-chair of the Latino Studies section of LASA.

**Misan Sagay** is an award-winning filmmaker, screenwriter and producer. She won the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Writing in a Motion Picture for Fox Searchlight's box office hit, 'BELLE'. The Belle script, nominated for a Humanitas Prize, was inspired by the true story of Dido Elizabeth Belle, the illegitimate mixed-race daughter of a British admiral who was raised by her aristocratic aunt and uncle. Sagay's producing and screenwriting credits include 'Secret Laughter of Women', starring Colin Firth and Nia Long, and the award-winning, critically acclaimed ABC television movie, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God', starring Halle Berry and executive produced by Oprah Winfrey. Sagay co-wrote 'Guerrilla' with John Ridley for Sky Atlantic and Showtime. She is writing 'Battersea Rise' for BBC, 'Imprinted' for ITV and 'Burma Boys' for Warner Bros. Misan Sagay is a member of BAFTA and the Academy for Motion Pictures where she sits on the Academy Nicholl Screenwriting Fellowships Committee and on the Writers Executive Branch.

**Sirpa Salenius,** native of Helsinki, taught at the University of Tokyo and at American university study abroad programs in Rome and Florence before moving to Finland to teach English and American literature at the University of Eastern Finland in 2016. Her conference presentations, lectures, and publications focus on Transatlantic Studies, in particular on American artists and writers in Italy. Her work looks at marginalization, race, gender, and sexuality, and the transgression of borders — social, cultural, and geographical. Her books include *An Abolitionist Abroad*: *Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe* (2016), *Rose Elizabeth Cleveland*: *First Lady and Literary Scholar* (2014), and an essay collection, edited together with Beth L. Lueck and Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Transatlantic Conversations*: *Nineteenth-Century American Women's Encounters with Italy and the Atlantic World* (2016). She has also co-edited an essay collection on *Race and Transatlantic Identities* (2017).

**Gunja SenGupta**'s interests lie in nineteenth-century US and slavery/abolition in the Indian Ocean; sectional conflict; African American and women's history. Her first book, *For God and Mammon*: *Evangelicals* *and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas* (1996), dealt with sectional conflict and consensus. *In From Slavery to Poverty*: *The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York, 1840–1918* (2009), she explored welfare debates as sites for negotiating identities of race, gender, and nation. Her articles have appeared in numerous journals including the American Historical Review, Journal of Negro (African American) History, Civil War History, and Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art. Her current projects, funded by Melon, Whiting, Wolfe, and Tow fellowships/grants, include one on nineteenth-century United States and slavery/abolition/empire in the Indian Ocean; and another on the history, memory and films of the Black Atlantic.

**Debora Spini** teaches Social Foundations at New York University in Florence. She is the author of various essays and book chapters in English and Italian on topics such as the transformation of public spaces, crisis of the modern self, secularization and post secularization. Her research interests focus on religion and political conflict, with a special concentration on gender as well as on monotheism and violence. On these topics, she has given lectures and participated in conferences and seminars in Europe, US, India and Brasil. She is the author of the monograph *La società civile post nazionale* (2006). With D. Armstrong, J. Gilson and V. Bello Spini co-edited the volume *Civil Society and International Governance* (2010). In her capacity as Vice President of the Forum for the Problems of Peace and War (www.onlineforum.it) she has promoted research on gender, religion and identity, now collected in the volume *Giovani musulmane in Italia. Percorsi biografici e pratiche quotidiane* (2015). Spini is a member of various scholarly societies including the Società Italiana di Filosofia Politica and the Società Italiana di Teoria Critica.

**Ellyn Toscano** is Senior Director of Programing, Partnerships and Community Engagement, NYU in Brooklyn and former Executive Director of New York University Florence. She is the founder of La Pietra Dialogues and the founding producer of The Season, a summer arts festival in Florence, Italy. Toscano co-organized Black Portraitures conference at NYU Florence and produced the exhibition 'ReSignifications', held at three venues in Florence, Italy. She is a member of the Boards of the Harbor Conservancy, New York, Museo Marino

Marini in Florence, Italy; of the John Brademas Center, New York; the Italian Advisory Council of the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, Umbertide, Italy; and the Comitato Promotore of the Festival degli Scrittori and the Premio Gregor von Rezzori, Santa Maddalena Foundation, Donnini, Italy. Before arriving at New York University Florence, Toscano served as Chief of Staff and Counsel to Congressman Jose Serrano of New York, was his chief policy advisor 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 and served on the boards of several prominent arts and cultural institutions in New York City, including The Bronx Museum of the Arts and the Brooklyn Academy of Music (representative of the Borough President), A lawyer by training, Toscano earned an LLM in International Law from New York University School of Law.

**Imani Uzuri** is a vocalist, composer and cultural worker who has been called ‘a post-modernist Bessie Smith’ by The Village Voice. Her work reflects her rural North Carolina roots singing spirituals and hymns with her grandmother and extended family. Uzuri has worked internationally in venues and festivals including Lincoln Center Out of Doors, SummerStage, Joe’s Pub, Public Theater, Performa Biennial, France’s Festival Sons d’hiver, London’s ICA, and MoMA. Uzuri has collaborated with a wide range of noted artists across various artistic disciplines. She is composer and co-lyricist for the musical GIRL Shakes Loose, selected for the 2016 O’Neill National Music Theater Conference. She was a Park Avenue Armory Artist-In-Residence in 2015–2016, a Jerome Foundation Composer/Sound Artist Fellow in 2016–17 and the recipient of a Map Fund award. In 2016 Uzuri made her Lincoln Center American Songbook debut as well as being a featured performer on BET for Black Girls Rock. She received her MA in 2016 from Columbia University in African American studies researching the liturgy, performativity and ‘subversive salvation’ of New Orleans-based preacher and artist Sister Gertrude Morgan (1900–80). She has written essays for *The Feminist Wire* and *Ebony* and her work is currently included in the anthology BAX 2016: Best American Experimental Writing. Uzuri is the founder and artistic director of Revolutionary Choir, community singing gatherings formed to teach historical and new songs of resistance and resilience. See www.imaniuzuri.com

**Cheryl A. Wall**, a distinguished critic in the field of African American literary studies, is Board of Governors Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English at Rutgers University and the author of *A Very Short Introduction to the Harlem Renaissance* (2016). Wall is also the author of *Worrying the Line*: *Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition* (2005) and *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995), and the editor of *Changing Our Own Words*: *Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women* (1989). She has edited two volumes of writing by Zora Neale Hurston for the Library of America — *Novels and Short Stories* (1995) and *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (1995); with Linda Holmes, she co-edited *Savoring the Salt*: *The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* (2008).

**Deborah Willis** is University Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and has an affiliated appointment with the College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Social & Cultural Analysis, Africana Studies, where she teaches courses on photography and imaging, iconicity, and cultural histories visualizing the black body, women, and gender. Her research examines photography's multifaceted histories, visual culture, the photographic history of Slavery and Emancipation, contemporary women photographers and beauty. She received the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship and was a Richard D. Cohen Fellow in African and African American Art, Hutchins Center, Harvard University and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow. Professor Willis received the NAACP Image Award in 2014 for her co-authored book (with Barbara Krauthamer) *Envisioning Emancipation*. Other notable projects include *The Black Female Body A Photographic History* (2002); *Reflections in Black*: *A History of Black Photographers–1840 to the Present* (2002); *Posing Beauty*: *African American Images from the 1890s to the Present* (2009); *Michelle Obama*: *The First Lady in Photographs* (2009), a NAACP Image Award Literature Winner; and *Black Venus 2010*: *They Called Her 'Hottentot'* (2010).

**Francille Rusan Wilson** is an intellectual and labor historian whose research examines the intersections between black labor movements, black intellectuals, and black women's history during the Jim Crow era. Her book, *The Segregated Scholars*: *Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890–1950* (2006) is a collective biography of the world and works of fifteen scholar-activists. *The Segregated Scholars* was awarded the Letitia Woods Brown Memorial Prize for the best book in black women's history by the Association of Black Women Historians. Wilson's works in progress include a study of the impact of racism and sexism on black women lawyers and social scientists before the Civil Rights Act and a history of black history movements, 1890–2015. She is Associate Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, and History at the University of Southern California and the current National Director of the Association of Black Women Historians.

**Paulette Young**, Cultural Anthropologist and Curator, is an independent scholar who lectures and provides ethnographic and archival research for cultural, educational, and business institutions. She is an educator and advisor in the visual and performing arts for a diverse range of museums, galleries and community-based organizations. Young has trained educators to integrate the arts of Africa and the diaspora in classroom curricula within the United States and at educational and cultural institutions abroad, including Japan, Germany, France, Kenya and Ghana. She holds a PhD from Columbia University. Young's research is concerned with the ways that women of African descent articulate power and meaning through the visual and verbal arts. She has been a visiting scholar at the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University where she developed and taught seminars incorporating film, literature, drama and the visual arts in courses entitled 'Visualizing African American Culture', 'Women and the Visual Arts in Africa' and the 'Diaspora and Africanisms in American Culture'. Prior to receiving her doctorate she was a museum educator and associate at the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, where she worked exhibitions and programs featuring modern artists including Jacob Lawrence, Constantin Brancusi, Georgia O'Keefe, Alfred Stieglitz and Man Ray. Young is Director of the Young Robertson Gallery in New York City. The gallery specializes in fine arts from Africa and the African Diaspora, with a focus on traditional African fine art, textiles and photography.

# Introduction: Women and Migration[s]

This edited volume *Women and Migration* examines the role photography, art, film, history, and writing play in identifying and remembering the migratory activities of women. The reader will explore a wide range of topics from interdisciplinary perspectives, including concepts of place, memory, globalization and the arts, photography and mobility, travel writing and food, experiences of refugees, the Caribbean Diaspora, border crossings, slavery and involuntary migration, displacement, marriage, indigeneity, pleasure, love, politics, war and family stories. To bring some order to this rich heterogeneity, the book is divided into eight parts that reflect these themes. Our authors, who come from many different nations, explore, interpret and reimagine ways in which we can discuss ideas and develop theories about migration. The interdisciplinarity of this project is rooted in its approaches to history, art, visual culture, and politics.

Part One, *Imagining Family and Migration*, offers the reader intimate personal narratives of migration. We learn how travel across borders and oceans affects families, and we learn more about the authors' connections to and re-articulations of homeland — as well as the corporeality of migration. Ellyn Toscano writes about silences and secrets within the family, exploring an unknown story about her grandmother's migration from South Carolina to a Home for Destitute Colored Children in Rye, New York when she was six years old. 'Between Self and Memory' is a story about racial passing, racial identity and a family secret in which Toscano writes about the consequences of deracination, concealment and the self-fashioning of transitive identities. Utilizing memoir, history

© 2019 D. Willis, E. Toscano and K. Brooks Nelson, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.43

and visual culture, 'The Impermanence of Place: Migration, Memory and Method' by Anna Arabindan Kesson reflects on her journey from Sri Lanka (her birthplace) to Australia and how that experience of migration shaped her scholarship. In 'A Congolese Woman's Life in Europe: A Post-Colonial Diptych of Migration', Sandrine Colard describes the photographs of her mother in her family photo album, as she chronicles her mother leaving the Congo, studying in Europe and getting married to Colard's Belgian father. Colard compares photographs of herself as a student and a professional with those of the young couple on their wedding day. Kathy Engel's 'Migrations' is a memoir-poem of the cultural work she has pursued over her lifetime working with women living in the United States, South America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and in South Africa. Engel includes her own discovery of what it means to migrate, something she learned not by direct experience but by listening to stories as a child and working with women who were fleeing violence.

Part Two, *Mobility and Migration*, gives the reader an insight into the creative methods used by artists to portray the transient and transcendental qualities of being in motion. This section explores the materials that women carry with them, while also probing the idea of 'woman' as the carrier of memories, stories, emotions, traditions, culture and religion. Marianne Hirsch's 'Carrying Memory' explores the connections between three distinctly twenty-first-century projects by women artists responding to mobility and migration: Argentinian artist Mirta Kupferminc, Kenyan/US artist Wangechi Mutu, and Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen. All three turn to the archive to explore how women carry the burden of a painful past in a way that attempts to look to the future. 'Making Through Motion, Art Practice Manifesto' explores how memory and metaphor shape Wangechi Mutu's practice. Mutu connects her life and migration to three generations of women in her family, drawing out themes of empowerment and independence. Karen Finley's 'Strange Set of Circumstances: White Artistic Migration and Crazy Quilt' reflects on her activism as an artist who was censored by the US during the 1990s. She discusses her own participation in the white migration that brought about the gentrification of low-income neighborhoods and considers how she benefited from censorship, having received recognition at the expense of the silencing of artists of color and the erasure of the cultural heritage of immigrant communities. Cheryl Wall's 'Nora

Holt: New Negro Composer and Jazz-Age Goddess' reflects on Holt's extraordinary life and the connections between movement and female self-invention.

In *Understanding Pathways,* the third section of the book, the authors offer insights into migrant experiences through images and documentation. The reader will encounter a diverse set of stories centered on the authors' approaches to researching, making and interpreting images that in some cases reveal and in others obscure preconceptions about identity, ethnicity and transnationality. '*Silsila*: Linking Bodies, Desert, Water' is a series of photographs by the Palestinian-Iraqi artist Sama Alshaibi. Alshaibi, whose family was exiled from two homelands, spent her formative years migrating across Middle-Eastern countries as a political refugee. She argues that any understanding of the socio-economic and political upheavals that Middle-Eastern women experience is complicated by problematic historical and contemporary depictions of them in photographs, which often reduce their challenges to what they wear. Alshaibi's photo essay offers an overview of various strategies she pursues in her own work to decode and subvert familiar images of Middle-Eastern women, while using a personal vernacular to describe her relationship with the many countries and cultures that have formed her identity. Jessica Ingram's 'My Baby Changed My Life: Migration and Motherhood in an American High School', expands on her social practice as a photographer committed to social change. Ingram photographed and worked closely with students at Hilltop High, a public high school for pregnant teenagers in the Mission District of San Francisco. Ingram portrays Hilltop as a crucial safe space for young women and their children who have emigrated to the United States.

Lorie Novak's 'Visualizing Displacement Above the Fold' looks at the placement of articles in the *New York Times* to explore how gender, displacement and migration are visualized and, at the same time, to highlight what is not photographed. In 'Unveiling Violence: Gender and Migration in Right-Wing European Populism' Debora Spini emphasizes how migrant women are constructed as 'others' and further how their bodies become the locus of discourses of domination that either turn them into prey or commodities. Maaza Mengiste's 'A Different Lens' is a meditation on how photography reshapes memory, using photographs taken by Italian colonial forces in Ethiopia from 1935–41 to understand more about how war was experienced by women and children — those villagers who did not make it into the history books. Isolde Brielmaier's 'Reinventing the Spaces Within: The Early Images of Artist Lalla Essaydi' highlights the critical role of the artist and her engagement with women in setting the stage for a broader discussion about migration. Kellie Jones's 'Swimming with E. C.' places the artwork of Elizabeth Catlett in the context of the political history of artists and others who worked between Mexico and the United States. Catlett's themes have remained consistent over time: celebrations of women — their power, their politics, their bodies, their bond with their children, and their culture. Her contribution can, in many ways, be considered part of the recent history of self-portraiture in art through the lenses of migration, photography and performance.

The essays in part four, *Reclaiming Our Time*, reveal narratives in which the intrinsic significance of women of color have been overlooked and ignored. Their authors critique debates about the legacy of colonialism and racism, and put forward new models to dismantle preexisting structures of power. In 'Kinship, the Middle Passage, and the Origins of Racial Slavery' Jennifer L. Morgan offers a revised perspective of the forced migration of women. She is concerned with how the seventeenth-century slave trade sets in motion a set of violent practices and assumptions that have particular implications for enslaved women. Bettina Love's 'Black Women's Work: Undoing Character Education' critiques concepts of civic engagement by Black women as they marshal new possibilities that focus on Black joy and Black radical imagination. Editha Mesina's photographic essay 'Gabriela NY and Justice for Mary Jane Veloso' focuses on a Filipina organization called Gabriela NY, a grassroots human rights feminist organization that advocates for migrant workers. Allana Finley's 'Women and Migrations: African Fashion's Global Takeover' shares her journey through African's diverse fashion industry, and chronicles her dedication to bringing African creatives into the global market. Treva B. Lindsey's 'What Would It Mean to Sing A Black Girl's Song?: A Brief Statement on the Reality of Anti-Black Girl Terror' focuses on Black femme insurgency as a contemporary liberation praxis that advocates for justice for Black women.

The essays in part five, *Situated at the Edge*, focus on women whose stories have been marginalized or forgotten in the histories of migration. Pamela Newkirk's 'Fredi Washington's Forgotten War on Hollywood' is a revelatory account on this overlooked actress who was one of Hollywood's and Broadway's pioneering African-American leading ladies. Newkirk highlights aspects of her noteworthy civil rights activism in the United States and abroad. Vanessa Perez Rosario's essay 'Julia de Burgos, Cultural Crossing and Iconicity' focuses on de Burgos's life, death, poetry, activism, and legacy, while highlighting the escape routes she created to transcend the rigid confines of gender in Puerto Rico in the 1930s. Sirpa Salenius examines a Black American female abolitionist's European travel in the nineteenth century in 'Sarah Parker Remond's Black American Grand Tour'. Remond participated in transatlantic struggles for social justice, moving beyond the borders of her nationality, race, and gender. Her travels and her detachment from her previous set of social conditions enabled her to propose a progressive model of Black womanhood — one of independence, intellectualism, and personal and professional success. Arlene Davila's 'Making Latinx Art: Juana Valdes at the Crossroads of Latinx and Latin American Art' addresses how the political economy of contemporary art markets impact the making of Latinx and Latin American art. Patricia Cronin's essay 'Moving Mountains: Harriet Hosmer's Nineteenth-Century Italian Migration to Become the First Professional Woman Sculptor' is a pioneering work that combines hand-painted images with art historical research to reveal the complexities of Hosmer's career, reputation, and legacy.

Expressing how identities shift through mediated sources such as film, music, and the internet, part six, *Transit, Transiting, Transition* explores mobility through alternate realities. Roshini Kempadoo's 'Urban Candy: Screens, Selfies and Imaginings' explores the itinerant imagery of her art project *Face Up* for the appropriateness of its response to current neoliberal politics and popular media. Kempadoo questions how difference is viewed when focusing on the Black women's body across the world. In 'Controlled Images and Cultural Reassembly: Material Black Girls Living in an Avatar World' Joan Morgan analyses the line between what is considered 'the real' self and what exists in digital space, suggesting that this division is at best blurred and more likely illusory. Sarah Khan's 'Supershero: Amrita, Partitioned Once, Migrated Twice' is an exploration of migrant stories through food. She illustrates Indian women farmers in their working environments and tells the story of farmers through the eyes of a seriously playful and playfully serious super shero, Amrita Simla. The Shero is neither oversexualized nor over-covered. She demonstrates agency based on her own experience, intellect, and humanity. In the essay 'Diaspora, Indigeneity, Queer Critique: Tracey Moffatt's Aesthetics of Dwelling in Displacement' by Gayatri Gopinath we experience identity and aesthetics through the same frame of different histories of dispossession and displacement, colonialism and racialization — without rendering them equivalent. Kalia Brooks Nelson's 'The Performance of Doubles: The Transposition of Gender and Race in Ming Wong's Life of Imitation' highlights Wong's work and the reception of gendered-racial narratives that are distributed through the international reach of Hollywood image culture, and received by audiences in other parts of the world. Wong's video intervenes in the cinematic depiction of racial passing, and the limitations that are enacted through this form of psychological doubling.

Part seven, *The World is Ours, Too*, is informed by mobility and desire, which frame studies of women traveling and finding their voices in countries and spaces from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. Francille Rusan Wilson's 'The Roots of Black Women's Internationalism' examines Black women activists' travel and writing from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century, and considers how their exposure to international debates on decolonization, women's rights, and missionary work helped to reshape the worldviews of Black American women's organizations, and expanded their conception of the possibility of sisterhood and common struggles across continents. Tiffany Gill's '"The World is Ours, Too": Millennial Women and the New Black Travel Movement' recounts how Black women in the early years of the civil rights movement built a 'travel movement' and explores how, in the early twenty-first century, the Black Lives Matter crusade has seen its resurgence. In this iteration Black millennial women, those 18–35 year olds who, in true millennial fashion, think they are the first to engage in this phenomenon, are at the forefront. Gill's essay explores the history of a movement that began in the 1940s and has a great deal to teach us about the tensions between political activism, leisure culture, and global freedom struggles. Paulette Young's essay '"I Want to do Something and be Something; I Want to Make a Name!" Performing a Life: Mattie Allen McAdoo's Odyssey from Ohio to South Africa, Australia and Beyond, 1890–1900' on musician Mattie Allen McAdoo, explores the ways in which Mattie navigated her role as wife, performer and African-American woman during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Young examines her migration from a student and musical prodigy in Ohio and a teacher in Washington, D.C., to her travels as an international performer and her return to the US as a race woman. Her presentation of self through professional photographic portraits taken in South Africa, Tasmania and the United States is a central visual component of this effort. Sharon Harley's chapter "I Don't Pay Those Borders No Mind At All": Audley E. Moore ('Queen Mother' Moore) — Grassroots Global Traveler and Activist' expands the conversation about female activism by showing that gender roles and class identity played a major part in shaping Black women's activism, vision, and travel at home and abroad. Cheryl Finley's 'Löis Mailou Jones in the World' examines the work, life and influence of Löis Mailou Jones as they relate to the themes of travel and migration — both literally and figuratively. As an artist and designer, Jones practiced, taught and utilized theories of travel and migration, most notably in her Art-Deco-era textile designs inspired by Art Nouveau and Chinoiserie, and the paintings from her Africa Series (1950s–1980s) inspired by her travels to Haiti in the 1950s and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

Part eight, *Emotional Cartography: Tracing the Persona*l, features Grace Aneiza Ali's 'The Ones Who Leave… the Ones Who Are Left: A Guyanese Migration Story', which offers a personal reflection on artists' experiences in Guyana. These particular experiences reveal universal tensions; they unveil the act of migration as a constant site of engagement and angst and explore what it means to be an immigrant in our twenty-first-century world. Through three distinct approaches — conceptual, portraiture, and documentary — three Guyanese artists unpack what drives one from their homeland as well as what keeps one emotionally and psychically tethered to it. Photographer Alessandra Capodacqua's 'The Acton Photograph Archive — Between Representation and Re-interpretation' mines a unique photography collection by selecting portraits of women that align with the standards of mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century portraiture whereby women were represented as symbols of beauty and purity. She focuses on the gaze of these women, arguing that it conveys different messages because their expressions could not be controlled by the photographer as they could by a painter, for instance. M. Neelika Jayawardane's 'Reconciliations at

Sea: Reclaiming the Lusophone Archipelago in Mónica de Miranda's Video Works' explores traditions of travel writing via memoir and film. Alessandra Di Maio's essay 'Minor Transnational Literature: Cristina Ali Farah's Somali Italian Narratives' investigates Farah's narratives and her use of language. Misan Sagay reflects on her scripting of a love story for an international television series in 'GUERILLA — Black Resistance Narrative Reinvented', which tells the story of a politically active couple whose relationship and values are tested when they liberate a political prisoner and form a radical underground cell in 1970s London. Gunja SenGupta's 'Migration as a Woman's Right: Stories from Comparative and Transnational Slavery Histories' explains that transnational history has yielded the important insight that migration makes meaning and that civic identities transform in transit from one place to another. This essay is woven from the archival traces of women on the margins, enslaved and free, who, through flight or emigration, appeared to seek reinvention. By nudging, navigating, narrating, and sometimes reshaping the contours of international borderlands, these women wrote themselves into the records that made and make history. Imani Uzuri's 'The Sacred Migration of Sister Gertrude Morgan' is based on the New Orleans street preacher, visual artist, musician and mystic who migrated from Georgia to New Orleans in 1939.

This book, featuring the contributions of forty-two women, began life during a conference and exhibition convened by Deborah Willis and Ellyn Toscano on the campus of New York University in Florence, Italy in June 2017. The initial workshop took place at New York University's Villa La Pietra in Florence, an ideal place to initiate this project because this site has been a nucleus for discussions about migration. In addition to the authors included in this volume, other participants in the workshop included Paula Giddings, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Sandra Jackson-Dumont, Karen Shimakawa, and Allyson Green. NYU Florence, through the programming of La Pietra Dialogues, has had a strong record of exploring migration since its inception in 2008, through conferences, talks and exhibitions, reflecting and responding to the unfolding crisis of hundreds of thousands of people arriving on the shores of Italy across the Mediterranean Sea from Africa, and many tragically perishing — drowning — in the desperate attempt to reach Europe. Even before the most recent wave of migration, African migrants were a common sight on the streets of Italy's cities, provoking surprise in students who had come to study in Italy influenced by a tourism-driven preconception of Italians. Since the sinking on 3 October 2013 of a ship less than a mile from the Italian island of Lampedusa, resulting in the death of more than 300 people believed to have been from Eritrea and Somalia, the attention of the world was focused on migration to the Mediterranean. Increasingly, that attention has become hostile.

In June of 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), created in 1950 in the aftermath of the Second World War to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes, reported that an unprecedented 68.5 million people around the world have been 'forcibly displaced' from their home. Among them are nearly 25.4 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18, and slightly less than half of whom are female.[1]

As Toni Morrison observed in *The Origin of Others*, 'Excluding the height of the slave trade in the nineteenth century, the mass movement of peoples in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is greater than it has ever been. It is a movement of workers, intellectuals, refugees, and immigrants, crossing oceans and continents, through customs offices or in flimsy boats, speaking multiple languages of trade, of political intervention, of persecution, war, violence and poverty'.[2]

Our perspective on migration is necessarily broad: the account of the migration of women comprises the totality of many stories. Women have been part of global and historical movements of peoples to escape war, to avoid persecution, for work, for security; we have been uprooted, stolen, trafficked, enslaved. We have moved rationally, for an education, a job, health care. We have been pushed off our land by climate change. We have moved and migrated for deeply private and personal reasons — to reach our potential freely, to lead a meaningful life, to secure a future for ourselves and our families. We have sailed, flown, driven and walked. Some of us have not survived the journey.

In this introduction we use the term migrations, using the expansive nature of the term to connote the geographic, legal, political, historical, temporal or other definitions. We include diasporas, internal movements and displacements, and international and transnational migrations. Ultimately, we leave it to our authors to respond to the term as they are inspired, hoping that diverse perspectives will enhance our collective understanding.

---

[1] UNHCR, Figures at a Glance, http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

[2] Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 93–94.

In the following essays and art projects, each author addresses questions and concerns that stem from varied experiences of migration from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first. Each chapter builds on current scholarship that focuses on women, migration, and citizenship, and explores perceptions of identity, race, gender, family, and work by examining the global movements of women.

We thank NYU's Global Institute for Advanced Study, Tisch School of the Arts, La Pietra Dialogues, the Ford Foundation and the Institute of International Education and Open Book Publishers of Cambridge, UK for their support and assistance in making this book possible.

# PART ONE

# IMAGINING FAMILY AND MIGRATION

# 1. Between Self and Memory

## *Ellyn Toscano*

It was through the investigation of a rich socialite and an ambitious librarian that the previously unknown racial identity of a six-year-old girl — my grandmother — came to light on a beach in Italy in the summer of 2010. I had not been looking for the complexity, coherence, or even the excitement that this investigation ultimately brought to me. Searching and researching Mary Godfrey's life, using incomplete and curated documentation, imagination and reconsidered recollections, I came to understand the consequences of migration, the liberty of withholding and concealment, and the powerful self-fashioning of transitive identities.

2010. August, the most unbearable summer month in Italy. I managed a week-long beach holiday, built around Ferragosto, the national holiday commemorating the Catholic belief that God took the body and soul of Mary into heaven at the end of her life on earth. I left my duties at Villa La Pietra, the house museum containing 6,000 objects including art, furniture, tapestry and textiles, sculptures, books and photographs, on a thirty-eight acre estate now owned by New York University.

The Villa and estate were previously owned by the Acton family. It was Hortense Mitchell, a wealthy socialite from Chicago, who purchased the fifteenth-century estate with the extraordinary fortune amassed by her father, one of the founders in 1874 of the Illinois Trust and Savings Bank in Chicago.

© 2019 Ellyn Toscano, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.01

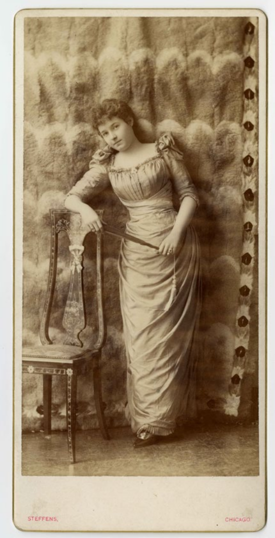


Fig. 1.1 Steffens Studio, Hortense Mitchell Acton. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

In 1903, Hortense married Arthur Acton, the rather less distinguished but socially ambitious adventurer with questionable lineage traced to the nineteenth-century historian Lord Acton. The marriage was unannounced, unexpected and without the fuss of the many society weddings in Chicago in which Hortense served as bridesmaid. Only her brother, Guy, and a passer-by witnessed the ceremony. Hortense and Arthur settled in Florence and began a life collecting art and entertaining. In July 1904 they started a family. Hortense never returned to live in Chicago. Pictures kept in an archive in Villa La Pietra reveal that Hortense had travelled extensively and adventurously before she married, apparently seeking a different life from that expected of young, rich debutantes of her day.

We can cobble together a sketchy understanding of her biography from newspaper accounts of her social life in Chicago and Florence, the treasure trove of photographs in the family archive, and the objects in her home attributable to her alone, such as a carefully preserved collection of fancy dresses with matching shoes, and her copious library of books, all readily identifiable as hers through the beautiful bookplates, one of which depicted a boat traveling at sea.

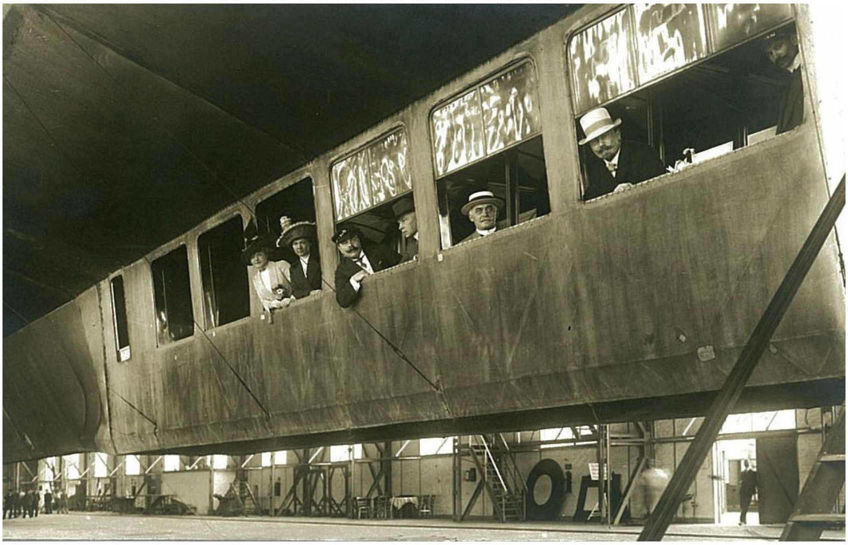


Fig. 1.2 Hortense Mitchell Acton travelling. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

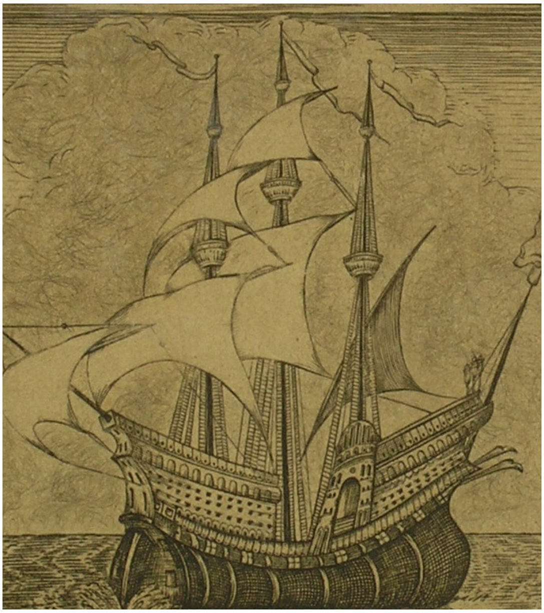


Fig. 1.3 Bookplate of Hortense Mitchell Acton. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

We know nothing about her motivation for uprooting her comfortable existence and emigrating to Florence. What was she leaving when she quit Chicago? What was she seeking? We treat her objects like totems; we imbue them with potent meaning and significance. In her fetishized presence in, and, at the same time pervasive absence from her home, Hortense is an alluring character. Aside from her wealth, was she extraordinary? Was it away from the ordinary that she was traveling?

My daughter wanted to be with her friends at the beach in Forte dei Marmi, but I wanted to be far away from the crowds of idle summer socialites. I elected to rent a room in a bed and breakfast near Pietrasanta, where I could rest by the pool and look at art when resting became too stressful. My goal was to tackle the 580-page book I had ordered months before entitled *An Illuminated Life, Belle da Costa Greene's Journey from Prejudice to Privilege* by Heidi Ardizzone. I had been drawn to this biography since the subject was an occasional companion of Bernard Berenson, the art historian who lived in Florence and was more or less a contemporary of Hortense and Arthur Acton (and an occasional visitor to Villa La Pietra). Fascinated by the intertwined lives of the large expat community in Florence during the early part of the twentieth century, the story of Bella, her employer J. P. Morgan and their relationships to the Florentine society of Hortense and Arthur Acton, I was reading for context of the life lived in and around the Villa. Myself, an 'expat', the rather more genteel word for immigrant, the question of why people choose to disrupt their lives, leave behind a regular, knowable and predictable life for an uncertain and precarious existence in an unknown place was increasingly on my mind. I, too, was a voluntary, privileged migrant in a historic city notorious for its legions of rich English and American expats and hordes of visiting students. I was always asked to account for myself, both by the community into which I had inserted myself and by that which I had left behind.

In 1905, Belle da Costa Greene (1879–1950) was a young librarian at Princeton University when banking tycoon J. P. Morgan hired her to help him to expand and organize his rare medieval and Renaissance book and illuminated manuscript collection. Belle probably developed her interest in books and manuscripts from her father, who had also begun his career as a librarian and professor. Belle was firmly established in the social circles of her supremely connected and well-heeled employer, frequenting the parties of wealthy cosmopolitans not unlike the Actons of Chicago and Florence. Through her travels to Florence with Morgan, she met and entered into a long affair with art historian Bernard Berenson. Heidi Ardizzone's research into Belle is exhaustive, in part relying on a substantial collection of letters from Belle to Berenson that Belle had expressly directed Berenson to destroy.

Belle was unmarried, exotic, private and beautiful, apparently alone in the world. Her exoticism and mystery were said to be the product of her Portuguese background. Ardizzone's biography, however, reveals that unbeknownst to Morgan, Berenson, and all of her social milieu, Belle was born Belle Marion Greener into a prominent Black family in Washington, D.C. Her father was Richard Theodore Greener, renowned as the first Black graduate of Harvard College in 1870, who had begun his career as the first Black librarian and professor at the University of South Carolina. Belle invented her name and Portuguese heritage in order to pass in white society.

Somewhere in the middle of this book, I stopped reading about Belle and J. P. Morgan and Bernard Berenson and stopped caring about the Actons. I started reading voraciously for clues. Somehow I realized that this story — this narrative of exoticism, intelligence, ambition, mystery and hiding — illuminated some of the unacknowledged secrets of my mother's family. Somehow I understood from Belle's story that the vague and inconsistent description I had been given of my grandmother's Cuban ancestry was, like Belle's Portuguese lineage, a fiction to mask a different heritage.

With my daughter sleeping at my side, and my exhaustion overcome by the adrenaline of the chase, I went online and accepted Ancestry.com's convenient introductory offer of two weeks of free genealogical research. I began searching for my grandmother with the scant and obviously unreliable information I could recall: I had been told that my grandmother had been brought from Cuba by her parents at the age of six or seven to Great Barrington, Massachusetts. My grandmother's name — Mary Godfrey — was one of the things that had caused my dissatisfaction with our meager family history: Godfrey was clearly not a Cuban name. In a moment of uncharacteristic curiosity during college, I had asked my mother about this inconsistency. My mother responded quickly and not very convincingly that the name had been changed from Maria Gutierrez.

I knew nothing else, nothing about her family or siblings. Nothing about the motives behind her leaving. Nothing about the strange choice of Great Barrington (the birthplace of W. E. B. Du Bois — how could this not be relevant to the story?). Nothing more than this sparse story of migration.

I began to search: Maria Gutierrez — Great Barrington — birth year 1900 plus or minus five years. Nothing. I altered the dates. Nothing. Changed Maria to Mary. Nothing. Finally, I entered Mary Godfrey, the suspect name under which she lived. One entry. Reading it, I froze. Mary Godfrey, 1910 Census, a fifteen-year-old negro servant in the white household of the Noonan family in Great Barrington. I stared for a long time. I knew this was my grandmother. It was late, 3am, but I had to keep looking. Reason told me that Mary Godfrey was too common a name to be sure that this single entry was my grandmother.

Further searching that morning revealed nothing and I spent the waning days of the summer on the hunt. Going through the military records of my mother's brother, killed in August 1944 in the Battle for Brittany, I found census records of the family in 1925, 1930 and 1940, all listing the family as 'colored' and giving various locations — Virginia, Massachusetts and South Carolina — as the birthplace of my grandmother. Never Cuba.

My mother was still alive when I discovered this history but I never confronted her with what I had found. Whatever she knew of her mother's life, I realized she did not want me to know and I did not want to confront her with this discovery at the end of her life. I could not help, however, picking around the edges a bit and once asked her how her mother had come to New York from Great Barrington. She answered, 'the church'. 'What church?' I asked, eager for any shred of information. 'St. Benedict's, on the west side', she replied, helpfully. When I arrived home I googled St. Benedict's.

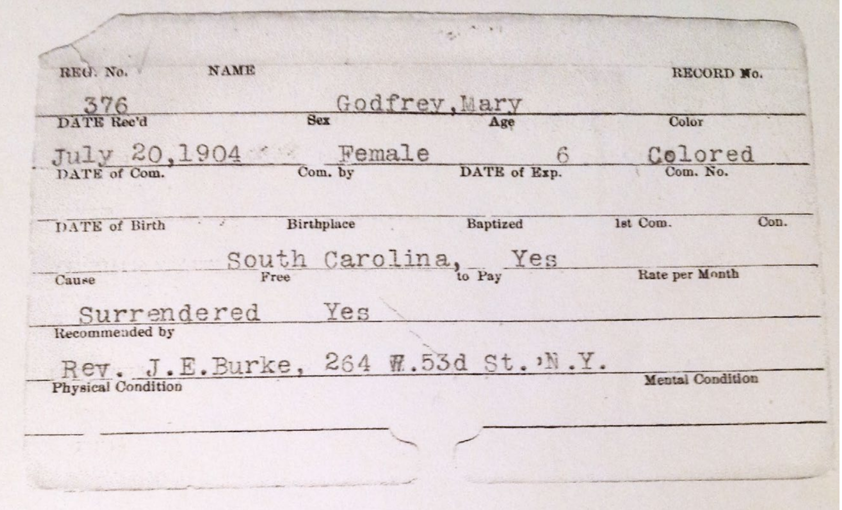
The Mission of St. Benedict the Moor was established in New York City in 1883 by Rev. Thomas Farrell, a Catholic priest with a church on Waverly Place who had come to be deeply troubled by the conditions in which the Black community lived in New York during the years just following the Civil War. In his will, he left money to establish a parish for that community. Rev. John E. Burke became the first pastor: he build the church and founded a home for poor Black children first located on Macdougal Street, then in Rye, New York.

Finding anything online from Italy beyond census documents proved challenging, though I spent many a night scrolling through records of Mary Godfreys. One night my eye fell on an entry for Mary Godfrey, a seven-year-old 'inmate' in Rye, New York. Thinking inmate a strange description for a seven-year-old child, I clicked on the entry and found the document that would provide the connective tissue between the haphazard documents I had found and give me the first evidence of my grandmother's origins in South Carolina: an entry in the 1905 New York State Census listing the children living at the St. Benedict's Home for Destitute Colored Children, the orphanage established by Rev. John E. Burke.

The following summer, back in New York, I was initially denied access to the records, with a helpful contribution to the church I was able to persuade a church employee to send me a copy of the record of Mary Godfrey, an index card containing information about her arrival into the home and her departure six years later.

In July 1904 (the same year that Hortense Mitchell Acton gave birth to the son who would leave La Pietra for New York University, and a few months before Bella da Costa Green was hired by J. P. Morgan) a six-year-old 'colored' girl named Mary Godfrey was surrendered to St. Benedict's Home for Destitute Colored Children in Rye, New York by a retired Catholic priest named Thomas F. Hopkins, from Summerville, South Carolina, Pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Charleston. The index card recording her admission into St. Benedict's listed her deceased mother as Mary F. Washington, a Catholic, but failed to name her father, noting only that he was alive, and Protestant. If it was known that he was alive and Protestant, surely his name was known, and omitted. I do not think I will ever find out who Mary's father was and I do not think his name was Godfrey. I suspect, but do not know, that Father Thomas F. Hopkins gave her that name as some sort of reference to his Catholic charity toward her. I suspect, but do not know, that Father Thomas F. Hopkins is key to discovering my grandmother's early life. According to the records of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston, Father Hopkins was pastor from 1894 until 1901, when he retired due to ill-health. That meant that he was no longer an active priest when he took my grandmother north. On 25 June 1904, roughly a month before 'surrendering' my grandmother to St. Benedict's Home, Father Hopkins, sixty-two years old, was issued a passport. On 22 August 1904, roughly one month after he delivered my grandmother to St. Benedict's, he died in Germany, at a resort noted for its salt springs, used to treat heart and nerve diseases.

What did he have to do with her and why did he undertake to bring her north? A further search of the records of the Home revealed that she was the only child he 'surrendered'.



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| REG. No. | NAME | RECORD No. |
| 376 | Godfrey, Mary | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| DATE Rec'd | Sex | Age | Color |
| July 20, 1904 | Female | 6 | Colored |
| DATE of Com. | Com. by | DATE of Exp. | Com. No. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DATE of Birth | Birthplace | Baptized | 1st Com. | Con. |
| | South Carolina, | Yes | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cause | Free | to Pay | Rate per Month |
| Surrendered | Yes | | |

Recommended by

Rev. J.E.Burke, 264 W.53d St. N.Y.

Physical Condition

Mental Condition

Fig. 1.4 Record of Admission to St. Benedicts Home for Destitute Colored Children. Author's collection.

Mary stayed at the Home until she was twelve (when children were discharged from St. Benedict's) and she was released on 2 March 1910 to another Irish priest, Rev. Thomas O'Keefe, the then priest at St. Benedict. The record book of students indicated that Mary Godfrey was 'adopted by Mrs. Noonan, Great Barrington, Mass, 3/2/1910,' the matriarch of the family, with whom Mary was listed as a servant in the 1910 census. The next traces of Mary Godfrey, also 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.

My grandmother's trip north could be considered part of the Great Migration, the exodus of African Americans leaving the south to seek out opportunity and freedom in the north in the early twentieth century. In *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson tells the stories of three Black migrants, writing that what bound their stories, and those of other migrants 'was the back-against-the-wall, reluctant yet hopeful search for something better, any place but where they were. They did what human beings looking for freedom, throughout history, have often done. They left.'[1]

Mary Godfrey did not leave, or go, she was brought. She was saved, or got out of the way. Whatever motivated Father Hopkins — Christian love, guilt, money, parental duty, a death-bed act of kindness hedging a life of luxury — he brought her north to an orphanage in which she would be educated, a right by no means certain in late-nineteenth-century South Carolina. She came north, barely aware of the south from which she was taken, taught the value of education and tempted by the luxury of self-determination. What she learned, or felt, or reached for or struggled toward is unknown to me except in the imprint she made on her daughter, a barely-Black woman, also unaware of or undaunted by limitation, and light-skinned and audacious enough to walk out of her fate.

I do not know that my grandmother ever acted to conceal her identity. It is more likely that she lived her life exploiting whatever good fortune she encountered. Mary Godfrey was not Belle Greener. Migrating, leaning forward with hope and innocence, does not always mean leaving something behind. Maybe you can make the past unimportant if not invisible.

Ultimately it is my mother I am searching because it is my mother from whom I am formed. I knew she was hiding something of her life from me and I knew she had memories that would never be mine to know. I could hear her silences. Like Hortense, she never belonged or wanted to belong — she wanted to remain sufficiently outside to stay in possession of herself, always free to retreat into some carefully preserved, comfortable and comforting secret self, always capable of annihilating an uncomfortable reality to make way for something more pleasant.

She was a powerful, willful and ultimately creative woman who deeply believed, as I think Mary Godfrey taught her, that one is the master of one's own identity, notwithstanding so much evidence to the contrary; that which is inconvenient or no longer relevant is expendable

---

[1] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*: *The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), pp. 14–15.

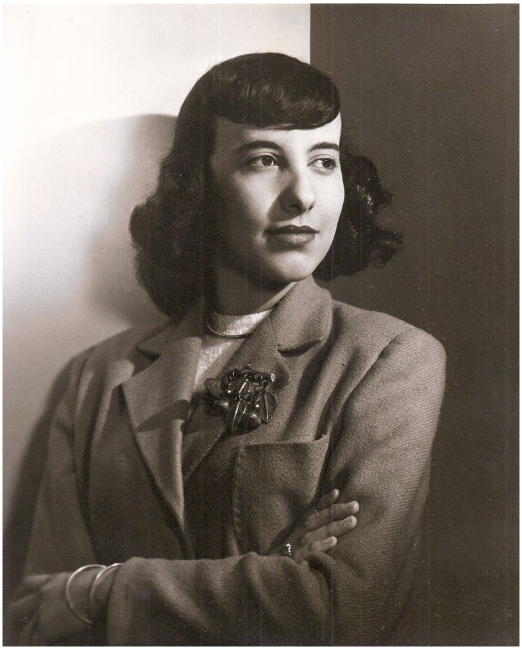


Fig. 1.5 Margo Ledee Toscano. Portrait photograph. Author's collection.

and there is nothing sacred, or even very genuine, about the truth. We moved frequently, migratory, never defining a home, never weighted by roots. If anyone 'passed' with any consciousness, it was my mother. If anybody chose to walk out of her history, to embrace a life of creative insecurity — like Belle Greener — it was my mother.

After she died, in going through old agendas and files, I found a ripped out page of a notebook, with random notes and reminders but with a scrawled sentence, written at a rising angle across the page, as my mother often wrote. The note said: 'I never shared my past because I felt these memories belonged to me.'

I use my imagination to fill in the lacunae and omissions of my history. I watch myself, trying to understand if I feel differently about my mother after what I have discovered. My migration is a sort of self-psychotherapy. The borders against which I push shift and waver and falter. I can never return to the place of my origin, or answer all of the questions I have — but this does not concern me. Ultimately, like my mother — and Hortense and Bella — my history is an act of creativity and imagination, an indulgence in not belonging, a migration.

# 2. Fragments of Memory: Writing the Migrant's Story[1]

### *Anna Arabindan-Kesson*

## Introduction

This narrative begins in 1983, when the events of what is now called 'Black July' — an anti-Tamil pogrom in Sri Lanka — took place over two weeks towards the end of that month; they reverberated for decades afterwards. For many Sri Lankans of my generation, and my parents', Black July led to a series of beginnings and endings. Families were torn apart as hundreds of Sri Lankan Tamils were killed. Thousands more were displaced and many permanently migrated. This violence led to a brutal civil war that lasted for almost three decades and shaped the development of a distinct Tamil diaspora across Europe, North America and Australia — a diaspora of which I have long been a conflicted member. I am, of course, aware that scholars warn against viewing Black July as the origin point for understanding Sri Lankan Tamil migration

---

[1] I am most grateful to Professor Deborah Willis for encouraging me to write about my own migrant experience for this volume. I am also grateful to the participants of the Migration and Gender workshop, held at Villa La Pietra in Florence in June 2017, for helpful feedback on this paper. The Australian writer Rajith Savanadasa was an extremely helpful interlocutor, especially in discussing narrative arcs, memory and the role of migrant stories in shaping cultural nationalism. Sugi Kossen, my mother, helped me to remember and this essay is dedicated to her.

© 2019 Anna Arabindan-Kesson, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.02

and the development of a diasporic identity.[2] However, I begin here because, as I reflect on the relationship between migration and memory, the events of Black July loom as an origin point that has shaped the trajectory of movement defining my experience of migration.

But beyond this physical experience of movement, I have lately begun to wonder about how these incidents and their legacies — which sometimes seem to overshadow anything that came before — also become important in the reconstitution of memory as a form of narrative. Describing the experience of migration seems so often like trying to navigate, or put in order, a series of episodes that are otherwise disjointed. This happened. Then that. The question is how can we *connect* these episodes. I would say then that I am 'fixated on moments',[3] because it seems the best way to describe my experience of migration: a life broken up into beginnings and endings, timelines that abruptly trail into memory, and memories loosely gathered to constitute experience. Sarah Manguso, the diarist and essayist, has suggested that this tendency is anxiety-inducing, because it obstructs an acceptance of life as ongoing or unfolding. Rather, a fixation on moments evokes something more deliberate and detailed, an instinct to record, observe, capture, strengthen memories in the hope that they become self-sustaining.

And this brings us to a key issue at stake in a migrant's story: memory. I do not only mean what we remember or forget, but how we use memory to tell stories. A migrant's story, or rather this migrant's story, is a register of fragmentation. And yet it is precisely this very sense of impermanence that I am called on constantly to rectify *through* my story, or so it seems. Migrants must move between what is transitory and what is lost, to create some link between what is known and what is remembered. What must we do, not only to plot moments in time, but simply to recover them? This act of recovery reminds me of Toni Morrison's description of memory as 'a form of willed creation.'[4] This description is even more apt when considering that migration necessarily 'implies an interruption in continuity […] a tear in the narrative line of […] stories.'[5] This discontinuity is often expressed as a kind of fragmentation: whether that be in the actual physical displacement of movement, or the psychological experience of being somewhat in between, neither from here nor there. Memory becomes a type of narrative formation that creates links, adds context, and delivers some kind of resolution.

---

[2] L. Michael Ratnapalan, 'Before and After 1983: The Impact of Theorising Sri Lankan Tamil Migration History Around the 1983 Colombo Riots', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37.2 (2014), 281–91. Scholars suggest that this event needs to be understood in relation to a longer history of Sri Lankan Tamil migration, and the multiple dynamics from which it has arisen. See for example Øivind Fuglerud, 'Time and Space in the Sri Lanka-Tamil Diaspora', *Nations and Nationalism*, 7.2 (2001), 195–213; idem, *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long-Distance Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999); John D. Rogers, 'Social Mobility, Popular Ideology, and Collective Violence in Modern Sri Lanka', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46.3 (1987), 583–602.

[3] Sarah Manguso, *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015), p. 25.

While we are all a product of the stories we formulate for, and about, ourselves, there seems to be something about telling your story as a migrant that is important, perhaps because a migrant must always have an account that justifies their existence, explains why and how they are *here*. Contemporary culture seems to value an arc that moves a subject temporally — from past to present — and spatially: from an old country to a new home. A migrant's story must reconcile the contradictions between being somewhere and going somewhere, and between displacement and located-ness. A migrant's story needs this cohesion because it is the best way to emphasize, or illustrate their successful integration into new places and nationalities.

But in articulating my own experience of migration, I wonder if the fragmentation that seems to follow the experience of migration is not simply a matter of mobility and geography; but is perhaps more powerfully expressed by the 'partial nature of […] memories, their fragmentation […] The shards of memory [that] acquire greater status, greater resonance because they were remains; fragmentation make[s] trivial things seem like symbols and the mundane acquire[s] numinous qualities.'[6] This raises the question not only of what we remember, but *with* what do we remember in our acts of willful creation?

---

[4] Toni Morrison, 'Memory, Creation and Writing', *Thought*, 59.235 (1984), 385–91 (p. 385).

[5] Vera Eliasova, 'Constructing Continuities: Narratives of Migration by Iva Pekårkovå and Dubravka Ugresic', in Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru, Madalina Nicolaescu, and Helen Smith (eds.), *Between History and Personal Narrative*: *Eastern European Women's Stories of Migration in the New Millennium* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), pp. 229–48 (p. 229).

## Black July

And so I return to those events of Black July and their aftermath. I have, of course, the official history, the one that spells out the facts or the chronology of events. The circumstances that led to Black July began in the northern city of Jaffna — a majority Tamil community. While conflict between the Sinhalese majority government and Tamil activists had been taking place for several years, and the government had already begun attempting to suppress Tamil activism to regain control of the area, one particular event eventually became the catalyst for the resulting riots. On Saturday 23 July 1983, a group of rebel Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Ealam (LTTE) ambushed a Sri Lankan military patrol (apparently in retaliation for the alleged rape of two Tamil schoolgirls). The ambush resulted in the deaths of fifteen soldiers and received widespread media attention. Rather than holding the funeral in Jaffna, the bodies were flown to Colombo, the capital city, the next day for a military funeral that was eventually called off. Following this change of plans, the already angry crowd began destroying and looting Tamil-owned businesses in the nearby area. On Monday, when an official curfew was called, the violence spread across the city. More Tamil-owned businesses and homes were destroyed and set on fire. Tamil residents were attacked, beaten and set alight. They were raped, hacked with knives and decapitated. In the Welikade prison, thirty-five Tamil political prisoners, still awaiting trial, were massacred by Sinhalese prisoners. It has become clear now that the violence of Black July was supported, or at least enabled, by political and government officials. The powerful Buddhist monk community, who fanned anti-Tamil sentiment in urban and rural areas, also encouraged it. Police did very little, or nothing, to intervene — often joining in with the rioters. Rioters were also in possession of electoral rolls that allowed them to systematically identify and target Tamil residences, and they were transported in government-owned buses.[7] The riots spread to towns outside Colombo — including towns where communities of Indian-Tamils lived — but after about a week the violence had dissipated. The government response focused on assuaging the fears of the Sinhalese community, including passing the Sixth Amendment in August 1983, which outlawed support for a separate state within Sri Lanka. The main opposition party, and the only real democratic political voice for Tamils, the Tamil United Liberation Front, refused to take the oath, and left for Tamil Nadu in India; in its place came several armed Tamil militant groups, and over the next three decades the country descended into a bloody civil war. Immediately after the events of Black July, displaced Tamils in Colombo were housed in various refugee camps that were set up in schools and Hindu temples. Others began evacuating the city and fled to Jaffna, while many escaped from the country altogether and sought refuge in Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States. Up to a million Tamils have left Sri Lanka since Black July, while around the same number remain internally displaced following the end of the civil war.[8]

---

[6] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*: *Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992), p. 12.

Of course this history misses another, which is that the events leading to the violence of July 1983 emerge from years of discrimination against the minority Tamil population of Sri Lanka, and intermittent violence between Tamils and the majority Sinhala population since the country's independence in 1948. Under British rule, the Tamils were favored and hired in greater numbers within colonial administrations. After independence, the divisions that had been created between the minority Tamil and the majority Sinhalese communities took specific social and economic forms. Perhaps most significant was the passage of the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 which replaced English with Sinhala as the language of government and education. This measure effectively disbarred non-Sinhala-speaking minorities from public service employment. The legacy of these restrictions was violence, the nurturing of extremist groups — both Sinhala and Tamil — and the formation of a desire for a protected Tamil homeland in the north of the Island, where most of the Sri Lankan Tamil population were located. It's also important to mention that when talking about the social and political formation of the Tamil community, and their diasporic identity, I am referring to Sri Lankan Tamils. There is a problematic division in Sri Lanka (still) between Sri Lankan and so called Indian Tamils. Sri Lankan Tamils trace their heritage in the country back for 2-3,000 years, and continue to predominate in professional jobs and bureaucracy. Indian Tamils on the other hand, tend to live in the center of the island close to its plantations, and are descended from the indentured laborers brought across from India by the British in the nineteenth century to work on coffee, tea and rubber plantations. Although both groups originated from India at some point, the political demands and anti-government violence of groups like the LTTE were created specifically on behalf of these Sri Lankan Tamils, and it is this community of Tamils to which my family belongs, and who were overwhelmingly targeted by the events of Black July.[9]

---

[7] Judith Betts and Claire Higgins, 'The Sri Lankan Civil War and Australia's Migration Policy Response: A Historical Case Study with Contemporary Implications', *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 4.2 (2017), 272–85 (p. 274).

[8] For more on this see Rogers, 'Social Mobility'; Amarnath Amarasingam, *Pain, Pride, and Politics*: *Social Movement Activism and the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Canada* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015); A. R. Sriskanda Rajah, *Government and Politics in Sri Lanka*: *Biopolitics and Security* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2017); Sharika Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*: *Civil War in Sri Lanka* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Katrina M. Powell, *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacemen*t (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

## Shards of Memory

This simplified 'official' historical narrative is a backdrop for some of my earliest — and partial — memories. To aid them, I looked for pictures of Black July. Photographs popped up on my computer screen of charred bodies, vandalized buildings and burnt-out cars that filled in the details I no longer recalled or never had to witness. Two images stood out in particular, both depicting burnt-out shells: one a car, the other a house. Both were Black and white — clearly news footage taken in the aftermath of civil disturbance. As a result, they had a snapshot quality, as if the photographer had come upon the scene suddenly. In one image they have trained their camera on a lone woman as she surveys the damage done to what is presumably her home. We see her through a large window frame as she steps over debris lying inside and outside the house. Wooden stakes and sheets of corrugated iron lie on the grass while charred concrete walls reveal the source of the damage. As the woman looks down, a grey sky and tree branches take the place of the fallen roof. Another photograph shows a battered car sunken into the roadside, brought to a stop on a street lined with shop fronts. Wreckage from the surrounding structures lies in piles across the road. The passenger door is wide open and the windscreen blown out. What we cannot see are the accompanying burnt bodies of the passengers and driver, and beyond the car we might wonder whether, amidst the strewn debris, there are more bodies lying abandoned, beaten and burnt.

---

[9] Betts and Higgins, 'The Sri Lankan Civil War and Australia's Migration Policy Response', pp. 274–75.

The destroyed car reminds me of what could have happened to my father, my mother or myself had we traveled home that afternoon and not been protected by friends. Monday 25 July 1983 comes to me in fragments. I was nearing five years old and I had spent the day with my father at his office in the Dutch Reformed Church of Wellawatte. The church, part of a denomination established under colonial Dutch rule, is located in a predominantly Tamil neighborhood, in one of the areas that was most affected by the rioting. We were about to leave when someone urged us to return inside, warning us of the violence and the government curfew. Somewhere else in the city, my mother walked towards a bus stop. Having spent the morning teaching at one of Colombo's private girls' schools, Methodist College, she was returning home. As my father and I walked back into his office, preparing to spend the night there, my mother was approached by a Sinhalese man driving a van. He was the father of one of her students, and he probably saved her life by driving her to a friend's home — not before having to talk down a group of angry men and convince them she was not Tamil — where she could stay safely for the night.

These photographs provide a backdrop — a literal 'outside' — for the inner workings of my memory. They show me, now, what I couldn't see then; they reveal what was happening around me. Even now the ferocity of the violence they depict startles me and makes me question my own memories: was news of the rioting, or at least the intensity of the violence, not widely broadcast? Had my father and mother really not known how dangerous it was to travel that day? So why were we leaving? These questions remain unanswered: my father has passed away; my mother cannot — perhaps will not — remember the ins and outs of that day any longer. They are testaments to the unresolved tensions that permeate my memories — that feeling that I'll never *really* know what happened — and reminders of the very real danger we faced on that Monday afternoon.

I am grateful that my memories of that period are vague; the photographs that emerge on my computer screen are graphic enough. And yet, I find I need them to locate and to stand in for scenes I cannot remember. As we waited in my father's office, my grandparents lost everything. The photograph of the woman standing in her house looking at the ruins of her life is a proxy for my grandmother, whose home was burnt to the ground that Monday as she fled from an angry mob while carrying my infant cousin. Like the woman in the photograph, I imagine my grandmother returning to the ruins of her house and searching amid the charred remains for anything that could be salvaged. Their story of narrow escape was not uncommon. And while Sinhalese mobs roamed the streets, many Tamils were also saved by their Sinhalese neighbors and friends. These extraordinary yet everyday life-saving acts continue to challenge both government and Tamil separatist propaganda that reinforced divisions along ethnic lines. But like the haziness of memories, such acts often slip away from official accounts and are buried or pushed aside. Yet this is what kept us alive. This, and refugee camps: first we sheltered in a Hindu temple, then a school. It was crowded; we must have slept in dormitories and used children's bathrooms. Food was passed around as we sat on the floor. In these cramped spaces we said goodbye to my grandparents and aunt — neither of whom we would see for several years. This was the last time we would ever all live in the same country, let alone the same city. From the refugee camps we were ferried in a van with blacked-out windows to an American friend's home. Here we stayed — or rather hid — for a week or two. Once it was safe to return home, our family was dispersed. We remained in Colombo while my aunt and grandparents traveled north to Jaffna and then east to India where they were resettled. It would be at least a decade before they returned to their homeland.

## Beginnings and Endings

While the events of Black July are captured in chilling photographs permanently embedded in the nation's psyche, for my family and many others its violence was not solely the loss of livelihood and homes, but violence of a different nature — an erasure of family history. In this sense its position as both beginning and ending — a moment always caught between remembering and forgetting — becomes even more prescient. Like many other Tamils who had to flee for their lives, my grandparents lost their treasured photo albums. These albums had pages of stiff black paper and each photograph was pasted onto the page and sometimes had a caption written next to it with colored pen. They were willful creations too, a repository of carefully accumulated narratives and family archives. But now, our family has precious few images of their life before 1983 and this loss is a wound that my grandmother carries with her still. It has always struck me as somewhat ironic that my grandparents married during the year of Sri Lankan independence. Their lives together followed the course of the life of the nation. While both lives were well documented, it was the destruction of one history — the personal — in the interests of the other — the national — that essentially constitutes what Black July has come to mean for me.

Today when a pre-1983 photograph of the house, or the family, surfaces we eagerly scan, email and text them to each other. And as they make their way between Australia, Sri Lanka, Canada and the United States they reconnect us all again, becoming tangible proof of where we once were, and what our family once was. Now the tangibility of a photo album has been replaced by a digital archive somewhere on the Cloud where these memories accumulate, amongst others, in some kind of permanent form. Now we can print and reprint them without fear of their being lost again. But there is loss deeply buried in these photographs, and a sense of strangeness that for me has grown with time, towards a country in which I am, now, effectively a foreigner. And so, if migrant stories have origin moments, then July 1983 is both a beginning and an ending. In a short while we went from being citizens to fugitives; driven across the city in secret, hiding in cupboards and bedrooms. It signaled the end of my family's close-knit life, and the beginning of a dislocation and a self-conscious awareness that difference can mean disposability. It also marked the beginning of the end of my life in Sri Lanka. A year later I was living in a small country town in Australia, a world away from the urban sprawl of Colombo.

## A Migrant's Photograph

There was no going back home for many of us in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora after 1983. What would we go back home to? And so we made homes elsewhere. In contrast to the lack of photographs I have of life in Sri Lanka, there are many of our lives in Australia. We were the quintessential South Asian immigrants in a country undergoing a severe backlash against Asian immigration.[10] Refusing to speak Tamil anymore, I quickly lost my accent but not my culinary tastes; I fell in love with Michael Jackson, Boy George, spiral perms and blonde hair. I watched TV endlessly, was fascinated by eighties fashion and hated the cold.

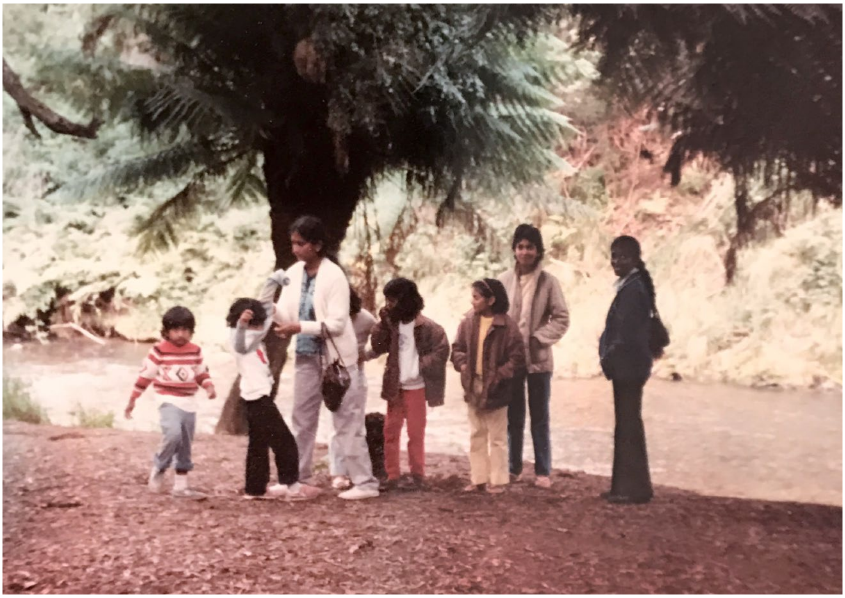


Fig 2.1 Photographer unknown. Author with mother and friends, August 1984. Author's collection. © Anna Arabindan-Kesson.

---

[10] See especially Andrew Jakubowicz, 'Racism, Multiculturalism and the Immigration Debate in Australia: A Bibliographic Essay', *Sage Race Relations Abstracts*, 10.3 (1985), 1–15; James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*: *The Story of Australian Immigration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michael Wesley, *There Goes the Neighbourhood*: *Australia and the Rise of Asia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2011).

Take Fig. 2.1 for example; it is a fairly banal group photograph of children and women. I am there in the center of the photograph, giggling or whispering, wearing pink trousers, a white jumper (sweater) and a dark coat. My mother stands a little to the right, dressed in dark trousers and a jacket, her long hair plaited down her back. We are there with four other little girls and their mothers: family friends of my parents who had moved to Australia to leave the violence of Sri Lanka. We range in skin tone and wear clothes that suggest it was probably cool. We face the camera, standing with our backs to the river and lush vegetation on its banks. Our mid-80s, outdoor clothing suggests we were on a hike or picnic, probably in Geelong: the town we lived in, located about an hour from Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria. I don't remember all the people in this photograph, or even the day particularly, but beneath its banality lies something more profound and also perhaps more generic. This is one of those migrant photographs, and I'm struggling to think of what else to call it; you'll see it in so many front rooms or on the walls of immigrant families. It's the kind of photograph that all immigrants take at some point, a photo that is both full of discomfort and full of hope, a photo that shows one's acculturation and strangeness, an image that is full of impermanence, even as it is meant to cement some kind of permanence.

When I look at this photograph I see a group of Sri Lankan women and children. We are dressed warmly because even a slight chill in the air is unbearable at this stage: most of us had only been in Australia for a year or two. Everything is still strangely alien here, even a picnic. At home a picnic would mean bringing carefully wrapped packets of rice and curry, sambal, fried treats, perhaps mangos and plantains, thermoses of milk tea and bottles of water. In Australia picnics meant sandwiches and a drink, some chips, perhaps raw vegetables. So we probably tried to achieve a happy medium, but inevitably there would have been some kind of curry. I look at this photograph and try to remember what it was like to be in that landscape: the trees, the water, the grass — all so very different to anything I'd seen before. We are trying to look 'at home' — we smile, we spread out, we appear to be comfortable and yet almost everything about this image is a reminder of how alien we were. I look at this photograph and imagine it being sent back home to Sri Lanka. Our relatives would have found the scenery interesting; they would have shaken their heads and probably felt a little sorry for us in our warm clothes; they would have wondered where we were, what the trees were called, how far away from the city we were, and what we ate. The adults in the group had known each other at home, so my family would have seen both our new life and its older roots.

If Black July was one beginning, here is another. As a photograph that simultaneously reveals both the desire for diasporic connection and its limits, this image also takes me back to where I began this chapter, arguing that the migrant's narrative must somehow reconcile the contradictory experiences of being both in, and yet out of, place. That is why we take so many of these photographs that seem to anchor us and validate us, even as, from another perspective, they only highlight the discontinuity that inevitably comes with geographical displacement. This photograph suggests that the experience of fragmentation is — simply — a subject position, a way of inhabiting place that relies more on discontinuity and impermanence than it does on a sense of completion.

Migrants always have to carry their story with them — and it is usually one that arcs from impermanence to something like permanence. By moving from Black July to new beginnings in Australia I too might be reinforcing a narrative for which we migrants seem to be responsible: reconciling contradictions between displacement and located-ness. And yet as I've tried to trace some of my own narrative here, I realize it is precisely these contradictions that lead to this fixation on particular moments, on beginnings and endings. Furthermore, as I write this I realize that I can hardly distinguish between my memory of these events and what I may recall of them from photographs. Photographs become both an act of storytelling and a memory device as they arrest time and apportion it out into segments.[11] Like remnants of memory, these images present fragmented views that are fixed on particular moments that nevertheless come to exist as if outside the gradient of chronological time. Images and memory activate each other, acting as stand-ins for what is missing or incomplete. By appreciating the fragmented nature of image-making and the remnants of memory, we can halt the otherwise unidirectional narrative of migration by rejecting a timeline focused on resolution, and bringing into focus details that might otherwise go unmentioned.

---

[11] See especially Elaine Wachtel, 'Ghost Hunter', in Lynne Sharon Schwartz (ed.), *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W. G. Sebald* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), pp. 37–63; Scott D. Denham and Mark Richard McCulloh, *W. G. Sebald: History, Memory, Trauma* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).

The story I have set out is as much an act of creation as it is a set of 'real' events that unfolded across multiple geographies. It is a story that is reassembled from shards — of memory and images — and so it may be a different story to the one my parents or my grandparents might have told. It is a story made up of impressions that, even when pulled together, never quite cover over the disjuncture and impermanence that migration can set in place. But then my aim here has not been to map a linear trajectory (this happened, then that), but to explore what it might mean to deliberately, willfully, remember. This is of course the basis of any kind of memoir and is the direction this short essay has taken. But what I have also tried to highlight here is how memoir, as an act of self-creation and re-creation, might also mirror a desire to visualize and image — connecting it with the memorial impulse that is embedded in the act of photography. This is an impulse that Teju Cole has elsewhere described as concerned with the act of retention, just as it also suggests a form of recording.[12] This relationship between memory and photography brings us full circle, and is perhaps what connects the fixations of an immigrant and those of an art historian. It is a relationship that revolves around a joint fascination with the impulse not just to remember but to select, retain and preserve, to constantly reframe and locate oneself in response to these experiences of impermanence without ever losing sight of their fragmentary nature.

---

[12] Teju Cole, 'Memories of Things Unseen', *The New York Times*, 14 October 2015, 'Magazine' section, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/18/magazine/memories-of-things-unseen.html; Teju Cole, *Known and Strange Things*: *Essays* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2016), pp. 196–221.

# Bibliography

Amarasingam, Amarnath, *Pain, Pride, and Politics*: *Social Movement Activism and the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Canada* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

Betts, Judith, and Claire Higgins, 'The Sri Lankan Civil War and Australia's Migration Policy Response: A Historical Case Study with Contemporary Implications', *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 4 (2017), 272–85, https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.181

Cole, Teju, *Known and Strange Things*: *Essays* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2016).

—, 'Memories of Things Unseen', *The New York Times*, 14 October 2015, 'Magazine' section, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/18/magazine/memories-of-things-unseen.html

Denham, Scott D., and Mark Richard McCulloh, *W. G. Sebald*: *History*, *Memory*, *Trauma* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).

Eliasova, Vera, 'Constructing Continuities: Narratives of Migration by Iva Pekårkovå and Dubravka Ugresic', in Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru, Madalina Nicolaescu, and Helen Smith (eds.), *Between History and Personal Narrative*: *Eastern European Women's Stories of Migration in the New Millennium* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), pp. 229–48.

Fuglerud, Øivind, *Life on the Outside*: *The Tamil Diaspora and Long-Distance Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

—, 'Time and Space in the Sri Lanka-Tamil Diaspora', *Nations and Nationalism*, 7 (2001), 195–213, https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8219.00012

Jakubowicz, Andrew, 'Racism, Multiculturalism and the Immigration Debate in Australia: A Bibliographic Essay', *Sage Race Relations Abstracts*, 10 (1985), 1–15.

Jupp, James, *From White Australia to Woomera*: *The Story of Australian Immigration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Manguso, Sarah, *Ongoingness*: *The End of a Diary* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015).

Morrison, Toni, 'Memory, Creation and Writing', *Thought*, 59 (1984), 385–91.

Powell, Katrina M., *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

Rajah, A. R. Sriskanda, *Government and Politics in Sri Lanka*: *Biopolitics and Security* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2017).

Ratnapalan, L. Michael, 'Before and After 1983: The Impact of Theorising Sri Lankan Tamil Migration History around the 1983 Colombo Riots', *South*

*Asia*: *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37 (2014), 281–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2014.882874

Rogers, John D., 'Social Mobility, Popular Ideology, and Collective Violence in Modern Sri Lanka', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46 (1987), 583–602, https://doi.org/10.2307/2056900

Rushdie, Salman, *Imaginary Homelands*: *Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992).

Thiranagama, Sharika, *In My Mother's House*: *Civil War in Sri Lanka* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Wachtel, Elaine, 'Ghost Hunter', in Lynne Sharon Schwartz (ed.), *The Emergence of Memory*: *Conversations with W. G. Sebald* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), pp. 37–63.

Wesley, Michael, *There Goes the Neighbourhood*: *Australia and the Rise of Asia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2011).

# 3. A Congolese Woman's Life in Europe: A Postcolonial Diptych of Migration

### *Sandrine Colard*

---

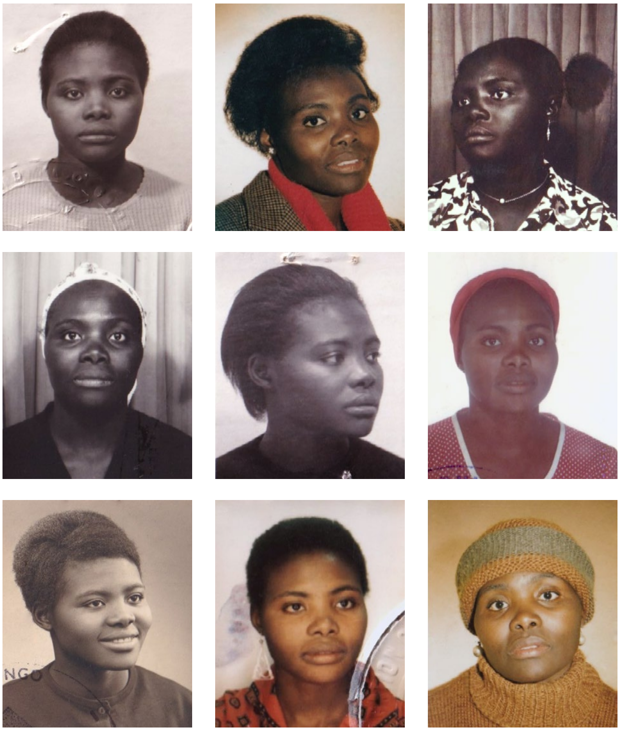


Fig. 3.1 Identity photographs of Léonie Ngoie, ca. 1960–90. Unknown photographer. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie.

© 2019 Sandrine Colard, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.03

My mother saved a stack of identity pictures detached from all the official documents she had possessed in her life.

Her beautiful, barely changing face was like an imperceptibly developing movie of her life. Sometimes, the portion of a stamp on one of the photographs was still readable, and on the oldest, one could decipher ‘Congo’ or simply a few letters that did not form any comprehensible words. The official classifications, descriptions, identifications, evaluations and migration documents of which she had been the subject had vanished, and only her round face and eyes looking straight into, or askew from, the camera remained. Under all these different geographical and temporal latitudes, the same person had indefatigably persisted.

## I.

My mother recalls the shock of her arrival in Europe with a profusion of details. The autumnal cold, the frenetic pace of passers-by, the surprise at discovering that white people could occupy menial jobs. She had reached her twentieth birthday a few days before the proclamation of independence of her country, Congo, on 30 June 1960, and remembers it as the only night of drunkenness of her entire life. Almost exactly three months later, she touched ground in Belgium under the sobering low grey skies of the ex-metropole, where, against all odds, she remained for the rest of her life.

Her journey had been undertaken, together with a few well-educated Congolese (and even fewer well-educated Congolese women) to pursue her studies in Europe. In the wake of a poorly prepared decolonization, it was vital to train the young generation who would step in for the Europeans swiftly. The education of African women had been a very late and half-hearted concern of the Belgian colonial administration, and my mother was part of the spearhead of a very restricted number of young professional women. If, for a moment, her encounter with a very much admired young politician, Patrice Lumumba, had almost deviated her route to the USSR, it was nevertheless in the orbit of the former metropole that she would continue to evolve.

The remarkable and profound shift that underlay her situation can be clearly seen when one lingers on the colonial literature and discourses that were circulating just a decade prior. The 'backwardness' of Congolese women was then a regular complaint of the authorities and young Congolese intellectuals alike. When my mother was just nine years old, an assertive, Congolese-penned book was published on the problematic situation of the 'the black woman's evolution', prefaced by the Minister of the Colonies himself. It deplored that Congolese women were stuck 'at the point of departure of civilization', that they had 'no instruction', were 'primitive and full of ancestral prejudices', and finally, that Black women were 'by atavism, little persevering in their studies.'[1] My mother swam against the current of these condescending notions. At the age of six, her father chose her from among her four sisters to be enrolled in a new 'model' boarding school for young girls, where she would be raised by Flemish nuns with an iron fist until her eighteenth birthday; upon completion of her studies there, she entered a nursing school where she finished the only girl of her otherwise all-male class; in 1960 her good marks caused her to be noticed by a priest who recommended her for a fellowship to study in Belgium.

This success in overcoming the obstacles that loomed over Congolese women's lives oozes from two small portraits that my mother had preserved from her youth and pasted in an album.

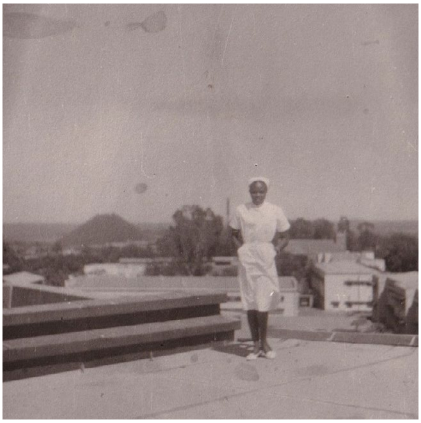


Fig. 3.2 Portrait of Léonie Ngoie on rooftop of the Sendwe Clinic, Lubumbashi, Republic of the Congo, ca. 1963. Unknown photographer. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie.

---

[1] Antoine-Roger Bolamba, *Les Problèmes de l'évolution de la femme noire*, preface by M. Robert Godding (Elisabethville: Editions de l'Essor du Congo, 1949), pp. 12–13, 18.

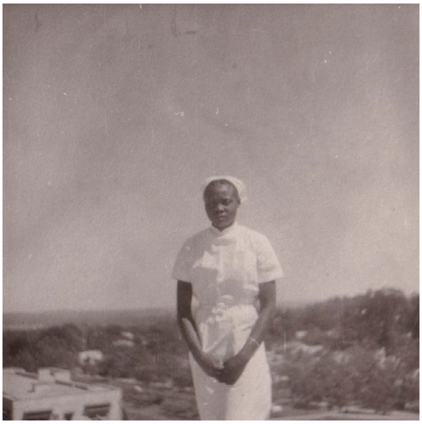


Fig. 3.3 Portrait of Léonie Ngoie on rooftop of the Sendwe Clinic, Lubumbashi, Republic of the Congo, ca. 1963. Unknown photographer. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie.

Both showing her in her white nurse's uniform, they were taken upon her return to her homeland, after her Belgian studies had concluded. The first is taken from such a distance that all that is recognizable is a white silhouette, detached on the skyline of the city. She poses on the rooftop of the hospital where she worked at the time, the Sendwe clinic, in her hometown of Lubumbashi. Up there, the wind that blew on that day made her dress ripple, but the hands held in the pockets, the buttoned-up shirt, and the feet delicately slanted in white shoes gently maintained the order of her attire. Her placement on the roof singles her out and detaches her from the masses in the busy streets of the city below, lifting her towards the sky that occupies the upper half of the image. As unassuming as her demeanor is, from her position she rises as on a pedestal; she is aligned with the proud 'monuments' of the city in the background, the iconic slag heap and chimney of Lubumbashi's famous mine. Just as the mine had been a formidable ladder for the social ascent of men — responsible for the creation of the small local bourgeoisie — the nursing career opening up in front of my mother promised the same upward mobility, and the way that snapshot was staged by a female colleague testified to the mutual recognition of their climbing the social ladder, up to the summit of the town.

Their landing in Belgium had been a humbling descent. If the medical system had been the pride of the colonial authorities, they had confined Africans to permanent auxiliary roles within it. The Belgian

Congo's diplomas were not recognized as equivalent to those of the former metropole, and my mother had to start her training from scratch. This social downgrade was aggravated by the racism of Belgian society. If she had grown up subject to the inferiorizing policies of the colonial state, the de facto apartheid that existed in Congolese cities had limited my mother's interactions with Europeans to the nuns, missionaries and some professors who were responsible for her education. Now a visible minority in white society, her solitary presence exposed her fully to the crudest prejudices towards Africans. In the streets of 1960s Belgium, a Black person was still a walking curiosity. The strict colonial mobility policies had made the presence of Africans a rare occurrence in the metropole, and subsequently the provincial mindset of the average Belgian person was almost entirely shaped by imperial propaganda. In the wake of an ill-digested independence, this ignorance was doubled with a patronizing expectation to see these ungrateful Africans fail.

For my mother, these experiences were never more stinging than during her clinical internships. In the words of Frantz Fanon, the 'weight of the negro's melanin at the first white gaze' was saliently felt at the contact of white patients.[2] The reactions varied from goggle-eyed and distrustful looks, children screaming at her approach in pediatrics services, to patients bluntly refusing to be taken care of by a Black person and punctuating their stance with racist epithets. With the indestructible optimism and gentle but steady combativity that characterize her, my mother remembers those years as bittersweet, with her love of learning being nurtured and some of her lifelong friendships being formed, but also with the feeling of out-of-placeness that would never completely leave her. None of these experiences predisposed her to choose Europe as home. If her studies had brought her to Belgium, meeting my father would be her reason to stay.

## II.

Of all the photographs that my mother preserved from her life, those of her wedding with my father have pride of place in a thick, fully filled, imitation leather burgundy album. The banality of hiring a photographer for the occasion, of the ritual sequence of images and of their eventual

---

[2] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), p. 122.

'enshrinement' in an album was nevertheless exceptional in 1969 Brussels, because the couple was interracial.[3] In the French parlance of the time, the young bride and groom formed a 'mixed' couple. My father was a white Belgian, and just nine years after the independence of Congo from Belgium, this kind of 'mixed' matrimony was still out of the ordinary.

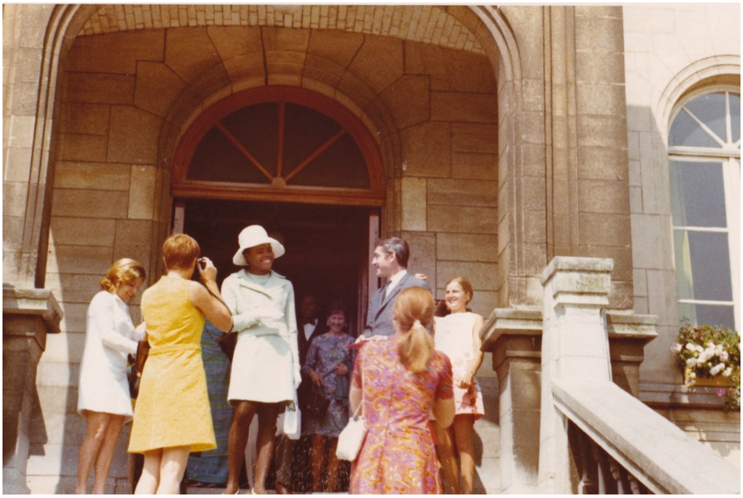


Fig. 3.4 Wedding day of Léonie Ngoie and André Colard, Brussels, Belgium, 1969. Unknown photographer. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie.

In the photographs, the rather bold short pistachio wedding dress worn by my mother and the miniskirts and multicolored attire of some of the female guests suggest a post-1968 opening of minds that did not yet commonly extend to interracial unions. The small number of guests certainly reflected my parents' wish for an intimate wedding, but it was also the result of the frowning that this union caused among my father's circle. On some snapshots from the day, passers-by are captured in the background, observing my parents exiting the hall while their friends cheered. A man in a black suit and dark glasses sternly crosses his arms in a spectatorial attitude, and an elderly lady stops her walk to give a sidelong look, jaws slightly open; they seem to reflect the incredulity that a Black bride and a white groom elicited.

---

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Un art moyen. Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1965), pp. 44–46.

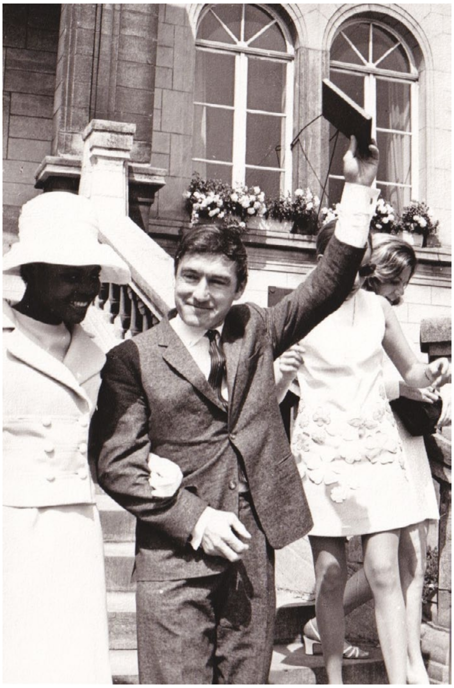


Fig. 3.5 Wedding day of Léonie Ngoie and André Colard, Brussels, Belgium, 1969. Unknown photographer. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie.

My aunts, who all married at eighteen and bore a child almost every year thereafter, had deterred my mother from following their example, urging her rather to enjoy her single woman's freedom. She had dutifully followed their advice, and waited until meeting a young doctor whom she loved before choosing to marry at twenty-nine. Living on a different continent and absent on the wedding day, her parents' surprise at this 'transgressive' union had probably been soothed by the relief of seeing their daughter finally stepping into line at such an 'old' age. Living just a few kilometers from the city hall, her in-laws were also absent, because they disdained what they could only conceive of as a 'doomed' union. My Belgian grandparents were part of a generation that had been deluded by racist antiquated notions that made incomprehensible the marriage of their son with an African woman. Furthermore, my grandfather had been for a time the doctor of the Belgian royal family, the guardian of national cohesion and of the country's colonial 'respectability'.

Hanging on the wall behind those responsible for officiating the wedding was the portrait of King Baudouin. It was the same image that had been ubiquitous in the former Belgian colony. A very popular figure back then, the monarch had been the champion of a flattering discourse that characterized the final years of colonial relations between Belgians and Congolese as an extended 'family' of which he was the benevolent patriarch. However, it is clear that this conceptual family was never supposed to translate into actual cross-racial unions, and the sheer hypocrisy of this national myth was proven by the unpopularity of my parents' wedding. On their big day, my parents were not surrounded by any family members, only the friends my mother had made along the way, and the less prejudiced acquaintances of my father.

As they left City Hall, my parents were cheered by their friends, who threw the ritual grains of rice over the newlyweds to wish them good luck in their life together.

In one photograph my father offers his right arm to my mother, and with his left he brandishes their wedding certificate in the air as a sign of victory. They had triumphed over their families, over the royal portrait looking down at them in the wedding hall, and over the public opinion that was staring at this very moment from the other side of the street. Perhaps the gesture was also an expression of the conquest of their own fears of the audacity of their hearts' sentiments.

Twelve years and four children later, my mother unexpectedly became a widow. She was alone and far from her family, and if by then her parents-in-law had repented of their icy welcome, her decision to remain in Belgium to raise her children was still open to question. The album in which my mother gathered her wedding photographs is branded 'King', which is inscribed on its cover in golden letters, the letter K topped by a little golden crown. It is difficult to do away with the idea that my father had been the 'king', reigning supreme over the destiny of her life. A long time before her grown-up children and grandchildren had definitively anchored her in Europe, and before the country that she had left as a young woman had changed beyond recognition, she could have returned to the Congo, and could have continued her life among her compatriots. However, doing so she would have exiled herself once more from what had become her lifelong home, the souvenir of my father.

# 4. Migrations

*Kathy Engel*

## Migrations (I)

> Migrate:
>
> 1. To move from one place to another, especially to leave one's country and settle in another.
>
> 2. To move from one region to another with the change in seasons, as many birds and some fishes.
>
> – *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*

As I began writing this chapter I thought I would reflect on some of the work I have done for more than thirty-eight years with women living the multiple manifestations of war and occupation, inside the US and across other borders. These geographies include Nicaragua, El Salvador, Haiti, South Africa, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan. Mississippi, Alabama, New York City, Long Island, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., and more.

Women fleeing violence from inside and outside the home and the body, through overt and covert domestic and foreign policies — unmitigated systemic, intimate, structural trespass and violation.

And the spectacular travels of women daring to move into their strongest skins and voices. Sometimes risking all.

© 2019 Kathy Engel, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.04

That is what I thought.

***

But the story never really begins elsewhere, does it?

***

Mine began in my pulsing young forehead, uneasy stomach and muscled legs, voice caught on the railroad shuttling back and forth between parents, loyalties, identities and locations.

Even languages in a sense, although all loosely assumed to be a syntax and grammar called *English*. Big assumption. The many lives and deaths, words and scaffolding inherited from a monarchy that would exclude us all. Yiddish didn't trickle down to me, sadly. The feel of it, yes.

***

My migration did not include the journey through my mother's tunnel, lifted out neatly by a surgeon, her infection inflamed by placenta previa.

Began in the dark recesses of my German, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Jewish American eyes. My great-grandparents' journeys escaping the Pogrom.

(I've been told we're related to Houdini on my dad's side. His parents grew up hungry near Delancey.)

(I've been told my mother's grandparents walked from New York City to New Haven upon disembarking from the ship and pinpointing Yale on a map, wanting 'the best' for their kids in a new world.)

***

> I always walked.
>
> With my dad after dinner as a child.
> On the Hudson's rough-planked piers. Pine needle paths in Vermont.
> We walked and walked. We talked.
>
> I walked with my mom and my sisters as a young woman.
> On the beach and small roads near potato and corn fields, with strollers and big hair, sometimes falling over laughing. Sometimes hiding the distances between us.

> I sat on a horse who walked.
> I walked barefoot.
> Now I walk and jog with my daughters who are women.
> The tender, knotted mother/daughter migration of light and shadow.
> I walk with my husband soon after dawn when we can. I walk with some friends.
>
> And I walk alone. Wherever I travel, I walk and run miles, battle my fear of getting lost, inhale the freedom of anonymity, the discovery of each corner, signpost, abandoned building, stray dog and riverbend. Sometimes I tie a scarf on a mailbox or fencepost to mark where I began.

***

Beginning at the age of eight I took a three-hour train ride every other weekend from the east end of Long Island to New York City to visit my father. He often met me at Jamaica Station, where we had to change trains. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, heading back, he would run along the platform waving to me as the train revved slowly then faster towards Babylon and east.

I shrank into my seat as my father disappeared.

When I got back to our home by the sea I couldn't talk to my mother. I didn't yet have the tools to stitch myself back together. I did speak to the cows and horses.

Language became my stitching, poetry my train tracks, the sea and animals my solace.

Later, community building and justice seeking became the ground on which I stood and the river between.

After decades I came to acknowledge the ways in which my own heart experienced a kind of migration, how a craving for wholeness directed my art and activism both, and how separation seeded itself within me as I internalized otherness in my family of origin and where I lived.

The only Jewish kid in my elementary school. The dark one with blonde sisters and mother. The depressed and angry one as they seemed cheery and quick. I leaned towards my father. I loved to visit his mother who as a child saved a penny a week for piano lessons at the Henry Street Settlement House in lower Manhattan, and then gave me 'piano lessons' that mostly consisted of her husky-voiced stories and chicken sandwiches on otherwise looked-down-upon white bread.

### excerpt from *Coffee*[1]

…My grandmother, Henrietta,
savored hers for hours,
porcelain cup and saucer,
large hands sifting
and folding her
famous buttery
plum cake — Henry
Street to 63rd, granules
of her transplanted
voice, like sugar, or
Yiddish. Like loss…

***

When I met the Black men and women who worked with my stepfather, a white farmer, heard their stories, saw where they lived, having come up from the south to eastern Long Island to pick potatoes, I learned what I would later understand as the way systemic racism forced migration for employment, forced the separation of families, forced people to leave home to travel for a still unsatisfactory paycheck in an equally racist place.

***

As a young adult I began a life of work in art and social justice, generally focusing on projects with women. I only traveled to work with women in places affected by US policies and in response to invitation. When I went to Nicaragua the first time, during war, invited by the Sandinistas, with poets June Jordan and Sara Miles, and my partner, visual artist Jonathan Snow, I felt oddly at home. In some strange way more at home, or perhaps more aligned, than where I lived. But I knew I would return to the comfort of my home after each visit. To different fields of bones.

***

---

[1] Excerpt from *Coffee*, originally published in *5 AM* #33 © Kathy Engel. Reprinted with permission of the author.

In 1991, during that US invasion of Iraq, in a shelter in the South Bronx, women fleeing violence in the home, living in the violation of homelessness, welcomed their sisters from Turkey, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, who had been uprooted, in daily danger, living with war and under occupation. In an exchange curated by the organization MADRE, which I founded with a group of women in 1983, the women shared stories, formed a temporary border-crossing circle inside a cement building in an enormous anonymous city, a migratory pause.

***

In occupied Palestine where water had been dug up and stolen by the Israeli military, women stenciled 'No Place like Home' on fabric. Some had left, finding themselves in exile elsewhere. For those who remained, each day flared with sirens, sweeps, bulldozers, wire, walls. Language stolen, school stolen, identity stolen, home stolen. Interrogation, arrest.

### *Breasts and Interrogation*[2]

Even you, breasts that milk no more,
    even if gush and cluck could come, the drops
    would sour and curdle as I recall
    the zattar-haired mother from Lyd, ice packs
    pressed on tender spouts to make her crack,
    recording of a child's call shot
    through the crusted wall into her prison cell.

***

During the period of Haitian President Jean Bertrande Aristide's exile in Washington, D.C., HIV-positive Haitian women were held in Guantanamo. Others who fled the dictatorial, US-supported regime were often still terrorized after relocating to Brooklyn, New Jersey or elsewhere.

No hour was non-migratory. No safety found its way between eye, throat, belly, foot. No stillness.

---

[2] *Breasts and Interrogation* originally published in *Vandal, Volume Number 1.* Reprinted with permission of the author. © Kathy Engel. Lyd is a Palestinian village inside Israel.

## *An Arm For Haiti*[3]

from just beyond the elbow
an arm one human arm
one female arm
imagine the fingers
imagine their work
the detail of their daily travel
imagine the palm
soft imprint
the cushion
telltale lines
leading somewhere
imagine the wrist
did it wear a watch
how did the bones fit
so delicate

she could not bury her arm
she could not nurse her back
and neck
she could not say goodbye
when she was left to die

imagine
a woman in her home
she lifts her arm to protect her face
she lifts her arm in the air

(For Alerte Belance, 1992)

***

In Mississippi and Louisiana with the Young People's Project, after Hurricane Katrina, from South Africa during apartheid, or around the corner from my home on Narrow Lane East where those who've moved from Central and South America seeking subsistence, often leaving families behind, daily face deportation — I've always experienced women in motion, battling forced separation, the occupation of body, voice, land; designing sovereignty, planting seeds, threading, imagining, building.

***

---

[3] *An Arm for Haiti* reprinted from *'Ruth's Skirts' IKON, New York* (2007). © Kathy Engel.

So far I’ve had the choice to walk out.
Walk on my road again.
Walk home.
My migration, the stirring within. The fire.

I’ve had the good fortune to walk by choice.

# (forced) migrations… (II)
# many birds and some fishes…

1.

a body doesn’t separate
from itself
    willingly
or from its needs knuckle from finger

wet infant mouth    from wilted breast
organ doesn’t choose to pull
apart from muscle

2.

we dream ourselves
alive — then name
honeysuckle, wire,

cockroach, nest
skyrocket of want

*murder of crow, pride of lion*
*ascension of lark*
        *are you home* [yet]? Or, more honestly,

*am I*?

3.

inventory of stone and wind reveals

each footprint leaves
her trace — shale, dirt, sand
        shin to fin, wing —

lure of return, terror of flight:
danger of recognition:

4.

birds    fishes    many

5.

the body does or doesn’t

become    home

# PART TWO

# MOBILITY AND MIGRATION

# 5. Carrying Memory

## *Marianne Hirsch*

In an era dominated by institutions of memory, and practices that monumentalize the past in the interests of present nationalist and ethnocentric imaginaries, a critical counter-aesthetic emerges in the work of women artists from different parts of the globe.[1] I shall explore the resonances between three distinctly twenty-first-century projects by women artists responding to mobility and migration: *En Camino* by Argentinian artist Mirta Kupferminc, *The End of Carrying All* by Kenyan/US artist Wangechi Mutu, and 'Portable Cities' by Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen. All three works turn to ordinary archives to explore the vicissitudes of diasporic lives. They create contingent and vulnerable memory practices that can help us recognize how women carry the burden of a painful past in a way that attempts to look to the future, both theirs and our own. But what are the implications of connecting works that emerge from such disparate contexts? What kind of analysis might enable us, in making these connections, to remain attentive to particular cultural contexts while also perceiving common strategies? It is my hope that my connective reading can define a productive feminist practice of solidarity and co-resistance across lines of difference.[2]

---

[1] This essay is inspired by the privilege of working within several transnational feminist networks of scholars, artists and activists — the 'Women and Migration' group based at New York University, and the 'Women Mobilizing Memory' working group based at the Center for the Study of Social Difference, Columbia University.

[2] On connective memory practices, see Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

© 2019 Marianne Hirsch, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.05

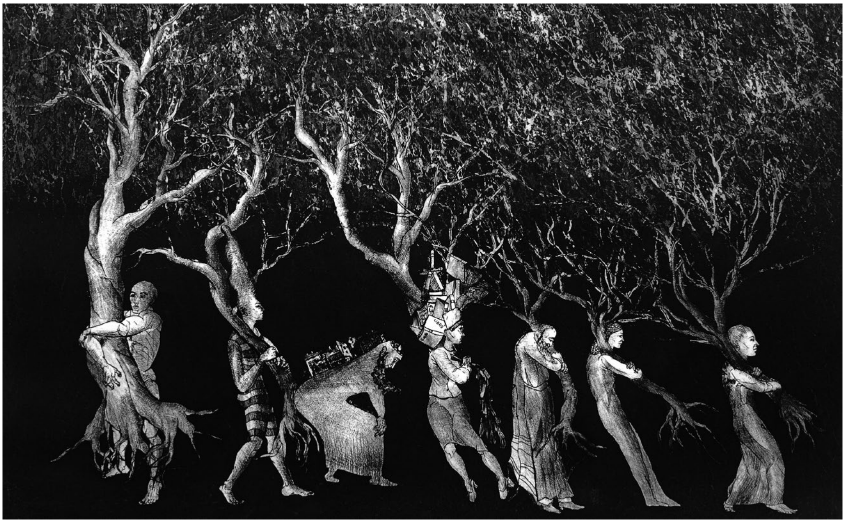


Fig. 5.1 Mirta Kupferminc, *En Camino*, 2001. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved.

Mirta Kupferminc's 2001 black and white etching *En Camino* [On the Way] portrays the difficult conditions of mobility in the aftermath of persecution and expulsion, exhibiting both the dangers and the potentialities inherent in diasporic memory acts. Seven figures led by a resolute woman in front attempt to move from left to right, but they are immobilized, pulled backward, hunched over under the weight of the objects they carry — not just uprooted trees, but houses, household objects, windmills, entire villages. This is even more dramatic in the vertical triptych version, in which the trees cover the top two panels, dwarfing the human figures under their shadow. What is more, these figures seem to float on different planes; there is no solid ground under their feet. Though their momentum points forward, they are slowed by the weight of memory and the past, a burden they cannot seem to shed. They lack the material support that might safely enable a freely chosen mobility.[3] These are victims of expulsion, refugees, like those we see on the news every day, and they are slowed by the burdens they carry — legacies of the past.

---

[3] Judith Butler has made this claim in her essay 'Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance', in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds. *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 12–27.

Mirta Kupferminc is the daughter of Holocaust survivors from Hungary and Czechoslovakia; she was born and raised in their refuge in Argentina.[4] Her work as a printmaker, photographer, video and installation artist is entirely devoted to, though not entirely weighted down by, this family history and its vicissitudes. In Kupferminc's iconography of exile, uprooted trees signify removal from home and a violent break in continuity, genealogy and generation. Absorbing nourishment from the soil, trees contain knowledge of the past and carry it into the future but, if uprooted for too long, they will die, obliterating generations of history and memory. In the etching, and especially in a 2005 nine-minute animated version of *En Camino*, humans blend into the trees, themselves becoming embodied archives of past knowledge that they attempt, with difficulty, to carry forward.

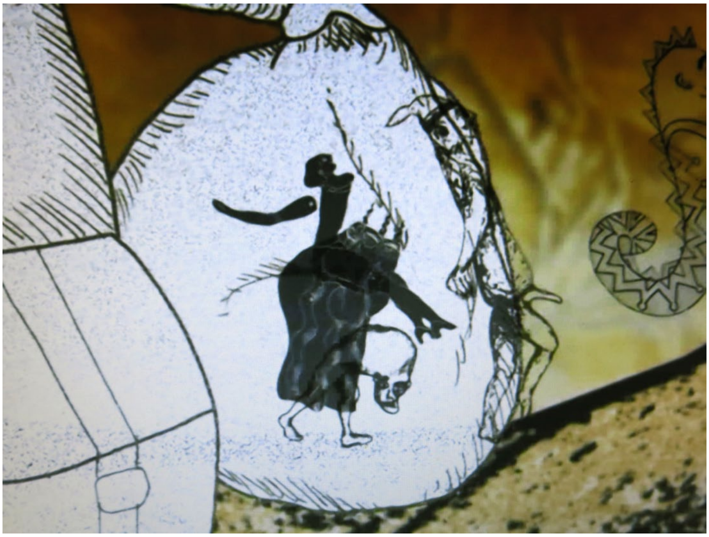


Fig. 5.2 Still from Mirta Kupferminc and Mariana Sosnowski, *En Camino*, 2005. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved.

But the animation elicits a very different affective response than the etching. It enables the motion of these characters without diminishing the weighty burden of memory that they continue to shoulder. Carrying suitcases, bags, trees, and other objects, these figures walk, run and climb, and they float and are blown around on multiple non-intersecting planes: forward, backward, sideways. They morph into hybrid mythic creatures, metamorphose into Hebrew letters; they float into and out of books and pages, walk up and down a ruler, emerge from a coat pocket. Hebrew letters multiply, torahs walk forwards and back. A king sits in a boat hovering precariously on top of the tower of Babel. Female figures, especially, carry heavy suitcases, moving slowly, laboriously, across the screen without looking up. Others, liberated, pirouette across our vision.

---

[4] Mirta Kupferminc, www.mirtakupferminc.net

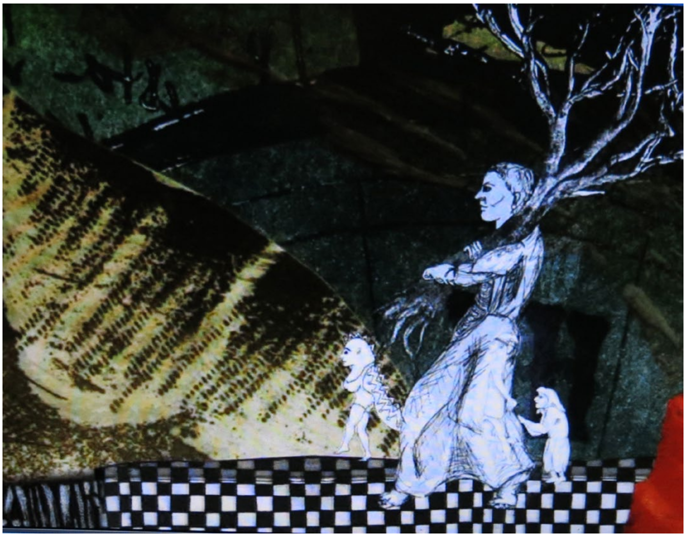


Fig. 5.3 Still from Mirta Kupferminc and Mariana Sosnowski, *En Camino*, 2005. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved.

These characters seem trapped in the pages and within the repeated gestures of an ancient Jewish scenario of expulsion and exile, a story that is written both in support of and against the refugees themselves. The cyclical movement of the video implies its perpetual repetition, granting it the status of legend or myth. And yet, while the etching evokes memory as an overwhelming and paralyzing burden, the video is animated by surreal humor and incongruity — a playfulness that lightens without diminishing the yoke of the past and its own mythic dimensions. As letters float around on the screen, looking like the playful doodles of a child, we are also invited to imagine different scenarios with different beginnings and endings. The artist offers her characters the shapes of letters that can be arranged and rearranged, thus mobilizing multiple potential histories on the threshold of more open-ended futures. These recursive trajectories complicate a genealogical temporality of loss and attempted recovery. This is an evocative aesthetics of small gestures, in miniature. Its circuits of mythic memory bypass homogeneous national traditions and heteronormative genealogies in favor of diasporic networks that could be reimagined and reconfigured. But even in this movement, they remain anchored in a specifically Jewish story of disaster and loss that continues to slow and haunt them.

Kupferminc's images address both recent and ancient Jewish history and philosophy. She is a student of Kabbalah, a reader of Jorge Luis Borges and Hannah Arendt, and an artist who experiments with different innovative media. Some of her work draws specifically on women's artisanal practices, such as sewing, fabric, and embroidery, and she uses these to inscribe memory on the surface of the skin.

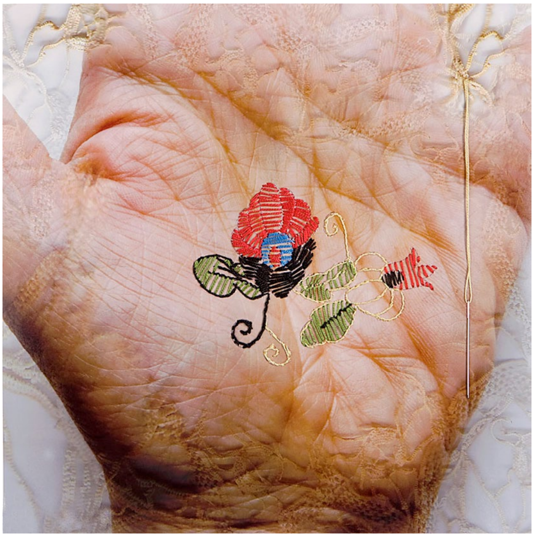


Fig. 5.4 Mirta Kupferminc, *Bordado en la piel de la memoria*, 2009. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved.

In *Bordado en la piel de la memoria* [Embroidered on the Skin of Memory], for example, Kupferminc embroiders flowers and leaves seemingly into the lines of her palm. As she does so, she marks her body not so much with memorial representations but with traditional practices like embroidery that live on in the very skin of her hand. But the needle and thread left hanging on the top right fold of the left palm pierce the viewer, provoking a visceral shudder or squirm. As Roberta Culbertson wrote in a classic essay on trauma, a break in the skin most powerfully evokes the wounding that is trauma.[5] The recuperation and transmission of artistic practice, the texture of the thread that sutures and connects cannot offset the piercing wound of the needle. Carrying these different forms of knowledge along from place to place, the body, and especially the hand, become the very site of memory and its transmission. And yet, the simple design of pretty flowers stitched in patterns that many of us learned as young girls is incongruous in relation to that disturbing wound. I would like to venture that the disjunction between the practice and the design leaves open a visceral space for a more open-ended response and perhaps also for alternate meanings we might glean from the stitches.

Kupferminc's 'migratory aesthetics' do not envision recuperation or return.[6] On the contrary, the wounds of expulsion and exile are carried on the body and skin. And yet, although Kupferminc's work performs the unforgiving visceral transfer of a painful past to future generations, it allows us to glimpse the possibility of different futures — futures we, as viewers, can participate in imagining.

Reading Kupferminc's work through a feminist critical lens, I argue it contributes to the formation of an aesthetic that activates small, unofficial, non-hegemonic collections and archives that mobilize feminist circuits of connectivity. It relates to aesthetic practices that have emerged from other diasporic communities — practices that mobilize personal and cultural loss in the service of alternative, non-linear, historical trajectories that bypass desires for recuperation and return.

Wangechi Mutu's *The End of Carrying All*, first exhibited at the 2015 Venice Biennale, also portrays, even while re-envisioning, the past as a burden to be carried. It shares the mythic yet anti-monumental quality of *En Camino*, as well as its attention to small household details that

---

[5] Roberta Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory, Transcendence and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self', *New Literary History*, 26.1 (1995), 169–95 (p. 170).

[6] For the notion of 'migratory aesthetics', see Mieke Bal, 'Migratory Aesthetics: Double Movement', *Exit*, 32 (2008), 150–61.

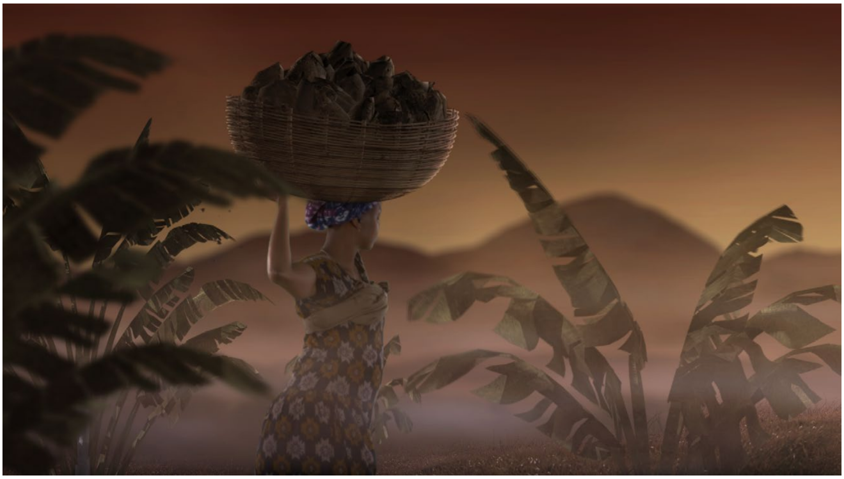


Fig. 5.5 Still from Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Carrying All*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, Victoria Miro, London, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. All rights reserved.

constitute both personal and communal lives. However, while the title *En Camino* signals the perpetual present of diasporic movement, *The End of Carrying All* expresses either a personal desire for closure or an apocalyptic ending to inexorable Sisyphean repetition. Both of these works could be seen as feminist re-visions of the Sisyphus myth, read not as an abstract human condition, but as historically and politically marked and gendered. Mutu doesn't just refer to Sisyphus, however: the earth mother in her work is a kind of Cassandra who cyclically predicts, even while enacting, impending human and environmental catastrophe.

Born in Kenya and working in both Nairobi and New York, Wangechi Mutu is well-known for work in multiple media that explores the operation of gender and power as well as colonialism and globalization.[7] Mutu's three-channel video *The End of Carrying All* shows an African woman (Mutu herself) slowly swaying forward while balancing a large basket on her head. As she progresses, with ever greater difficulty, the basket gets filled with an increasing number of objects: bicycle wheels, electronic and household goods she collects along the way, causing her to bend more and more under their weight. The landscape evokes an

---

[7] wangechimutu.com

African savannah, rich in color, though progressively getting darker and more threatening. On the soundtrack we hear the strong wind of the plains and the swarms of birds that ominously fill the unnaturally red skies.

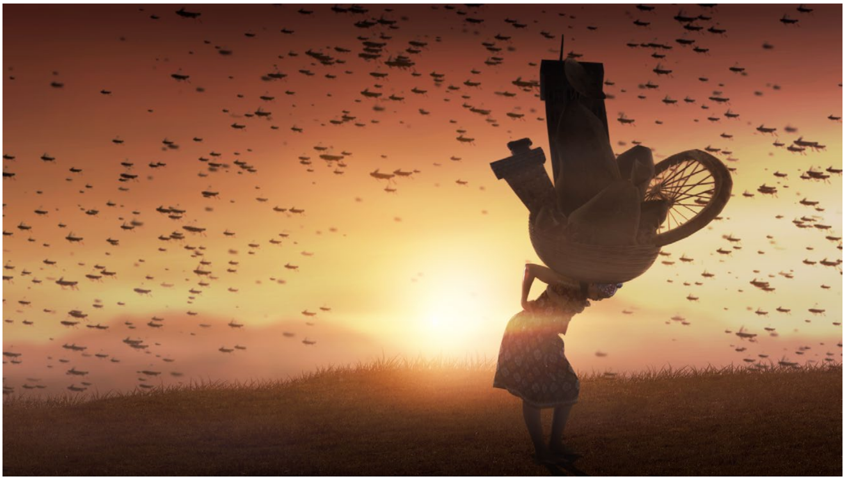


Fig. 5.6 Still from Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Carrying All*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, Victoria Miro, London, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. All rights reserved.

As she walks, the woman approaches and then passes a tree that becomes more barren as its appearance recedes. When the weight of the basket becomes impossible to bear, the earth erupts and swallows the woman and her many belongings. At this point in the video we reach 'the end of carrying all'. And then, of course, the journey begins again in an endless loop, linking the violence of the past to new disasters to come. Mutu compares this planetary apocalypse to a bodily wound: 'the wound on the skin behaves similarly; eventually it bursts open and all that festering stuff comes out, and then it's back to normal. But, you know, when things go, when the earth decides to clean up, it's not going to go, oh you're the good ones, you're alright, you stay and they go.'[8] This attention to the female body and its role in 'carrying all' of the past and the future marks Mutu's work as feminist.

In both of these works, mobility is slowed by the weight of the past and also by a cyclicality that leaves little room for hope and change. And yet, the protagonist of Mutu's video is both vulnerable and powerful. We could argue that her vulnerability, in fact, becomes a vehicle of resistance.[9] But could we also say that by drawing on the knowledge of the past, she might re-envision the future and truly 'start again'? If we are open to such a reading, the connection to Kupferminc's *En Camino* is at its most powerful, opening Mutu's work to less apocalyptic interpretations.

---

[8] Tiffany E. Barber and Angela Naimou, 'Between Disgust and Regeneration: An Interview with Wangechi Mutu', *ASAP/Journal* (September 2016), 337–63 (p. 352).

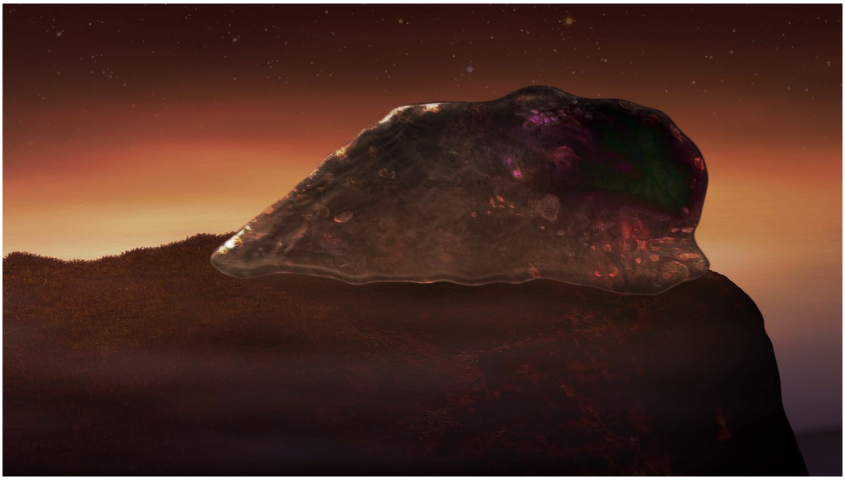


Fig. 5.7 Still from Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Carrying All*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, Victoria Miro, London, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. All rights reserved.

Responding to the theme of the 2015 Biennale, 'All the World's Futures', the work was described as a critique of capitalism and environmental disaster, of the violence done to indigenous landscapes by the consumption and waste resulting from colonization. These are recognizable themes in Mutu's sculptures and collages and in the feminist mythologies she invokes and (re)creates. In her sculpture and collage work, she recycles the materials of global capitalism, such as junk mail and magazine pictures. Hers is thus a work of critique that all the while also practices salvage and attempted healing.

---

[9] The connections between vulnerability and resistance are explored by the contributors to Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

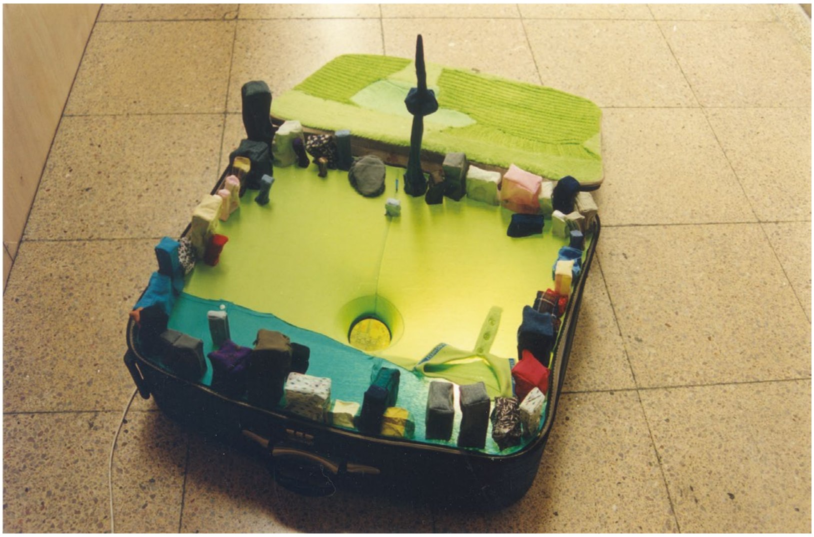


Fig. 5.8 Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: Beijing*, 2001. Image courtesy of Pace Gallery. All rights reserved.

'Portable Cities' by the Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen, begun in 2001 and ongoing, is another distinctly anti-monumental memory project. Although it does not respond to a specific history of trauma and destruction, it offers counterpoints and parallels to Kupferminc and Mutu that further illustrate the promises of memory's mobility as well as the difficulties of mobilizing memory for change.

Living and working in Beijing, Yin Xiuzhen is a sculptor and installation artist who incorporates numerous materials from everyday life into her work.[10] She has been building cityscapes in open suitcases. Toy-like miniature buildings are made out of fabrics, buttons and other objects collected from people living in the communities where the work is created and displayed — cities like New York, Beijing, Melbourne, Tokyo and Düsseldorf. To supplement the viewer's visual and tactile engagement with the work, each suitcase also contains a soundscape recorded in that city's public spaces. And each suitcase has a small hole that invites us to look through a magnifying glass at a map of the city displayed on the level below.

---

[10] http://www.pacegallery.com/artists/520/yin-xiuzhen

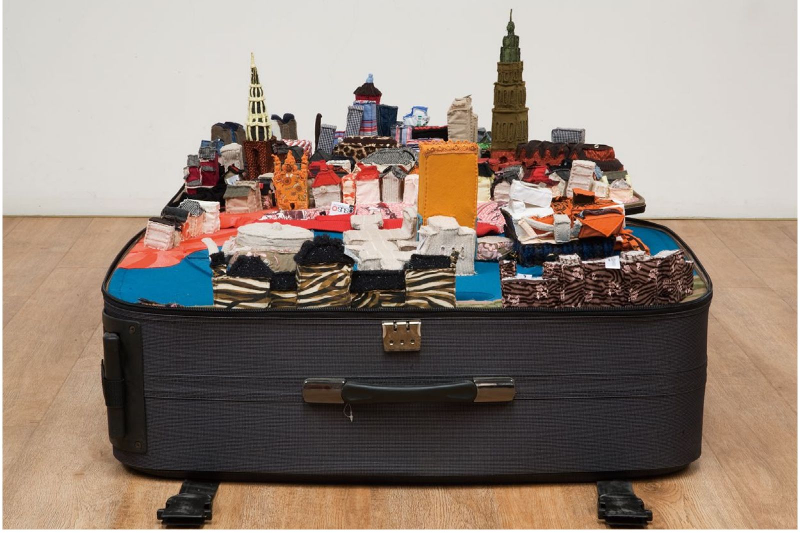


Fig. 5.9 Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: Groningen*, 2012. Image courtesy of Pace Gallery. All rights reserved.

'The earliest inspiration for my suitcase work came from the baggage lines at the airport,' the artist writes.[11] As she traveled for her exhibits and watched the suitcases roll by, she 'thought each one was like a tiny shrunken home.' A witty response to the travails of globalization and the resulting homogenization of urban landscapes that 'shrinks difference' and reduces urban spaces to recognizable landmarks, the 'Portable Cities' nevertheless 'carry' the artist's personal feelings about each site. At the same time, they are also sites of collective memory, transporting the bodily imprints of the people who wore and touched the clothes and objects Yin uses to make the suitcase cities. 'I believe that clothing is people's second skin,' the artist said in an interview.[12] As she sews the experiences of people together by means of their old clothes, transforming these into miniature buildings, bridges, parks and squares, Yin magically creates what she thinks of as a 'collective unconscious.'

---

[11] Hung Wu, Hou Hanru, and Stephanie Rosenthal, *Yin Xiuzhen* (London: Phaidon Press, Contemporary Artists Series, 2015), p. 102.

[12] Ibid., p. 189.

Philippe Vergne writes that in Yin's work 'memory becomes a critical tool.'[13] The 'Portable Cities' and her other work using recycled materials counters the destruction of traditional ways of life and the constant renewal, traffic and exchange that characterizes the era of globalization. Airports and public restrooms are the spaces she uses as sites of intervention as she reconfigures the hard technologies of globalization, imbuing weapons, television towers, airplanes, engines, cars and buses with the softness of cotton, wool and silk. This is a practice of small-scale resistance and memorialization, reshaping objects from the past and endowing them with new life and new meanings, enabling them to carry multiple unprocessed memories towards a future that obliviously races ahead.

In the space of the gallery, the cities Yin has rebuilt in miniature form are connected by blue threads on a large map mounted on a wall, forming a network of contact and interconnection — a network that is in constant flux as new nodal points appear along its routes. Though portable, the cities are nevertheless fixed unto a large map: even in their mobility they remain pinned to the wall.

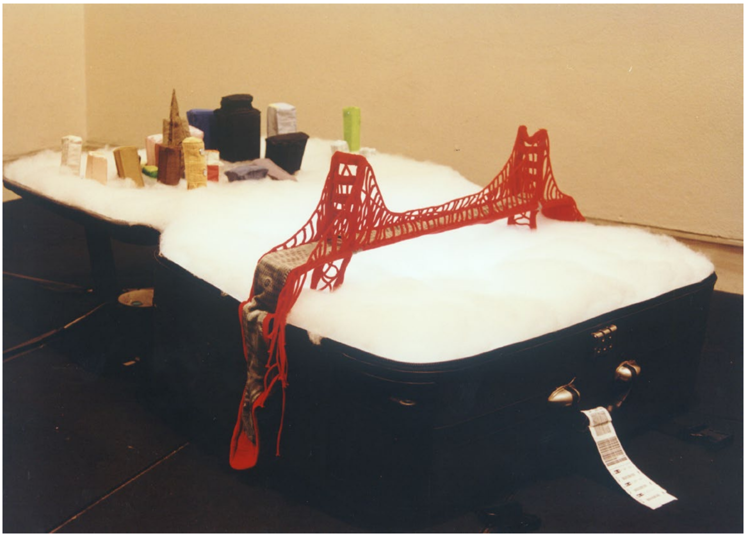


Fig. 5.10 Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: San Francisco*, 2003. Image courtesy of Pace Gallery. All rights reserved.

---

[13] Ibid., p. 150.

Rather than locating memory on site, the 'Portable Cities' allow sites and monuments of memory to travel, sparking recall wherever they go and thus activating networks of transnational and global connectivity as well. Yin's is an aesthetics of vulnerability that miniaturizes the details of everyday life to enable us to gain some ironic and playful distance from their eventfulness and monumentality, from the losses and transformations that shape them.

Cities are spaces of transformation and renewal par excellence, and they are also sites of memory and commemoration. In Yin's work, even mega-cities become small, manageable and portable. Contrast the suitcase cities to the burdensome suitcases in Mirta Kupferminc's 'En Camino' or the basket in Mutu's video. Sitting on the floor of the gallery or museum, housing miniature buildings and sites, Yin's seem light and compact. Bodily traces survive in the small stitches that construct the miniature structures and in the containers of other people's possessions, transported across borders, along routes of displacement and renewal. But they do not weigh us down; they merely serve to slow natural and manufactured processes of oblivion in a globalized world where consumption dominates. As their contents can be repurposed, recycled and discarded, these memories lack the heaviness of traumatic expulsion. And yet, the import of individual and local histories still cling to every stitch, demanding contextualization. Mobility seems to be performed here lightly, inconsequentially, for its own sake. The suitcase cities galvanize a movement forward that recalls individual and collective hopes and disappointments, without being unduly encumbered by them. Thus, they serve as ironic foils to monumentality, inspiring other acts and objects of small-scale resistance.

The small gestures of intervention performed by these three women artists — their miniaturization; their embrace of incongruity and contradiction; their use of animation; their humor, fantasy and play — are counterbalanced by their careful attention to particular and located bodies and traditions. Even as they insist on this particularity, however, they also invite connections across histories and geographies. They resist the monumentality that memory has acquired in our eventful present, a monumentality that has been holding us back. And they inspire us to think further about how memory might be mobilized for a progressive future.

## Bibliography

Bal, Mieke, 'Migratory Aesthetics: Double Movement', *Exit*, 32 (2008), 150–61.

Barber, Tiffany E. and Angela Naimou, 'Between Disgust and Regeneration: An Interview with Wangechi Mutu', *ASAP/Journal* (September 2016), 337–63, https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2016.0026

Butler, Judith, 'Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance', in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds. *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 12–27.

Culbertson, Roberta, 'Embodied Memory, Transcendence and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self', *New Literary History*, 26.1 (1995), 169–95.

Hirsch, Marianne, *The Generation of Postmemory*: *Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Wu, Hung, Hou Hanru, and Stephanie Rosenthal, *Yin Xiuzhen* (London: Phaidon Press, Contemporary Artists Series, 2015).

# 6. Making Through Motion

## *Wangechi Mutu*

As a visual artist my thoughts, my cognitive strength, my memories and my art presentations are mostly visual. I use visual resources testimonials and quirky or qualified theories to surround images. When Deborah Willis invited me to participate in *Women and Migrations* I was not only honored, but also interested in how she envisaged my involvement in a workshop that mostly focused on written work.

As a result of this invitation I pushed myself to change how I do my presentations. Surrounded by all these remarkable women writers, academics and scholars, I felt compelled to write what I had to say and showed only two visual works.

On the afternoon of my presentation, I unfurled my handwritten paper and read, slowly, sonorously and deliberately, my and my family's story of migration. I thus created movement in the form of the writing I had done and the reading I was doing, and liberated myself from having to come up with off-the-cuff remarks, a most uplifting motion.

I am my own quintessential 'Woman in Migration'. Ever since I was fifteen, when in a stormy argument with my father I swore to leave home 'and never come back', and when, at seventeen, I proceeded to do so, I have been moving, or planning to.

In Latin *migrationem* means 'removal, change of abode'. In Greek, *ameibein* is 'to change, to go, to move'. Migration is mutation.

My father outlined a dream for me: a dream he never experienced himself, but instead made up for his four children. He and my small,

© 2019 Wangechi Mutu, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.06

hardworking mother are from the hills of Nyeri, a very green, very cool, very lush part of the country of which we are all part. Nyeri is in the central province next to the second highest mountain in Africa, Mount Kenya.

Formerly part of British East Africa, and prior to that a place of over forty-two distinct languages and ethnicities, Kenya sits smack on the equator.

On December 12, 2018, Kenya will be fifty-four years old. I think my mother has clothes in her wardrobe older than that.

I am the second of four children. She, my mother, is the second of ten; all but two are still alive. One, a twin of my aunt, died at birth; another, the last born, died of a brain tumor in 1971 at the age of three. All my mother's siblings (with the exception of the oldest, a boy) completed their higher education, and most of them went on to university.

They are all children of the war. Even the youngest was born way before independence, during the 'Emergency Years'. The state of 'emergency' was declared by the governor at the time, Sir Evelyn Baring, during the years of the Mau-Mau Rebellion. This war took place almost exclusively in the highlands of Central Kenya where my ancestors are from. It has emerged that some members of this group never used the term Mau-Mau, and instead called themselves the Kenya Land and Freedom Army.

So all my grandparents who were born out of this deeply coveted green, rainy land — in the shadow of Mount Kenya, during a time of tremendous turmoil — raised their families through drastic transition, during the birth of our nation, the arrival of the Presbyterian Church and the British Administration who came to facilitate the settlement of our land with their people.

My grandfather was very industrious; he learned how to drive early and really well and was rarely home during those long difficult years. He built his fortune driving trucks all over Eastern Africa for tourists and for the transportation of goods.

My grandmother ('Cūcū' in the language of Kikuyu), enterprising and diligent, was never idle, and it was she who raised those babies almost entirely on her own. Eventually she converted to Christianity to be able to visit the medical clinic, to go to school and to avoid the suspicion and cruel life of being considered a Mau-Mau sympathizer or, perhaps even worse, a heathen.

As a young pubescent girl in preparation for marriage, she had to undergo the obligatory rite of passage to womanhood: circumcision.

My Cūcū also had her earlobes pierced and stretched to fit the wide and beautiful traditional wooden earrings. When she chose the church over Kikuyu life, she was left with the dangly looped skin of her ears, which she had snipped and sewn back to where it had been stretched.

In those days there was not much anesthesia and I often wonder: what hurt more? The incision of the knife to cut a hole for her stretched ear lobes, or the small, precise, ritualistic slicing-off of the clitoris hood, or perhaps the cutting and stitching up of her earlobes back to something the British would no longer consider primitive.

All in all, I come from a line of serious, strong, stubborn women. Each of them made decisions to ultimately survive through movement and through hard work, and during every change and to every destination they brought with them their families and their skills.

All the way from Cūcū Annie, my great-grandmother, who pretended she had been baptized and took on an English name, although she never actually respected the unwise and unknowable British land-grabbers; to my maternal grandmother, Wathira, who insisted on going to school, learning how to drive and converting to the new religion.

Then, my mother, the nurse, the midwife, the gardener and the healer. She was accepted to nursing school in Athens but, afraid to travel so far away from her family, she settled for Uganda. Here she completed her training and returned home to her newly independent, slightly volatile country and a new husband.

I have been pressed by the many motivated matriarchs who knew that progress came through a willingness to move and adjust and survive with swift and safe motion through time and unfamiliar landscapes. My mother still remembers that as a child she was constantly playing second mother to her siblings. She still remembers having to pick up and relocate to the ‘villages’, as they called them, concentration camps where Kikuyu families were trapped and surveyed. They took with them all that they could carry, but had to leave many, many things behind.

The eldest people, the ones who held the greatest share of our knowledge, our oral culture and traditional ways, did not survive. They were unable to move fast enough, if at all. Almost all who were taken along died from the cold and unfamiliar housing given to the interned families.

Soon, the fight for self-determination would take shape and out of the population of young leaders in our nascent country, a group who could lead Kenyans to independence emerged.

Moving forward, past the early seventies when I was born, into the nineteen-eighties, I found myself contemplating my life as a creative young woman. My academic results could certainly get me into good schools, but I was yearning for something I simply could not define or find in my home country. After playing the principle role in a major play at my Catholic school, I was presented by a family friend with the idea of an alternative path towards completing my education. I applied and attended high school for two years in Wales, and emerged unashamedly aware that I was an artist.

When I returned to Nairobi I was offered a job at an old fort in the northernmost point off the coast of Kenya, a small island called Lamu. I was offered work as the main muralist and designer of one of the rooms belonging to a museum of the environment.

This was a really strange choice for a fort building that had stood as an armory, a prison, and a monument to the presence of early Oman/Arab traders in the area. Nevertheless, the Swedish government had offered a lot of funding for this environmental museum and so the project proceeded.

In Lamu, my days were filled with the work of mixing egg tempera with colors that were non-toxic and absolutely unprotected from the festering fungus of a humid tropical climate. Everything I painted turned into a shade of moldy gray within a few weeks of application. In this moist, coastal air, mildew grew on the damp edible paint surface.

I was determined not to rot there myself, so I began to apply to schools that offered art degrees, only to realize how far I would have to move to accomplish these dreams and hopes.

One particular day, after a long night of writing and working, I heard the clamor and clang of the farm handlers and decided to go out into the pitch-black night to find out what the noise was all about. To my surprise I found the young men standing over a long snake whose only crime was to be a legless animal in a culture fearful of snakes, in spite of how common they are.

I begged them to stop pounding at his head, since the poor animal looked perfectly lifeless, lying long and battered in the grass. They agreed to go to bed and leave the sad remains till morning time.

As fate would have it, in the morning, on my way to work, I encountered something seriously strange. The animal, which the night before lay lifeless and beaten, was no longer where we had left him. I looked around but I was running late and I had edible paints to mix and murals to complete at the fort. I left the snake-finding task till after work.

Upon my return home, I asked the farm guys if they had any idea where this young reptile had gone. They walked me over to see; it turned out that the poor animal and his pounded head had tried to crawl away and had moved across to another spot in the garden where he finally lay motionless, even more dead than the night before.

I came up with a most phenomenal idea.

To prevent the creature from resurrecting again, and also to preserve the remains of this most beautiful body, I decided we must skin the poor thing. Having never skinned a snake in my life, and knowing my only help was to come from a pair of squeamish snake-fearing farm workers, I proceeded with caution and an inflated sense of confidence. How else could I have possibly justified and explained such a ridiculous task?

We proceed to cut off the head of this unlucky animal and then split the skin down the belly, following some unknown snake-skinning formula that all of a sudden I became keenly aware of.

After much cutting and scraping and separating and removal of flesh from membrane we discarded and burned the meat.

If none of us was certain about snake skinning, when it came to the task of preserving the animal’s beautiful outer covering we were all nothing short of clueless! The next and final activity was the most important one and it almost carried a spiritual significance — though we were not sure why. We found a wide wooden board and began to nail the soggy piece of skin onto it, until all six foot five inches of him was pinned down like some peculiar, sacrilegious crucifixion.

This encounter with the snake that was stoned and would not die, and the ensuing decapitation and skinning, has never left my psyche. According to the host family, our skinning technique was so uninformed that the animal continued to decay and reek weeks and months after it had been stretched and nailed.

I left Lamu soon after this experience and journeyed to New York City to study, but not before my local women friends had properly embraced and amused me with their stories. They spoke of *Nguvas*, sea creatures. They explained how the goat-footed women were the daytime disguise of these sirens as they walked and haunted the streets of this little ancient boat village.

After the leaving, the schooling and the living, it took me many years to properly locate and exhume my memories of the snake, the head and the stories of the sea women, the henna-covered brides and their ululating relatives, but eventually they all came back to me one painting at a time.

The Biblical serpent that tempted Eve, that stood for human curiosity, the search for knowledge and doubt, was the instigator to the banishment and cursing of woman. Coincidentally, this ritual that I had clumsily enacted became a symbol of my own search for knowledge and autonomy. It became a metaphor for the banishment that I would receive for my search and shamelessness in leaving.

Many of the stories and memories of my childhood have returned to me in random order, sometimes threatening to undo reality, constantly inspiring me to create un-realities and sur-realities in the form of majestic paintings cobbled together with watercolor and photography.

I was freed by my flight away from home, from my paradise life in Lamu, from the snake and the garden. This escape allowed me to be magnificently untethered for many years to come.

After years of longing, and feelings of melancholy, I was finally able to harness my mobility. I began to create with a deep personal connection to both studios, in Nairobi and New York. Traveling between the place of my upbringing and the place I call home, bridging my workspaces which were both essential to my art-making, I began collecting my fragments, my new family, my basket of spells and supplies. I moved towards my father's unrequited dream, to red soil, black cotton and petrified roots.

I now mold and mush the materials that I missed and yearned for, making rust-colored surfaces that vaguely resemble anthills or stomped and parched foot-paths. Some sculptures begin to mimic the pattern of keloids — a condition only found in melanated skin. I use the roots retrieved from my neighbor's land and I find pebbles and crystals, beads and seeds, feathers, broken glass and stringy twigs. They are all part of this new chapter of my making, my migration and mutation, in which Brooklyn and Langata speak to each other in a harmonious story of art-creating, extending past the journey I started with the words 'and I'm never coming back'.

It is this narrative that I must recall and reclaim to find my way back home, to be next to family and the earth and the soil that bred and fed me.

# 7. Strange Set of Circumstances: White Artistic Migration and Crazy Quilt

## *Karen Finley*

The two parts of my essay are excerpts from larger works.

In part one I will address my participation in white artistic migration.

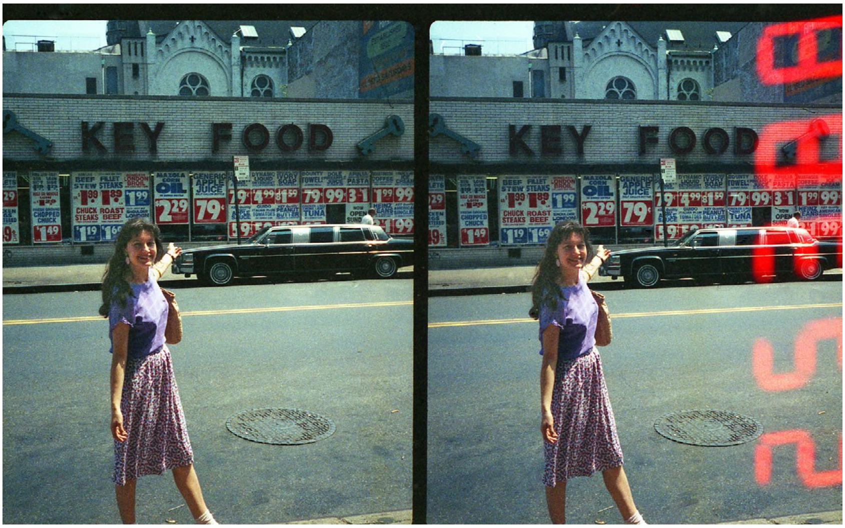


Fig. 7.1 Gary Ray Bugarcic, 'The Limo at Key Food on Avenue A with Karen Finley', 1985. Original 3D lenticular print. Courtesy of the artist. © Gary Ray Bugarcic.

© 2019 Karen Finley, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.07

I came across this photo recently and I was taken by my confident presentation, my presence as an occupier holding the location. Here I am in the East Village in the mid-eighties, around the corner from my apartment on Avenue A between 3rd and 4th. My arms embrace the world eastward and beyond, towards the church and heavens. As I stand on Avenue A facing west, with little or no traffic (one solitary limo a metaphor of what is to come) and the food prices as halo, Key Food signals that I am nourished as a solitary man walks south. The Catholic church towers above, with alphabet city in the unseen distance. The viewer is in a relationship with me as my arms and gaze attempt to break the fourth wall. In other words, I am eager to occupy. I am here. I make my claim.

In this brief essay I will address white boomer migration into the East Village and Lower East Side and my active and willing participation. I have come to understand that in my migration with countless other boomers, I vigorously and aggressively came to establish and overthrow cultural platforms that already existed. The unsuspected grandeur of this ambition was still an act of assault by gentrification that my generation accomplished by moving in with thousands (millions nationwide) of other boomers in low rent tenement areas to push, target and create our own entrepreneurial experimental (art) marketplace by displacing the local businesses with little regret. We rationalized that we were doing the neighborhood or society in general a favor. That our migration was a great accomplishment in the area of *artistic* citizenship.

This Cultural Action Movement gained momentum and prosperity with *coined* experimental artworks that established a supply and then a demand. The East Village art scene created a necessary product: a branding of youth culture that was innovative, bold, and in-your-face. The East Village, with its numerous, small-spaced galleries housing experimental exhibitions, thrust its products and its market share into the speculative art market. The cheaper East Village cultural goods appealed to collectors who wanted to *get in low* and hopefully sell high later.

There was another advantage of proximity. The Lower East Side and the East Village were relatively close to the then exclusive Soho gallery scene. Soho burgeoned in the sixties with the collapse of manufacturing and the New York crash of the early seventies where artists took over empty warehouses for studios and galleries. With this recent history as model, artists and realtors knew the power of transforming neighborhoods and displacing businesses to raise real-estate value.

It isn't that each and every artist was paid in currency, although some were, but nonetheless this process instituted capital, based on a trade system dominated by white people that privileged a white cultural expression.

The art and real estate markets profited from the unpaid labor of many. Not every artist who contributed to the overall overhaul of the East Village benefited or was paid in currency for their services. But nonetheless the neighborhood, made up of tenement dwellings and the older original residents, became participants whether they liked it or not. Sight-seeing buses and tours gawking at the artists in the run-down neighborhood were sold as chic. And it was known that for an emerging artist to become economically successful, they had to navigate a cultural industry mostly controlled by the white-dominated collectors, museums, media and realtors.

Most of the white migrants came from elsewhere to take over, and whether we intended to do so as musicians, dancers, poets, painters or gallerists, we were still complicit with real estate developers. We were the hand that scratched the back. Even if there was a sincere feeling that we were returning to the gateway of Ellis Island and the tenements of our ancestors, such as my own great-grandparents who were married blocks away, we also intended to seize, to come into the inhabitable *to make habitable* and to create fortune and affluence by exploiting the residents. We possessed a kind of white-settler mentality, an unexamined arrogance and aggressiveness that underlay my entitled sense of talent, my ambitious assurance and my victimized feminist drive. I deserved artistic achievement and it couldn't come soon enough. There was a falsity to our claim that our unique cultural sensitivity in the arts exonerated us while offering innovation and advancement to society as a whole. The art establishments recognized and encouraged the economic potential of artistic production brought about by such migration, while we demanded a cultural shift even though we still sought support from government sources. Some artists, but not all, were being paid for their art production, and we had a sense of entitlement and expectation of sustenance, as though, due to our *specialness*, we deserved public support, promotion and acceptance through squatting;

philanthropy; and city, state, and federal funding. Artists, galleries, and cultural institutions work together to frame a marketing language for the arts. This language signified a sellable methodology, whether New Wave, Next Wave or No Wave: but it was still a formula based on denigrating and minimizing already existing cultural platforms by using an assumed exclusive educational authority.

I benefited, obtaining jobs and an apartment with the help of my whiteness. I entered the neighborhood encouraged and marked as deserving by the individual National Endowment of the Arts grant that nestled in my pocket — a grant that I was only able to receive thanks to my access to the educational elite afforded by my Master of Fine Arts.

The East Village was scarred by drugs and the lines for scoring did not end at the door of a club or one of the new fancy restaurants. But I would recognize many white artists among those waiting for their fix on my street. Property was abandoned, fires set, values were lowered by creating a zone of vacant and forsaken dwellings. The neighborhood was under siege with ID checks and police crackdowns whose apparent purpose was to create a safer city, but in reality, to lay the foundations for real estate development. This was a tactic that had been seen before during periods of white artistic migration. The authorities cited a desire to reduce crime and poverty as a justified reason to remove the local population, resulting in the cruel destruction of neighborhoods in the name of urban renewal. This tactic would later be seen in Brooklyn and other areas of the city that became the focus of white gentrification.

My career did not 'take off' but rather was held up and supported by a thriving, already existing neighborhood. It built upon a cultural heritage shaped by other artists, who were less recognized because they were artists of color. Downtown New York was an international cultural melting pot, yet white people's idea of multiculturalism was most evident in our taste for different cuisines. The image of me in front of the neighborhood food store therefore has other meanings. We also encountered the thrilling diversity of the city streets on the dance floor, but the white migration encouraged by real estate development gradually minimized and erased this diversity, replacing it with a growing artistic milieu comprised of the chic and the trendy. And the art slowly faded away. Soho is now mostly a high-end shopping mall. The East Village no longer houses many art galleries, clubs or venues.

Most galleries moved uptown to Chelsea, and those that remain on the Lower East Side struggle to pay the rising rents. The New Museum now resides on the site of the old single-occupancy residences of the Bowery.

During the culture wars I spoke out against injustice. As a woman, I took control of the male gaze and combatted the passivity of the performing female body.

There is a certain sense of power and entitlement that came with my dream. And in hindsight I need to own up to it. I felt that as a woman artist not only did I want to have the same access and privilege that my male colleagues had, but I rightfully deserved it. But let's get real: the majority of artists who were recognized and received subsidies were white, educated and privileged. I was one of them. There was little questioning on my part of the displacement we caused and the cost of our gentrifying the neighborhood that had belonged mostly to families of color, who still lived in tenement conditions characterized by absent slum lords and neglect. Our consciences were quiet about our participation in the conditions that led to higher rents and to galleries taking over abandoned spaces and bodegas. A marketplace need was created, and we all contributed to the capitalism boom. The 'discovery' of the Lower East Side by white boomers resonates as an aspect of a selective, speculative, cultural and colonial system that works in coordination with the encroaching NYU campus, Chase bank, or KMART.

The language that legitimized the destruction of Downtown neighborhoods was ever present: uninhabitable, in a crisis, a war on drugs, unlivable, impoverished, neglected, abandoned, a war zone, filthy, illegal, dangerous. It justified, even warranted the evictions, the occupation, the relocation, the demolition and the clean-up.

As an artist who developed her career in the eighties to become an icon of the culture wars of the nineties, my work alongside three other white gay and lesbian artists was censored. Our NEA grants were denied in 1990 and soon we filed a lawsuit, NEA vs Finley, in which I was the named plaintiff. We went to the Supreme Court to challenge the awarding of federal support based on decency. We lost in 1998 and I was devastated as the options ahead for my career path changed. Yet, my white migration provided me the benefit of a future, and the opportunity that my voice and creative expression would be supported and would continue to be recognized. My creative expression had enough merit, prominence and influence to be considered threatening enough that the state should try to censor me. And so, the invisibility of censorship afforded me a different kind of visibility. I was not forgotten, ignored or set aside. It took me a long time to understand that as an educated white woman artist I was never *really* censored, or *really* suffered as other artists of color and those with less educational opportunities did. Yes, there was a chilling effect, but there were many artists and groups of artists of color who were never even given the opportunity to be listened to or seen, or to be censored. My so-called censorship was ultimately a ticket into the art market elite and brought me to NYU, where I work today.

As an educator, and as an artist interested in artistic research, I am concerned about who is remembered and recognized in art history. The Downtown Art world, in my experience, is mostly documented and archived as a white-in-isolation demographic, drawing the growth of the Downtown Art scene on the cultural map as something that was always and exclusively white. As if the arrival of this talent just happened.

Many generations of artists of color and forgotten immigrant craftsmen, who formed neighborhoods rich in cultural tradition, contributed to the foundation of so-called Downtown Art — whether in the Lower East Side, Greenwich Village, The Bowery, Below Canal, China Town, Little Italy, or Henry Street Settlement. Downtown includes the First People’s trail of the Lenape, now better known as Broadway. Italian-crafted mosaics, marbles and painting. Yiddish theater. Chinese calligraphy. Puerto-Rican poetry. Cultural movements such as graffiti, not branded by white artists in a gallery setting. James Baldwin in Greenwich Village. Romare Bearden in his studio on Canal. I can give you countless examples of artists that are not included as Downtown artists. There is little acknowledgement in Downtown archives of the rich cultural heritage that the white boomers built on, yet were forcing out with these acts of annexation, historical re-envisioning and erasure. This erasure must be reversed. And it must be reversed now. As educators we must insist on telling these truths, not only in our pedagogy but also in the institutional record. Believing in historic architecture preservation is necessary, but preservation and protection for people, neighborhoods and cultural heritage is required as well.

# Part Two

## Crazy Quilt

Gloria Vanderbilt is an artist, designer and fashion designer who became infamous after losing her fortune, building it up again by being the first to market designer jeans with her trademark swan. In the following excerpt of a poetic text from a larger project I begin with the image of Gloria Vanderbilt, the heiress whose wealthy life was riddled with tragic events. When she was two years old her father died of cirrhosis of the liver, instigating the Trial of the Century — a long legal battle to establish Vanderbilt's custody and guardianship, in which the fitness of her mother and the control of her inheritance were up for debate. Since the trial occurred at the height of the depression, Gloria became internationally known as *poor little rich girl*. She felt emotionally abandoned except by her governess, Dodo (fittingly given the name of an extinct creature) and had a harrowing upbringing despite her wealth. The world watched as she married four times, becoming a mother to two sons by composer/conductor Leopold Stowkowski and two more by writer Wyatt Cooper. One of her sons is TV journalist Anderson Cooper, and another, Carter, committed suicide in front of her by jumping out the window of her apartment.

In this image[1] of a crazy quilted room we see the figure swathed in a quilt-patterned robe surrounded by the repetition of quilt craziness, arrangements of shapes and leftover scraps *in an artful relationship composition.* Both inspired and intrigued by the design décor of overmatching, where the same pattern or color of the walls matches the drapes, bedspread, upholstery, etcetera, this image offers a psychological interior landscape. In the midcentury it was popular for the woman of the house and, at times, her children to be photographed while wearing clothing that matched each other and the décor. This suggests a body without boundaries, a loss or merging of self into the room. A *crazy room* of one's own. Crazy love — as if to migrate one's skin into the environment or to be knowingly camouflaged. What becomes even

---

[1] Laird Borrelli-Persson, 'Valentino's Patchwork Frocks Recall Gloria Vanderbilt's Quilted Bedroom', *Vogue*, 10 March 2015, https://www.vogue.com/article/patchwork-quilts-valentino-gloria-vanderbilt

'crazier' is seeing an heiress wearing the dress of the impoverished, the quilt of farmers, African-American women in Gee's Bend, the Amish. Appropriating the craft of women who both saved and fostered community with the art of quilting feels disingenuous in terms of labor and transforms the quilt as a fetish to put on, rather than something experienced or earned or made. For it is clear Gloria Vanderbilt did not make her quilt; it is displayed, a costume, a stage setting of hoarded blankets. The pleasure and craft of quilting is one of economy, recycling and warmth.

In recent years the terms shabby chic or *looking vintage* have become popularized: describing the hobby of finding the authentic look of distress that is nonetheless fitted to modern standards. The quilted room becomes more of a museum, a collection to compensate for loss, never having enough, and acquiring. These critiques should be considered, but nevertheless *the strange set of quilted circumstances* insist on the role gender plays in merging and losing self in order to exist. One becomes all and loses one's own identity to have an identity. Yet being consumed or suffocating within the quilt's extremes frees the craziness to take over. For the woman is trained to merge — to go beyond boundaries regardless of money and class. We know this instinctively; we don't learn about the possibility from this scene but see it verified. There is nowhere to go but sit and enjoy the view.

I have written the following poem that illustrates the meaning of the crazy quilt for Gloria Vanderbilt, while also considering the Villa La Pietra and the former lady of the manor, Hortense Acton, and the possible relationships between costume, fashion, accessory and migration that Deborah Willis has photographed.

Crazy Quilt[2]

It is out of nowhere
exacerbated leftovers
These fragmented selves
Cut up
Torn shorn and worn
Besieged against the elements

---

[2] 'Crazy Quilt' is published by permission of Karen Finley. © Karen Finley. All rights reserved.

A crazy quilt born
A defense mechanism
An environment of scraps
Of forlorn orphan rags
Of leftovers and scrappy
Of homeless and wasted
Little orphan child
Here I am dilapidated
Longing for my nursemaid — anyone to hold me
Remember the long night aloneness
A forgottenness, a mother's neglect

Careful quilt enclose me
A sewer of strings and ties
Of fancy babushkas
Calicos calliopes and calling cat flannel
Lingering in saucers of space and flight
In an undisclosed thread
Find me the peonies or roses from Kate's dress

Crazy quilt I stand before you
I am your leftover forgotten design
Design is merely the outside trying to get in
Enter my cave my sandman
Oh, open sesame
A patchwork of plaids and butterfly cry
I am your coping mechanism
A place of velveteen maroon
A joy in disassociation
A mild form of severe detachment disorder
And let me lose myself in the pattern of
An altered universe
And imagined design
Woven in between the fabric
Of silks tapestries and flour sacks
Burlaps for apples and dungarees
A farmer's wife quilting bee I wish

With my crazy I'm free
I achieve the trapeze act of depersonalization
Watching myself watch and be watched
I am the hands of time
I watch little children like myself
As if they were not me — (As it was not me)

As if she was not me
I hover above my body
I will be in the sky as you forget me
I protected her from herself
I protected her in my crazy quilt
Covered up in darling
A maze in perception
The anxiety only accepted within its collection
Perfumed bottles emptied
Temporal lobe examined
My alienation wealth
Brought about my
Exploitation of riches
Where I became a commodity fetish child
Eventually reification explained
An object for your gossip

Both innocent and grotesque
The wealth's power macabre
Where inheritance is poverty by proximity and birth order
As consumption is between
Object and subject
A means to an end

I am your thing
I am your fortune, your way out, your bills paid
I am your unfortunate, your lost way, your debt, your bankruptcy
I am your success and the reason why you never made it
I am your lost brother, your derelict self, your handy man gone wild —
I am your greedy boss your hungry self, your lonely child in the corner —
I am the shit you hold on to
I am the savings in your pig
I am the cruel world of the haves and the have nots
An empire of too many rooms and not enough space
A world of god's favorites
Let me tell you of my secret world
A painted lady red wall saloon with a swan on my ass

Hello comfy quilt where the sleep is here at will
Let me show you jouissance in all her intensity
The queerness in all of her splendor
I birthed you Anderson Cooper

Speaker of flight to trauma and crisis
Of Haiti and Sandy and Sandy Hook and Charleston
Of cyclones, shootings and disasters
In poverty, churches, schools and theaters, on trains in weather and violent storms, on vacations — we are never far away.
My silvery foxy boy
From my loins to his lips to your eyes
The illustrated guide to trauma freeway

If you have children someday
Pretend you don't exist
I will be there
Hurt people hurt

What can I make for you
Besides money
What do I mean for you
Besides money
What do I do for you
Besides money?
Cash n carry

There is no sleep for me.
All the things that made mother crazy
Now make me crazy
Wait for me foolish, silly, senseless, irrational, wild, cracked, outlandish, ridiculous, bizarre, eccentric, off, daft, zany bed covering.
My shelter
My concealment
My refuge
Here I come to sleep.
Embrace me in your chaotic warmth
Sleep well
Mommy needs to rest

# 8. Nora Holt: New Negro Composer and Jazz Age Goddess

## *Cheryl A. Wall*

The name Nora Holt glimmers through histories of the Harlem Renaissance: as a guest at the era's legendary parties, including the one given in honor of the publication of Langston Hughes's *The Weary Blues*, as a principal in the period's most tabloid-ready scandals, and as the model for Lasca Sartoris, the seductress of Carl Van Vechten's notorious novel, *Nigger Heaven*. Lasca Sartoris is more caricature than character and does not remotely capture the complexities of the woman on whom she is based. A conservatory-trained musician on the one hand and a cabaret singer on the other, Nora Holt impressed some people who met her as a proper New Negro matron, while to others she was a jazz-age goddess. She was a study in contradiction, a woman whose multiple careers and identities remain difficult to reconcile. She reinvented herself constantly, which she could do because she was constantly on the move.

Born Lena Douglas in Kansas City, Kansas, perhaps in 1885 (the years 1890 and 1895 are sometimes cited) the daughter of Reverend C. N. Douglas, an elder in the African-American Methodist Church, and Grace Brown Douglas; the girl who became Nora Holt seemed destined for a life of respectability and achievement. In her later years, she looked like a portrait of a Negro lady, complete with hat, veil, and gloves. An

© 2019 Cheryl A. Wall, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.08

influential reviewer and critic, her columns on classical music ran for years in the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Amsterdam News*, and in the 1960s she hosted 'Nora Holt's Concert Showcase,' a weekly music program on a Harlem radio station. As the first African-American woman to earn a Master's degree in music, she was well equipped for these positions. She co-founded the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM), a guild of trained performers, composers, and teachers of what was defined as 'classical' music. She herself composed more than two hundred pieces, although only two, *Negro Dance, Opus 25, no.1*, and *The Sand-Man*, seem extant. She later studied voice at the American Conservatory of Music in Fontainebleau, France, and taught music in the Los Angeles public schools. When she died in 1974, Holt left a record of the accomplishments for which she had so carefully prepared.

But the intervening years were a study in experimentation and self-invention. In the 1920s and 1930s, she was tall, glamorous, and blonde: a jazz-age goddess, who captivated audiences from stages in Berlin, Monte Carlo, Paris, Shanghai, and Tokyo. She performed a repertoire of bawdy tunes some of which she also composed and sang in a voice one London reviewer described as 'astonishing.' He elaborated: 'she can produce sounds not comparable to orthodox singing, ranging from deepest low voice to a shrilling high, often unaccompanied by words… '[1] Five-times married, Holt's romantic escapades were fodder for the Black press at home, a typical headline blared: 'Raid on Rooming House "Love Nest" Reveals Double Life of Married Pair.' In these early years, Holt changed names even more often than she changed husbands: Lena James, Lena James Douglas, Lena James Holt, Nora Ray, and Nora Holt Ray are a few of the appellations by which she was known. She was eager to try on and shed new identities, in part because they allowed her to inhabit roles that would have otherwise been incompatible. Holt reveled in the confusion she left in her wake.

Quoting from a letter she had received from Gertrude Stein, she wrote to their mutual friend Carl Van Vechten: 'Carl has been writing me about a Nora Ray. You write me Nora Holt. Well, 'Rose is a Rose ——'[2] Holt and Stein knew each other only in passing, but the bond between Holt and Van Vechten proved unbreakable. Almost thirty years later she attended the ceremony at which the novelist, who was patron and confidante to such Harlem Renaissance artists as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, and Nella Larsen, presented his papers and those of a roster of Harlem Renaissance luminaries to the Beinecke Library at Yale. In the photographs that survive from that occasion, Holt looks like the proper lady she had perhaps by then become.

---

[1] Review in the *London Daily Express*, date unknown.

[2] Nora Holt to Carl Van Vechten, 27 October 1926, quoted in T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris: African American Women in Paris between the Two World Wars* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), p. 54.

Nora Holt traveled widely across the United States, Europe, and Asia but the borders she crossed were not only geographical. In her professional life, she crossed and re-crossed the boundaries between high culture and popular culture, as she achieved success in the worlds of classical and popular music. Quite often, her champions in one world knew nothing of her participation in the other. One student of her career in classical music believed she objected to jazz because of the sexual component of nightclub dancing. He would have been shocked to learn that as a cabaret singer, one of Holt's signature tunes was 'My Daddy Rocks Me with a Steady Roll.' In her personal life, she ignored the constraints of respectability politics, deciding to love and marry as freely as she chose.

This essay explores the porousness of the professional boundaries that Holt regularly transgressed and considers the extent to which scholars may have drawn them more strictly than they in fact existed. I want to analyze Holt's professional achievements, which the notoriety of her personal life may have overshadowed, and finally I want to consider how Holt's life exemplifies more general connections between movement and self-invention for women. That she traveled as widely and as freely as she did testifies to Holt's audacity, for she came of age in a world where the codes of conduct for middle-class African-American women were rigorously enforced.

From the time she was a teenager, Holt did only some of what the protocols of propriety commanded. She went to school and played for the choir on Sunday but at fifteen she married Sky James, a local musician who might have introduced her to vernacular forms of music. The marriage did not distract her from her educational goals. She enrolled at Western University in Quindaro, Kansas, a school run by the African Methodist Episcopal church and the first college for Negroes west of the Mississippi. Combining an industrial training program with a liberal arts curriculum, the school had an unusually strong music department. Other distinguished women trained at Western include choir director Eva Jessye and singer/actress Etta Moten. Holt wrote the school song.[3]

After graduation she went to Chicago where she enrolled in Chicago Musical College and studied with a stellar faculty that included a number of prominent emigré composers, including Frederick Borowski and Louis Victor Saar. These professors affirmed Holt's ambition to write as well as to perform music, an ambition that was unusual for any woman at the time. Her thesis was a composition, *Rhapsody on Negro Themes*, scored for a hundred-piece orchestra. Like other conservatory-trained Black musicians, including William Grant Still and Clarence Cameron White, Holt was inspired by the example of Antonín Dvorák, whose *Symphony for the New World* drew on motifs from Negro spirituals. With her composition, Holt completed the requirements for the Master of Music degree that was conferred in 1918, and widely reported in the Black press. Even before the ink on the sheepskin was dry, the *Chicago Defender* announced that Lena James Douglass would write about opera and symphony for the paper.[4]

In the interim Holt was the subject of several feature stories, including one in which she paid fulsome tribute to her husband, George W. Holt, for 'the wonderful inspirative [*sic*] background' he 'formed when he presented her an elegant residence […] decorated and furnished in the New England style, and the world's finest piano, a Mason & Hamlin concert grand.'[5] She and Holt, a wealthy hotel owner and the treasurer of the Liberty Insurance company, who was forty years her senior, had married while she was in school. Unreported was the fact that Holt was her fourth husband. She had been briefly married to a politician named Philip Scroggins and a barber, Bruce Jones, before she began her graduate studies.[6] Also unreported, but more germane to her professional future, was the fact that as a graduate student she helped to support herself by 'singing light songs, […] and spirituals' at dinner parties in the homes of rich Chicagoans with surnames like Armour, McCormick, and Swift as well as at clubs in the city's 'Red Light' district, then known as the 'Line.' For a time she appeared at one of its fanciest brothels: the Everleigh Club, run by two sisters from Omaha, who counted novelist Theodore Dreiser, boxer Jack Johnson and Prince Henry of Prussia among their clientele.[7]

---

[3] Helen Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies*: *African-American Women Composers and Their Music* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 18.

[4] 'Lena James Douglas to Write About Opera and Symphony,' *Chicago Defender*, 3 November 1917, p. 11.

[5] 'Lena James Holt Takes High Honors at Chicago Musical College,' *Chicago Defender*, 29 June 1918, p. 10.

[6] Bruce Kellner, ed., *The Harlem Renaissance*: *A Historical Dictionary for the Era* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 172.

Holt remained determined to pursue the career for which she had been trained. In her *Defender* column she reviewed almost every classical music concert featuring a Black musician in Chicago, beginning with one by the acclaimed tenor Roland Hayes. She was the first music critic employed by a Black newspaper, as well as the first woman to join the *Defender's* writing staff. Although her first column ran on the women's page of the newspapers, it soon moved to the regular news pages. She took on a range of assignments in addition to reviewing. Her columns, published under several titles including 'Musical Notes,' 'Music News,' 'Music,' and 'New of the Music World', reported on the accomplishments and appearances of Black musicians around the country including Nathaniel Dett, Rosamond Johnson, Harry Burleigh, Hazel Harrison, and Clarence Cameron White. One can reasonably infer that only a small number of the *Defender's* readers were interested in classical music, but they were all interested in the advancement of what the newspaper always referred to as 'the Race.' Holt was avidly interested in both.

She recognized that the best way forward was to make common cause with like-minded people. In 1919 she organized the Chicago Music Association. As she acknowledged, others had previously called for a national association but the advent of the First World War and the 1918 influenza epidemic slowed their progress. The time seemed right when Holt invited a group of local artists to her home and announced her plan to launch a national association. When she learned that a group in Washington, D.C. had a similar idea, she issued a call for 'Musical Unity,' in her column.[8] The groups decided to come together and hold an inaugural convention in Chicago from 29 July to 1 August 1919.

---

[7] Sylvia Dannett, *Profiles of American Womanhood*, Vol. 2 (Yonkers: Educational Heritage, 1964), p. 146. In *The Tastemaker*: *Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014), Edward White reports that the Des Moines-born Van Vechten had himself been the house pianist at the Everleigh's establishment a decade or so before Holt.

[8] Nora Holt, 'Musical Unity,' *Chicago Defender*, 29 March 1919.

One of the worse race riots in US history broke out that weekend. The immediate catalyst was a white mob's attack on a young Black man who was on a beach reserved for whites. But the underlying reasons were the migration of tens of thousands of Black southerners to the city and the competition for jobs and housing they represented to white workers in the midst of both an economic downturn and an upsurge of Black militancy. By the time order was restored, thirty-eight people had been killed (twenty-three Black, fifteen white), more than five hundred injured, and thousands more, mainly Black, made homeless. It was the deadliest of a series of riots that swept across the United States during what became known as Red Summer. In Chicago, the violence interrupted transportation in and out of the city, and service on buses and trains in the city was suspended.

Registrants for the NANM convention scrambled to get to meetings as events were rescheduled and venues were changed. Nora Holt was the rare conventioneer who arrived by electric car. When the ballots were counted, the Washingtonian Henry Grant was elected president of the NANM. Nora Holt was elected vice president. Holt might well have felt that her gender was the reason she was not elected to the top post. For the rest of her life, she worried that she was not given sufficient credit for her role in founding the organization. But she was savvy enough to publish 'A Chronological History of NANM' in 1921 to document her role.[9]

The highlight of the convention was the concert which, as Holt observed in her review, had 'no precedent in the history of Negro musicians.' She noted that due to the riot the venue was changed and the concert, scheduled for Wednesday evening, took place on Friday morning. After listing the names of local and visiting artists, she concluded, 'each participant was a star and each star an artist.' But one star shone brighter than the rest, a young contralto from Philadelphia, Marian Anderson, who brought the audience to its feet with her performance of the aria 'Adieu, forêts' from Tchaikovsky's *Jeanne d'Arc.* Holt recorded the response eloquently: 'Every one stood and acclaimed her with cries of bravo and *bis*, while tears of joy were in the eyes of many musicians who felt that the dawn of a new era in music had arisen for our people.'[10] The crowd was so moved that a collection, begun with Holt's pledge of $50, was taken up to establish the first NANM scholarship, which was awarded to Anderson. Anderson would remain associated with NANM for the rest of her life and served as the honorary chairperson of the 'Jubilee' convention in 1969.[11]

---

[9] Nora Holt, 'A Chronological History of NANM,' *Music and Poetry*, July 1921, pp. 15–21. In a letter to Theodore Stone, then president of NANM, dated 1 September 1969, Holt expressed her happiness that her role in the organization's founding had been acknowledged. Theodore Charles Stone Collection, Chicago Music Association, Box 100, Folder 2356, CBMR.

In January 1921 Holt published a magazine, *Music and Poetry.* It bore the subtitle *A Monthly Magazine of High Standard for Musicians and Music Lovers* and the imprint of the Holt Publishing Company. In her mission statement Holt declared that her generation was but a 'short span' from slavery, yet they were nonetheless a 'new people.'[12] Spirituals were a bridge between the old and new. For classically trained musicians, the spirituals were a deep well of inspiration and formal influence: most of the composers, instrumentalists and singers whom Holt championed arranged and performed spirituals. Anticipating views set forth by Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson, Holt was keen to explore the possibility of assimilating European and African American musical forms.[13] Notably, she refers to Blacks 'assimilating' rather than being assimilated into white culture, thereby suggesting a relationship of reciprocity rather than hierarchy. *Music and Poetry* was unusual in its equal treatment of male and female subjects and writers. As scholar Joyce Marek observes, 'Holt's support for racial equity in the concert hall, her international perspectives, and her interest in multiple art forms allowed *Music and Poetry* to treat Black involvement in music with considerable depth and complexity.'[14]

---

[10] Nora Holt, 'Musicians Organize National Association, *Chicago Defender*, 9 August 1919, p. 15.

[11] Doris McGinty (ed.), *A Documentary History of the National Association of Negro Musicians* (Chicago: Center for Black Music Research, 2004), p. 20. The NANM is still in the business of holding conventions, awarding scholarships, and providing moral support for professionals in the music business. Unlike the teachers and performers originally involved in the association, current members adhere to a capacious definition of music that includes blues, jazz, gospel, and computer-generated genres. McGinty, *A Documentary History*, p. 52.

[12] Nora Holt, 'A Letter to Our Readers,' *Music and Poetry*, January 1921, p. 5.

[13] See for example, Alain Locke, 'The Negro Spirituals' (1925), in his (ed.) *The New Negro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 199–213.

[14] Joyce Marek, 'Women Editors and Little Magazines in the Harlem Renaissance,' in Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKibble (eds.), *Little Magazines and Modernism* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp.105–118., p. 117.

Each issue of the magazine implored its subscribers to sign on to this musical creed: 'I Will Use Something of Negro Origin on Every Program.' To help its readers fulfill the pledge, the magazine printed a composition by a Black composer in each issue. The first was Holt's own 'Negro Dance, No. 1' [of 4] from 'the Southern Suite for Piano.' It was described as a 'brisk, lively number, which should be played with verve and spontaneity.' Written for the piano in the key of G Major, its style is reminiscent of ragtime, with a generally steady left hand accompaniment and syncopated right hand melody.[15] A second Holt composition, 'The Sandman,' was published in the June number. Were it not for her decision to publish her own work, none of it would be extant. The manuscripts she put in storage when she left the United States in the late 1920s were all lost.

The death of George Holt ended the run of *Music and Poetry*. Without her husband's financial backing, she closed the magazine, soon after stepped down from her post at the NANM, and ceased writing her column for *The Chicago Defender*. A new marriage brought her back into the public eye. In 1923 she wed Joe Ray, a wealthy African American employed by steel magnate Charles Schwab. The wedding was extravagant. According to the *Defender*, the bride was 'a picture of loveliness gowned in a gorgeous creation of crepe Elizabeth, beaded on masses with pearls [...] and a tulle veil [which] fell gracefully to the floor, caught here and there with orange blossoms.'[16] The marriage was short-lived. Holt, who much preferred Harlem to her husband's home in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, moved to New York in the blaze of publicity occasioned by her divorce from Ray, her fifth and final husband.

In 1926, still in the glare of tabloid headlines stemming from her divorce, Nora Holt sailed for Paris, in the wake of Josephine Baker, Bricktop (Ada Smith), and Florence Mills. The Negro vogue had crossed the Atlantic, become *Le Tumulte Noir* in France, and would soon spread throughout Europe and beyond. With her glamorous looks and striking voice (which, like Mills's, was never recorded) Holt quickly created a sensation. She made her debut at the Les Nuits du Prado in Paris in October. She was now a full-on blonde, and keenly aware of the effect she had on her audiences. In a letter to Van Vechten, she confided, 'these French are too excitable to be stable. [...] The little music hall "Prado" goes on well. It is quite chic, no dancing and only French people. Imagine them liking me and they don't know a word I am singing or what it's all about. The real truth is, I'm selling my hair and personality. So far so good. I am not greatly enthused. It's a lark for me you know.'[17]

---

[15] Nora Holt, 'Negro Dance,' *Music and Poetry*, January 1921, p. 8. The piece may have influenced the well-known piano piece, 'Three Little Negro Dances,' (1933) by Florence Price, who also composed the arrangement of 'My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord,' made famous by Marian Anderson. The first Black woman to compose a symphony, Price was at the center of a group of Black women musicians in Chicago that included her student Margaret Bonds, Muriel Rose, and the author's aunt, Nannie Mae Strayhorn, during the 1930s.

[16] 'Holt-Ray Wedding Style Most Brilliant Affair,' *Chicago Defender*, 4 August 1923, p. 4.

It was a 'lark' that would continue for twelve years. Her seemingly cavalier attitude might reflect the ambivalence Holt as a classically trained musician felt about her newfound fame in continental cabarets. Holt was hardly alone among African-American musicians who pursued dual careers in classical and popular music in the early twentieth century.[18] The opportunities in the former were slim. After trading the concert stage for the nightclub, Holt headlined shows in Monte Carlo and Berlin and returned to Paris multiple times. In the fall of 1929, Holt played an extended and widely advertised engagement at the Café de Paris in London. She had not lost her flair for publicity; an article in the *Daily Mail* reviewed an exhibition by an artist named Adrian Daintrey; the reviewer detected 'a merry twinkle — almost a wink in the eyes and the quiver of a smile about the lips' in the drawing of Holt, identified as 'the white Negro *diseuse*.'[19] If the description disparaged Holt's complexion, it complimented her talent as a singer/storyteller. She had a gift for drama. Before she performed 'The Man I Love,' she would aver, 'I knew Mr. Gershwin.' This was probably true, as Gershwin was a regular at Van Vechten's New York parties. Holt also liked to recount the night at the Café de Paris when the Prince of Wales showed up with his future wife, the divorcée Wallis Simpson. In Holt's telling, the Prince came to the stage at the end of the set to congratulate her.[20]

---

[17] Nora Holt to Carl Van Vechten, 26 October 1926. Quoted in T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris*, p. 52.

[18] The example of William Marion Cook is telling. The violin prodigy was appointed first chair by the Boston Symphony then forbidden to play any solos. He never played in public again, but found success as the composer of musicals starring George Walker and Bert Williams. See Bill Reed, *Hot From Harlem*: *Twelve African American Entertainers, 1890–1960* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2010), pp. 8–28.

[19] P. G. K., 'Artist's Sense of Humour', *Daily Mail*, 11 November 1929, p. 21.

[20] Reed, *Hot From Harlem*, p. 77.

In November 1932, Langston Hughes wrote Van Vechten from Ashkhabad, Turkmenia, Soviet Central Asia to inquire about Holt: '… The papers say Nora's gone to Shanghai. I want to come home in the Spring via Siberia, and will go to Shanghai too if it's possible to get the dollars and the visa. Let me know if Nora will still be there.' Van Vechten replied in a postcard: 'Also Nora Holt (who is in Shanghai — c/o American Express — do send/ her a line).[21] Perhaps Hughes had seen the photograph headed 'She's Shanghai-Bound,' which appeared in Holt's hometown paper, the *Kansas City Plain Dealer*, as well as in other Black papers.[22] The short article reported that Holt had 'recently left for Shanghai where she will fill an eight months engagement at one of the exclusive English night clubs.' Holt would spend much of the next eight years performing in the city popularly known as the 'Paris of the East.' As one scholar notes, 'what made Shanghai the "Paris of the East" was its dazzling nightlife.'[23]

Shanghai was a modern city in many respects: for example, the first skyscrapers outside the West were built there. It was a segregated city: the fancy hotels, theaters, elegant shops, cabarets, and golf course were reserved for whites only. The masses of Chinese lived in desperate poverty. But for the international elite, Shanghai in the thirties was wide-open: drugs were legal, prostitution flourished, and gambling was widespread. Jazz was the music of choice in the European quarter. According to one estimate, by 1934, the number of Black jazz musicians in Shanghai was greater than the number of Black jazz musicians in Paris.[24] Black entertainers were allowed to work and live in the Bund, the city's European compound.

Holt was a mainstay of nightlife in Shanghai off and on from 1932 to 1937, when the Japanese invaded China. Dancer Al Baldwin was her most frequent partner on stage, and Holt kept Blacks back home informed of her success. An item from the column 'Topical Types in Filmland', circulated by the Associated Negro Press, announced Holt's upcoming engagement at a club in Los Angeles: '… glamorous Nora, who, as you know, has been the toast of many continents will take over the Underwood and tell in her own words about the subtopics of Shanghai.' The column quotes Holt: 'Don't hand me the typewriter, dearie. I haven't done anything on a machine since back in the 19's…. never mind the date…. when I published the mag, *Music and Poetry* for the National Association of Negro Musicians.' Despite the confidential tabloid tone she assumed, she had little to say about her Chinese sojourn. Instead she spoke of her eagerness to revisit places closer to home: 'I've seen all the world,' she confided, 'and I am broadcasting: "Hello Harlem, your naughty little Nora will be seein' ya."'[25]

---

[21] Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, 15 November 1932; Carl Vechten to Langston Hughes, 3 December 1932; in Emily Bernard, *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), pp. 99–102. Hughes did stop in Shanghai on his way home, but he does not say either in his correspondence or his memoir *I Wonder As I Wander* whether he saw Holt there.

[22] 'She's Shanghai-Bound,' *Kansas City* (*Kansas*) *Plaindealer*, 2 September 1932.

[23] Marie-Claire Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 269.

[24] William Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: A Jazz Story between the Great Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 81. The imposition of a 10% quota for foreign musicians in French clubs forced Black American musicians to look for work outside of France. Shanghai beckoned.

Back in the US, Holt reinvented herself once more. Reclaiming her original surname, she earned certification as a schoolteacher in Los Angeles. She taught music and for a time served on the city's board of education. Then in 1939 she opened the Nora Holt Beauty Salon, where she promised to bring 'Hollywood service to West Side business and society matrons.' Hers was the first Black-owned business in the historic Vermont-Jefferson district of Los Angeles.[26]

In 1942, she moved back to Harlem and became music critic for the New York *Amsterdam News*, where she again took up the mantle of racial uplift. For example, she chastised Black New Yorkers for not supporting concerts by Black musicians and promoted the careers of a new generation of performers, including Martina Arroyo, Leontyne Price, and William Warfield. She continued her support of the NANM, serving as president of the New York City branch in 1950. That year a testimonial concert was held in her honor at St. Philip's Episcopal Church, a bastion of the Black bourgeoisie, which featured greetings from the vicar and a host of stellar performances.

Nora Holt lived on for more than twenty years. She was a major supporter of Van Vechten's efforts to establish the James Weldon Johnson Collection at Yale University. The letters she exchanged with him are the primary source of information about her life. There is much more to discover. She was a free woman, who lived and loved as she chose, and somehow managed never to pay the price such freedom usually incurred. She maintained the respect of her peers in the small but rarefied world of African Americans in classical music, while enjoying the prerequisites of show business success on three continents. By staying on the move, Nora Holt succeeded in two equally unlikely careers: she was a woman who became both a New Negro composer and a jazz-age goddess.

---

[25] Fay M. Jackson, 'Topical Types in Filmland,' *Kansas City Plaindealer*, 20 April 1934.

[26] Bernard, *Remember Me to Harlem*, p. 166.

# Bibliography

'Holt-Ray Wedding Style Most Brilliant Affair,' *Chicago Defender*, 4 August 1923, p. 4.

'Lena James Douglas to Write About Opera and Symphony,' *Chicago Defender*, 3 November 1917, p. 11.

'Lena James Holt Takes High Honors at Chicago Musical College,' *Chicago Defender*, 29 June 1918, p. 10.

'She's Shanghai-Bound,' *Kansas City* (*Kansas*) *Plaindealer*, 2 September 1932.

Bergere, Marie-Claire, *Shanghai*: *China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 269.

Bernard, Emily, *Remember Me to Harlem*: *The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001).

Dannett, Sylvia, *Profiles of American Womanhood*, Vol. 2 (Yonkers: Educational Heritage, 1964).

Holt, Nora, 'A Chronological History of NANM,' *Music and Poetry*, July 1921, pp. 15–21.

—, 'A Letter to Our Readers,' *Music and Poetry*, January 1921, p. 5.

—, 'Musical Unity,' *Chicago Defender*, 29 March 1919.

—, 'Musicians Organize National Association, *Chicago Defender*, 9 August 1919, p. 15.

—, 'Negro Dance,' *Music and Poetry*, January 1921, p. 8.

Jackson, Fay M., 'Topical Types in Filmland,' *Kansas City Plaindealer*, 20 April 1934.

Kellner, Bruce, ed., *The Harlem Renaissance*: *A Historical Dictionary for the Era* (New York: Methuen, 1984).

Locke, Alain, 'The Negro Spirituals,' in his (ed.), *The New Negro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 199–213.

Marek, Joyce, 'Women Editors and Little Magazines in the Harlem Renaissance,' in Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKibble (eds.), *Little Magazines and Modernism* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp.105–118.

McGinty, Doris (ed.), *A Documentary History of the National Association of Negro Musicians* (Chicago: Center for Black Music Research, 2004).

P. G. K., 'Artist's Sense of Humour', *Daily Mail*, 11 November 1929, p. 21.

Reed, Bill, *Hot From Harlem*: *Twelve African American Entertainers, 1890–1960* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2010).

Shack, William, *Harlem in Montmartre*: *A Jazz Story between the Great Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean, *Bricktop's Paris*: *African American Women in Paris between the Two World Wars* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015).

Walker-Hill, Helen, *From Spirituals to Symphonies*: *African-American Women Composers and Their Music* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

White, Edward, *The Tastemaker*: *Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014).

# PART THREE

# UNDERSTANDING PATHWAYS

# 9. *Silsila*: Linking Bodies, Deserts, Water

### *Sama Alshaibi*

'*Silsila*' (Arabic for 'link') retraces history through diary, documentary and magical realism. From 2009–2016, I have explored and documented fifteen predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East, North Africa and the Maldives islands in Southeast Asia. This project was inspired by the great fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Batutta, who traveled 75,000 miles after initially setting out to perform Islam's compulsory Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. His meticulous notes were made over thirty years of traveling — a scientific approach to recording observations, insights and lessons all grounded in his Islamic faith that were later transcribed by a young writer, and which became *al-Rihla* [The Travels]. His book is considered the foundation of travel writing, and the birth of the genre of the travelogue. Set in a postcolonial context, '*Silsila*' advances pressing global ecological and environmental challenges, while aesthetically and historically alluding to the geographic allure of the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, which is rich in natural resources and antiquity in some areas, but barren in others. Geometric patterning and symmetry reference the formal qualities of Islamic art, connecting the individual to the divine. By capturing my journey and my performances in the significant deserts and endangered water sources and oases in the landscape from the Islamic world, and visually referencing the spaces maliciously documented

© 2019 Sama Alshaibi, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.09

in *al-Rihla*, I sought to unearth a historical story of continuity, community and perseverance. It serves as a visual resistance to the cultural productions from and about the region that selectively depict contemporary narratives of fragmentation, oppression, and war. The political refugees from the Global South of today are the climate migrants of tomorrow, but in much greater number and without geographic distinction. '*Silsila*' focuses on our geographic voice and our search connection with each other as interdependent peoples and nations plagued by an unthinkable future.

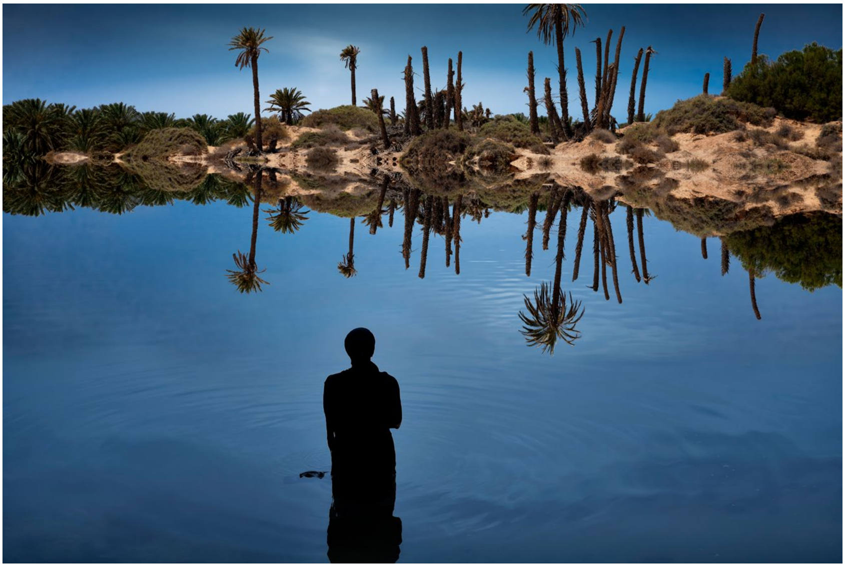


Fig. 9.1 Sama Alshaibi, *Fatnis al-Jazirah* [Fantasy Island], from the series '*Silsila*', 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

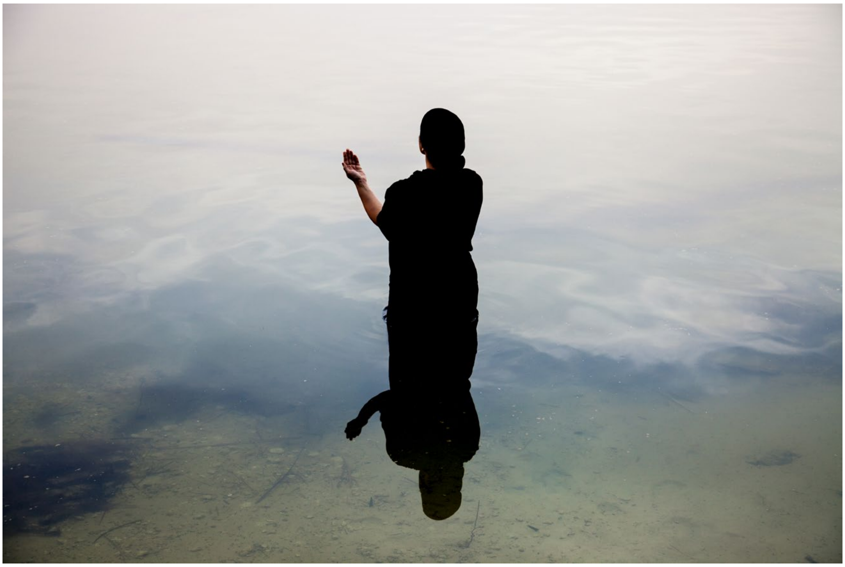


Fig. 9.2 Sama Alshaibi, *Silsila* [Link], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

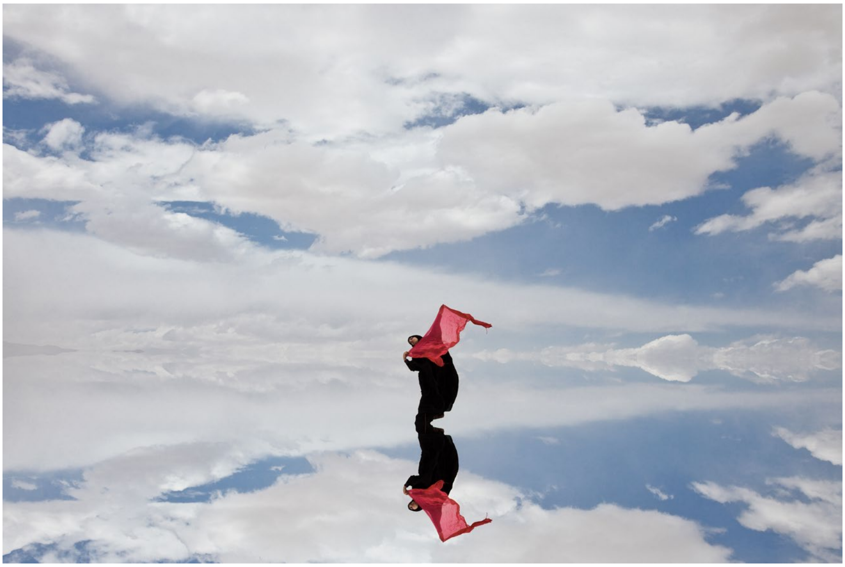


Fig. 9.3 Sama Alshaibi, *Ma Lam Tabki* [Unless Weeping], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

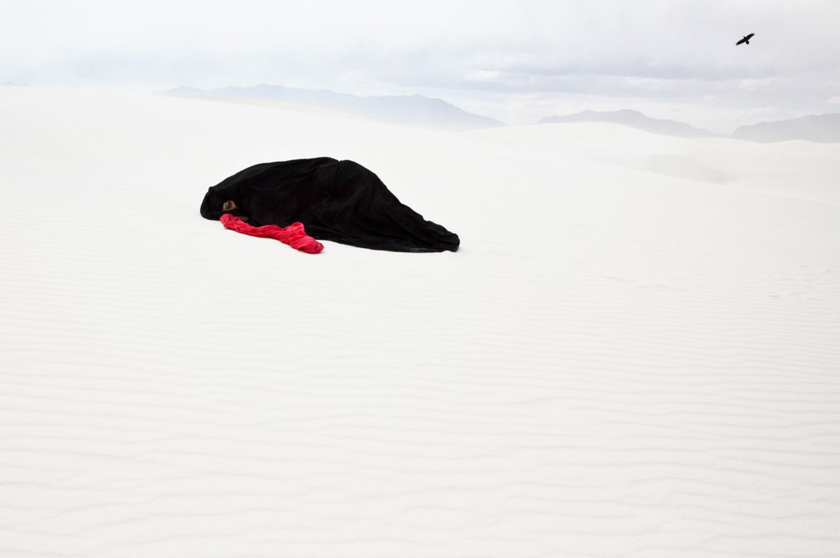


Fig. 9.4 Sama Alshaibi, *Jarasun Yaqra' li-l-Mawt* [Death Knell], from the series '*Silsila*', 27 1⁄2" × 39 3⁄8", inkjet pigment print, edition of 5, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

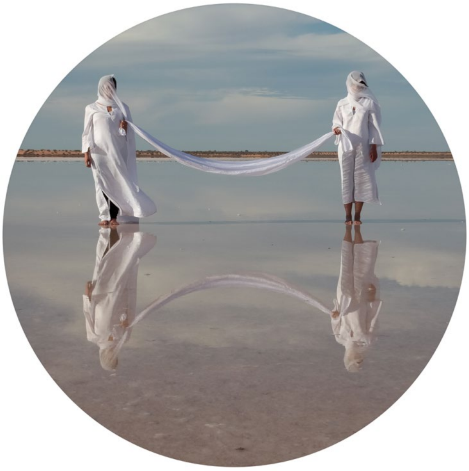


Fig. 9.5 Sama Alshaibi, *Sabkhat al-Milh* [Salt Flats], from the series '*Silsila*', 47 ¼" diameter, c-print mounted with Diasec, edition of 3, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

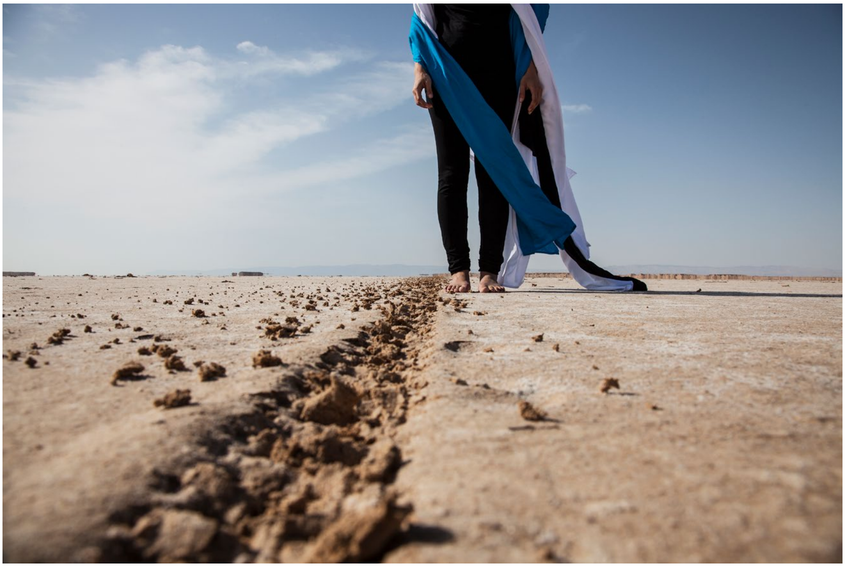


Fig. 9.6 Sama Alshaibi, *Al-Ṭariqah* [The Path], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

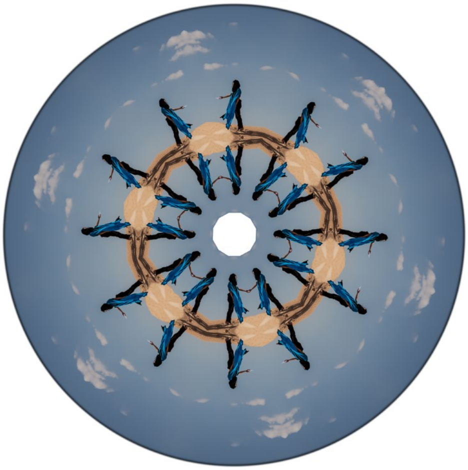


Fig. 9.7 Sama Alshaibi, *Ma Ijtamaʿat Aydina ʿala Qabdih Kan Muʿattal* [What Our Hands Joined Was Broken], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 47 ¼″ diameter, c-print mounted with Diasec, edition of 3, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

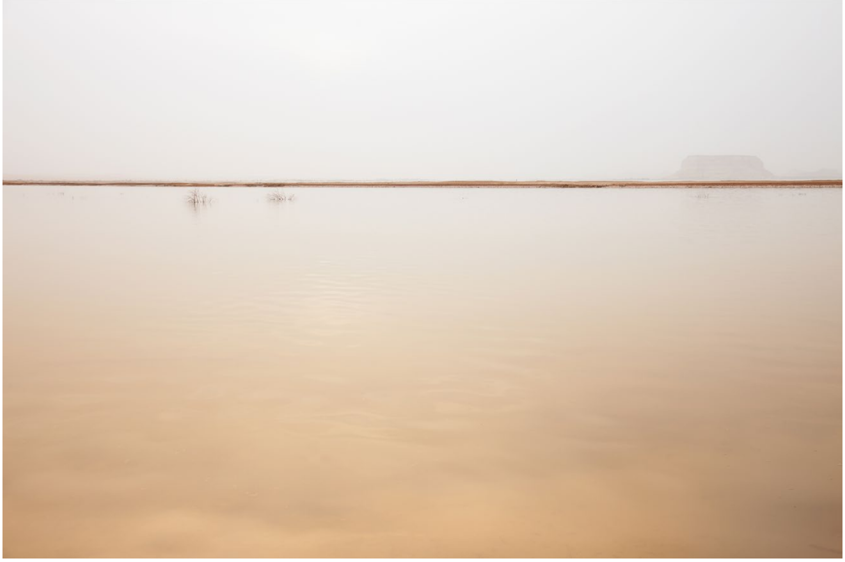


Fig. 9.8 Sama Alshaibi, *Wahat Siwa* [The Siwa Oasis], from the series '*Silsila*', 27 1⁄2″ × 39 3⁄8″, inkjet pigment print, edition of 5, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

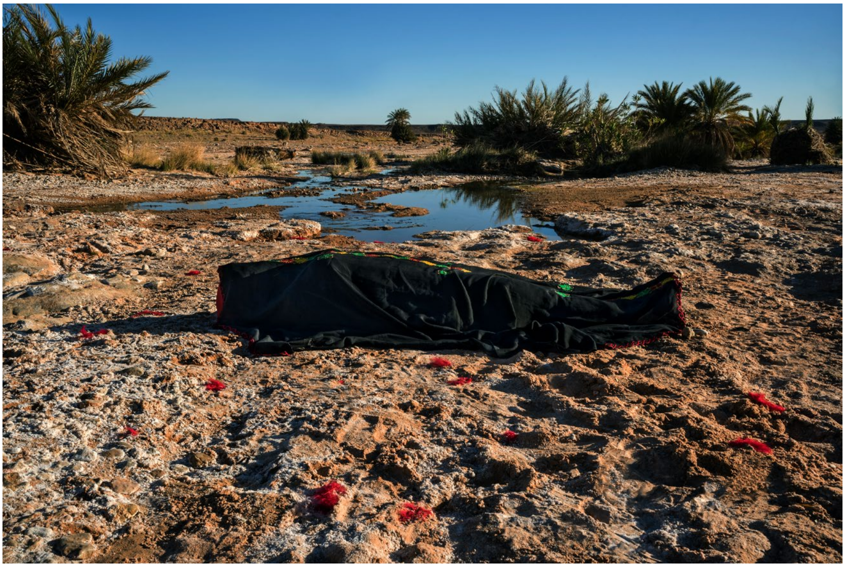


Fig. 9.9 Sama Alshaibi, *Idha Intaha Thumma Yabtadi* [If Over and Then Begins], from the series '*Silsila*', 39 3⁄8″ × 27 1⁄2″, inkjet pigment print, edition of 5, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

# 10. My Baby Saved My Life: Migration and Motherhood in an American High School

*Jessica Ingram*

The students come from around the city, often taking several buses with their baby carriages and backpacks before arriving at Hilltop, a public high school for pregnant teenagers nestled in the Mission District of San Francisco. Inside the school, strollers line up in front of lockers and pregnant teenagers, discussing mothering and boyfriends, pass in the halls. Outside of the walls of the school, life is harder. The majority of the young women immigrated to the United States from Latin America, some seeking asylum. The young women are raising children, many in the midst of gang culture, immigration and housing problems, foster care, poverty, and violence.

Almost every young mother says that her baby saved her life, forcing her out of dangerous and abusive situations into new decisions with fresh purpose. The experience of inclusion in Hilltop was a turning point and provided a crucial space of belonging, at an urgent time in these young women's and their children's lives.

Hilltop opened in 1968 as a one-room school in San Francisco's General Hospital and moved to the Sunshine building in the Mission District a few years later. In the 1990s there were approximately 160 students, by 2000 80 to 90 students, and by 2017 65 students. The numbers of students and their demographics are changing as the Bay Area becomes unaffordable.

© 2019 Jessica Ingram, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.10

Hilltop has a standard high-school curriculum, with the addition of parenting and nutrition classes, grief group, baby massage workshops, and creative writing. There is a social worker, counselor, and nurse on staff, as well as a nursery, and continued care for the children after graduation. Sanctuary is at the core of the experience, with a focus on empathy, and moving each student out of reactive trauma and survival modes into a space where she can make choices, understand pathways, identify needs and self-actualize.

Several of the 2017 graduates who walked across the stage with their babies this year also walked across the US/Mexico border with no family and no food. Two of those students graduated with honors and have scholarships to City College in San Francisco.

I started spending time at Hilltop in 2004, until 2007. I returned to the former students in 2016 for a ten-year update. I have been reconnecting with and interviewing these women (see Figs. 10.1-10.8). This process includes looking back at videos made during those earlier years where they discuss immigration, the first time they had sex, giving birth, and relationships with partners and family. In the recent interviews they open up about life since graduation, including having more kids, parenting, and dealing with housing and economic realities, and the conversations were a moment for them to reflect on what they thought life would be like ten years after graduation and what they have experienced and learned.

Charlotte enrolled at Hilltop in 2005. She describes the experience as finally arriving in a place where they saw her as she saw herself:

> I met Renaldo [Re] at sixteen, and was pregnant at seventeen with Lualhapi & Ligaya, who are now twelve years old. I was scared and wanted an abortion. I was thinking, can I really raise them on my own? Renaldo is a good person, but he was young. I'm thinking, if he leaves me, what will my life be like? My family situation wasn't fit.
>
> When I told Re I was pregnant, he was happy. He wanted to be a dad. I said, 'so you're not going to leave me?' He said, 'of course not.' My parents kicked me out and Re's parents took us in. All the time I am thinking, when is he going to leave me. I wasn't planning on a commitment. The way my life has been, there had been so much disappointment in my relationships with people.
>
> We've been together fourteen years. We're inseparable. We grew up together and into adults together. We had set ideas about the father and mother roles, but now we share roles. It took a while for us to do that.

He changed his views of a Latino family, and who was supposed to be the provider and who was supposed to stay home. We've had setbacks. My nephew passing away made things rocky. I was depressed. I'm still going through it but it's better. I was depressed after our son was born too, and didn't take care of myself then, and that was hard.

My son is Herinaldo. He was an accident. I switched birth control and got pregnant. Before Heri, we thought we are in a good place, the girls are getting older, I can finish school, and then: surprise!

I was born in the Philippines. Emigrated at five years old. Came on a green card with my adopted mom [an aunt]. I always thought she was my real mom, but then I found out I was adopted. I felt loved as a kid, but there was always something missing. In middle school, I overheard one of the aunts say, you know she's not their real daughter. I didn't tell anybody I had heard that. When I was older, I went to the Philippines and found my real mother. She thinks I shouldn't tell my story, that there could be legal issues. I think why should I be afraid to tell my story? I have my papers. It's good for other people to know there are other people out there-for hope.

Re is from the Philippines. We had the same circle of friends and met messaging each other. I have friends, but my children have always come first. My goal is to be the best mother because I didn't feel like I had a solid person in my life. My children are my world, and I'm going to give them the best of me, and then what's left can go to friends.

I was always searching for a place to feel like I can be myself. I knew I was a good person but felt like every step I made was wrong. Hilltop became about choice. I had a say in what I needed, and my needs were met. They guided me to meet my own needs. I had the freedom to make choices and being a part of the Young Family Resource Center, we were the first people to help young parents plan, to see what they needed and organize resources. I was given responsibility. I felt a belonging to a place. I had connections with teachers who care and really sit down and listen to me. Who help me plan if I have a career idea or want to go to college and take me seriously.

I was sleep-deprived in high school, after the twins were born, and they would say, school would always be here. Go sleep and come back to class when you are ready. So I would go sleep on the couch in Naomi's office, and then go back to class when I woke up. I was learning how to take care of myself. To figure out what do you need and how do you make it work, and breastfeeding as a way of connection with my girls. I felt at home. They didn't highlight the bad. Only the good came out of their mouths, which I wasn't used to. It made me want to go to school every day.

We live in Daly City now, all five of us in one room of a house. The girls are in seventh grade. I have a job at a preschool and I drive for

Lyft. I always dream of where I want to be. I'm about to turn thirty and assessing myself. Have I succeeded? Is this where I saw myself being ten years ago? Over the years I grew spiritually, intellectually, and mentally, and I reassessed. Money is great. It gets you places and gets you what you need. But it's not everything. I'm successful. My daughters are good people. I'm still in school. I'm always striving to learn something new in school or from another person. My relationships with people, I assess them, thinking how can I grow. I'm thankful for a house over my head and that I can provide for my kids.

It's a continuous process. I know myself now more than I did ten years ago. All I have learned has taught me to be a good person and someone who can contribute to others' well-being. I'm able to let go of things. I define success that way. I may not have the nice stuff — the nice shoes, the house, those things which means you're making it, but it's all situational. With three kids, I have to always ask, is this reasonable, is this realistic? What will benefit my family? I'm secure in myself, I know who I am and what I want. It's a journey and you have to just keep going.

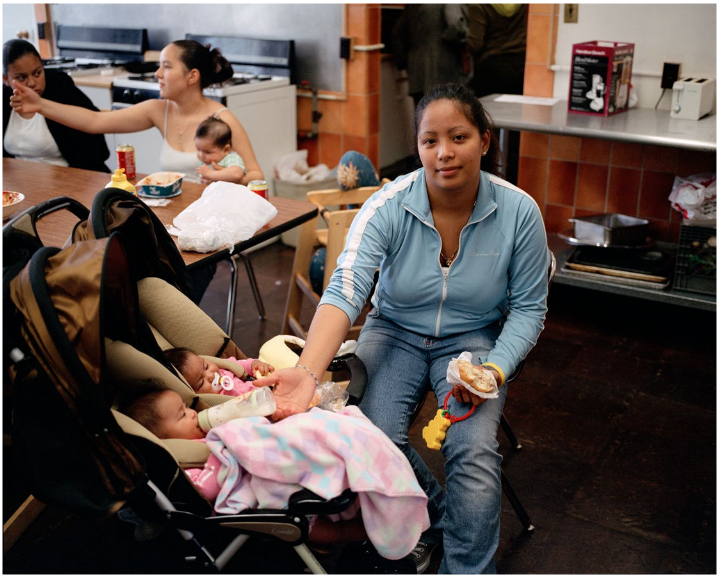
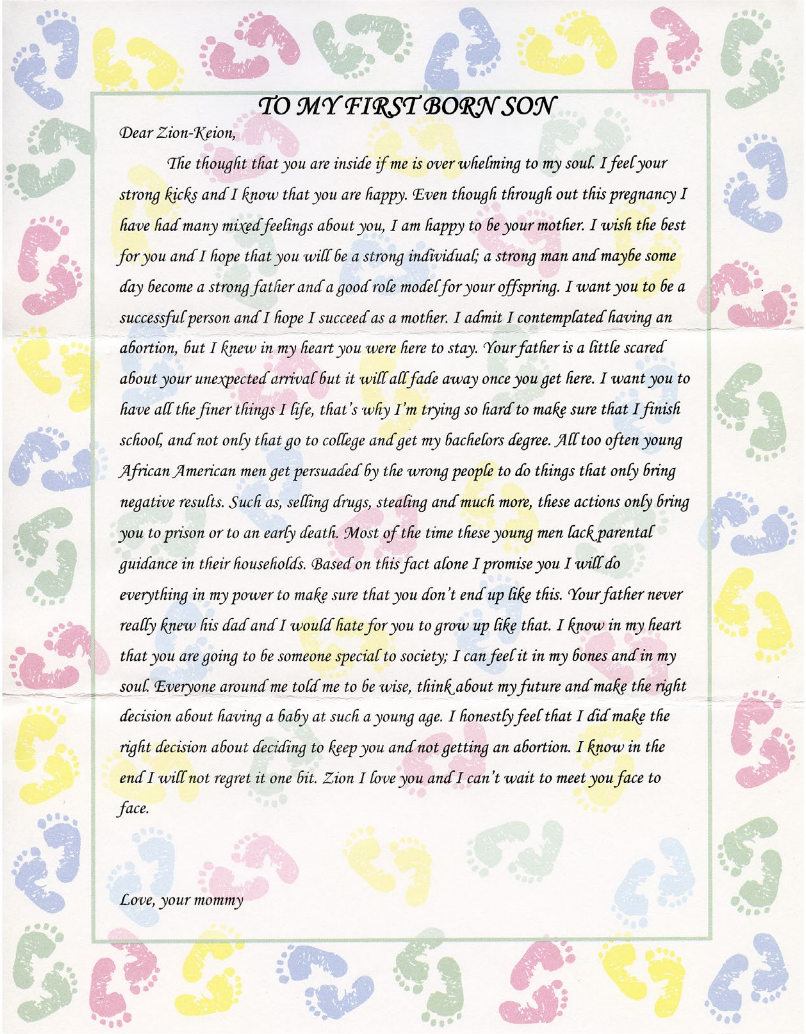


Fig. 10.1 Jessica Ingram, 'Charlotte', 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.



## TO MY FIRST BORN SON

Dear Zion-Keion,

The thought that you are inside if me is over whelming to my soul. I feel your strong kicks and I know that you are happy. Even though through out this pregnancy I have had many mixed feelings about you, I am happy to be your mother. I wish the best for you and I hope that you will be a strong individual; a strong man and maybe some day become a strong father and a good role model for your offspring. I want you to be a successful person and I hope I succeed as a mother. I admit I contemplated having an abortion, but I knew in my heart you were here to stay. Your father is a little scared about your unexpected arrival but it will all fade away once you get here. I want you to have all the finer things I life, that’s why I’m trying so hard to make sure that I finish school, and not only that go to college and get my bachelors degree. All too often young African American men get persuaded by the wrong people to do things that only bring negative results. Such as, selling drugs, stealing and much more, these actions only bring you to prison or to an early death. Most of the time these young men lack parental guidance in their households. Based on this fact alone I promise you I will do everything in my power to make sure that you don’t end up like this. Your father never really knew his dad and I would hate for you to grow up like that. I know in my heart that you are going to be someone special to society; I can feel it in my bones and in my soul. Everyone around me told me to be wise, think about my future and make the right decision about having a baby at such a young age. I honestly feel that I did make the right decision about deciding to keep you and not getting an abortion. I know in the end I will not regret it one bit. Zion I love you and I can’t wait to meet you face to face.

Love, your mommy

Fig. 10.2 Jessica Ingram, ‘Letter to My First Born Son’, 2006. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.

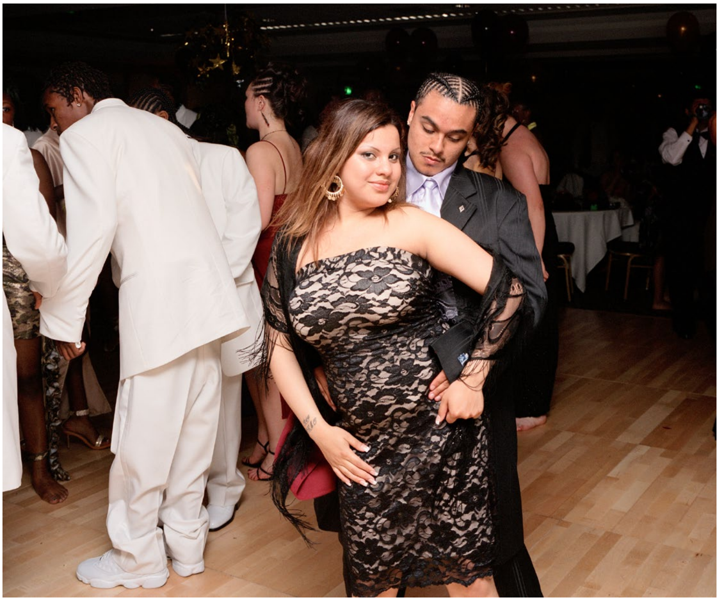


Fig. 10.3 Jessica Ingram, 'Isabelle at Prom', 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.

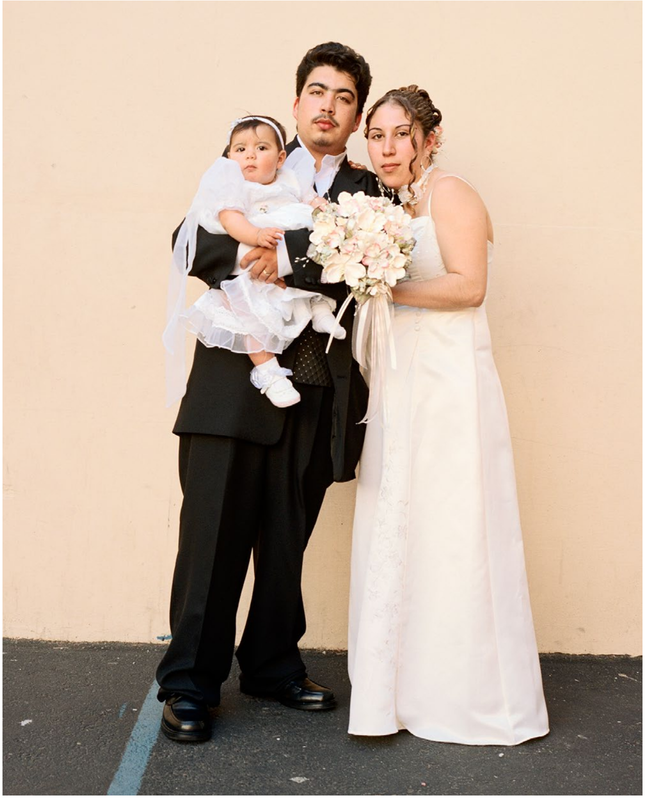


Fig. 10.4 Jessica Ingram, 'Rosaura's Wedding', 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.

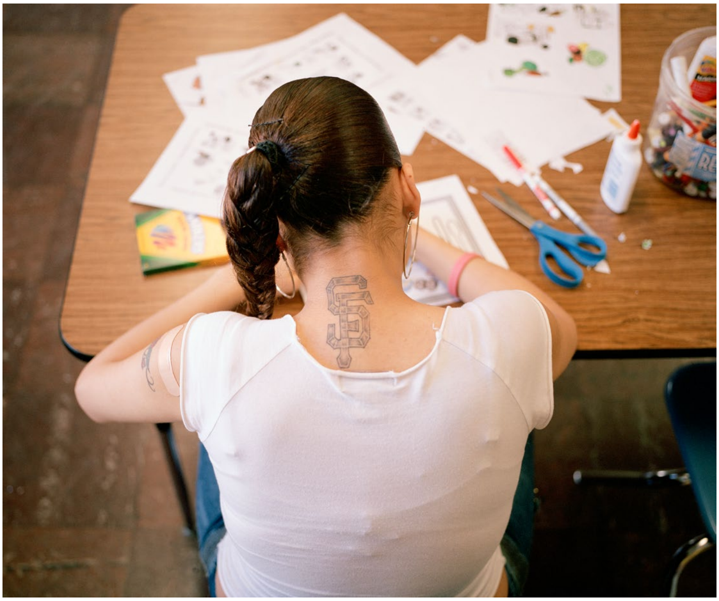


Fig. 10.5 Jessica Ingram, ‘SF’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.

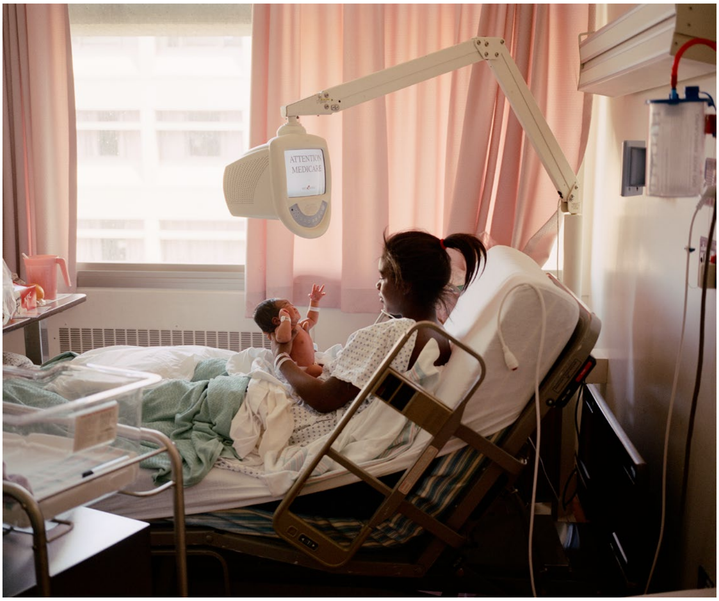

ATTENTION
MEDICARE

Fig. 10.6 Jessica Ingram, ‘Alanna’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.

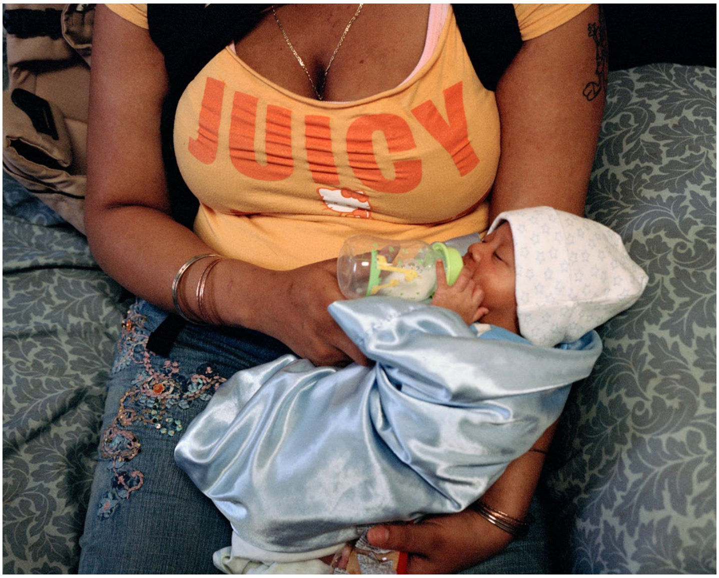


Fig. 10.7  Jessica Ingram, 'Juicy', 2006. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.

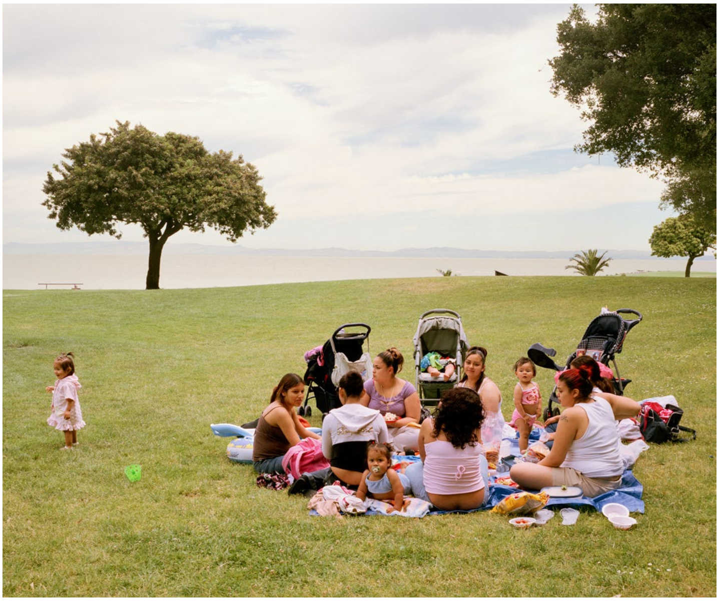


Fig. 10.8  Jessica Ingram, 'Picnic', 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND.

# 11. Visualizing Displacement Above The Fold

## *Lorie Novak*

---

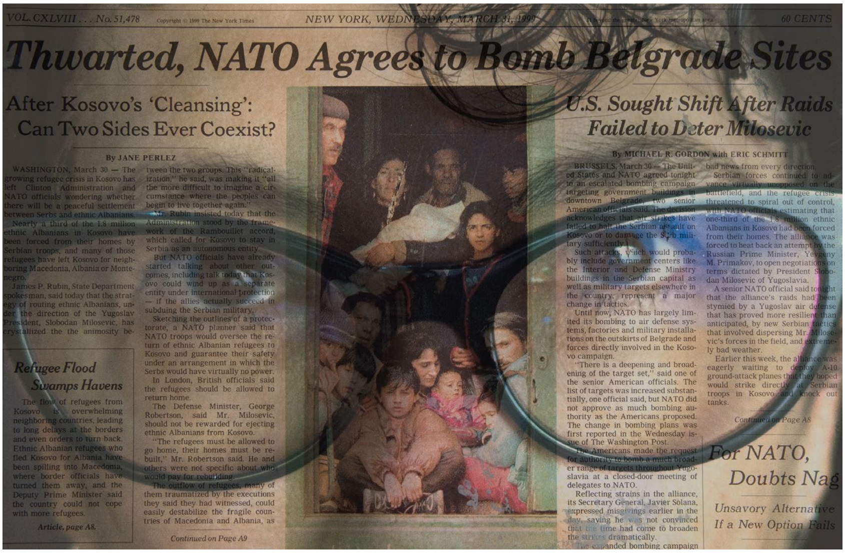

VOL. CXLVIII . . . No. 51,478
NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 1999
60 CENTS
Thwarted, NATO Agrees to Bomb Belgrade Sites
After Kosovo's 'Cleansing': Can Two Sides Ever Coexist?
U.S. Sought Shift After Raids Failed to Deter Milosevic
Refugee Flood Swamps Havens
For NATO, Doubts Nag
Unsavory Alternative If a New Option Fails

Fig. 11.1 Lorie Novak, 'Reading the News', 1999, CC BY-NC-ND.

In early 1999, photos of displaced families in the former Yugoslavia were appearing on the front page and throughout *The New York Times*. I was deep into my *Collected Visions* project in which I was collecting photographs from over 300 people to understand how family snapshots

© 2019 Lorie Novak, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.11

shape our memory (see http://collectedvisions.net). I was clipping more photographs from newspapers than usual. The war in Kosovo had been going on since 1996, but now more photos were appearing to draw our attention to the conflict. As it became clear in March 1999 that NATO was going to bomb Serbia in response to the attacks against Albanians in Kosovo, I made the decision to start saving the entire front section of *The New York Times* once the bombing started. My idea was to have a stack of newspapers that signified a war.

On 24 March 1999, NATO began air strikes with the bombing of Serbian military positions in the province of Kosovo and I began saving the front pages. When the air strikes ended on 10 June 1999, and ethnic Albanians began returning to their homes, it did not seem that a true

## Counting Speaks Volumes

Jumping ahead to the present, there are over 7,000 *New York Times* front-page sections in my studio sorted into 33 categories suggested by the photographs that appear above the fold. I approach my analysis as an artist. To determine how to sort the newspapers, I let the front-page photos talk to me. Subject matter that appears over and over includes men with guns, dead bodies, people grieving, people holding photos, memorials, protest, bombings, shootings, refugees, migrants, natural disasters, daily weather, sports, US presidents, and politicians campaigning.

Determining categories was often a challenge. For example, I struggled over how to define war and terrorism. I settled upon the category War & Conflict to include images of state sponsored violence, and Terrorism to include images where violence was perpetuated to harm as many innocent people as possible because of their ethnicity, religion, gender, etc. Over the years, the relative sizes of the categories changed as photographic trends and political attitudes emerged and evolved. More dead bodies appeared, the number of photographs of refugees grew, and politicians campaigning appear more frequently. In late 2017, the attention given to cases of sexual harassment and assault on the front page allowed me to form a new category. Nonetheless, as of July 2018, there are only thirteen papers in this category (the first one appears in 2006), replacing Arts & Fashion as the smallest pile.

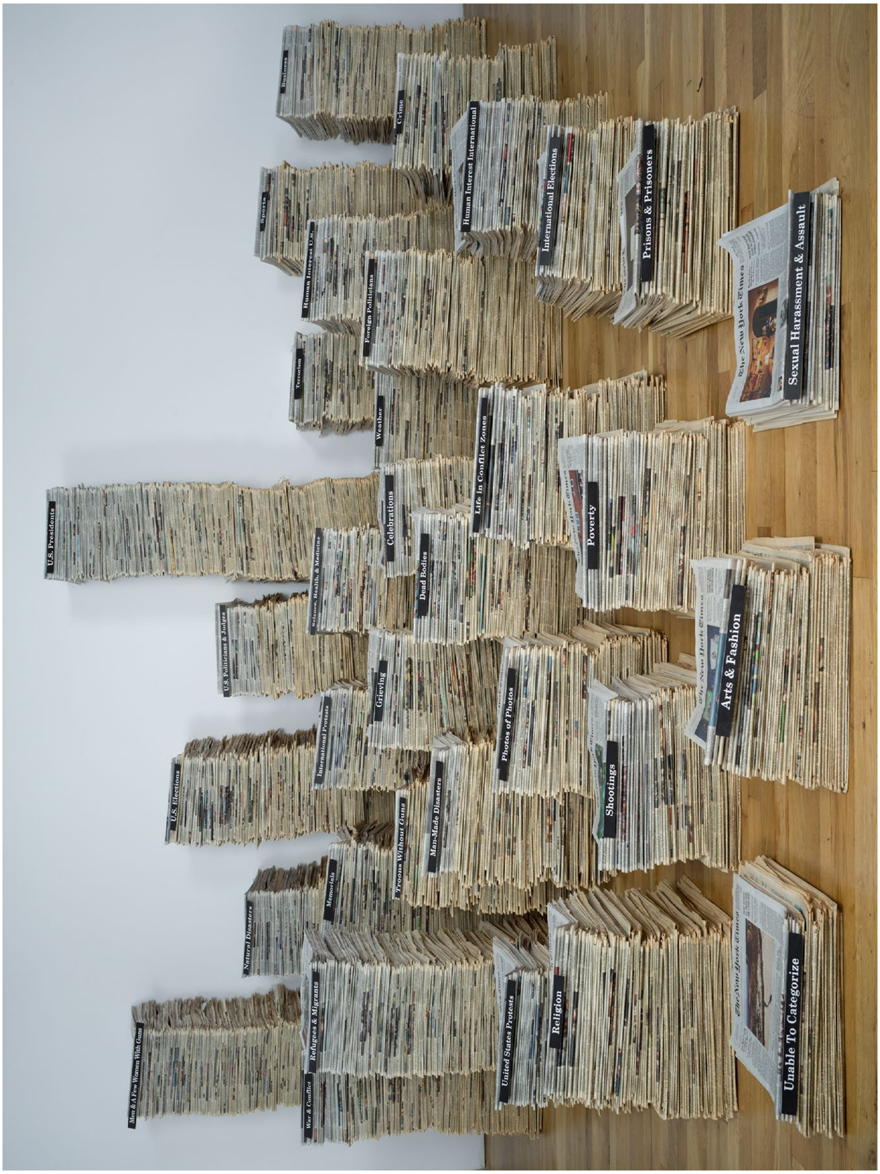

Business
Crime
Human Interest International
International Elections
Prisons & Prisoners
The New York Times
Sexual Harassment & Assault
Sports
Human Interest U.S.
Foreign Politicians
Terrorism
Weather
Life in Conflict Zones
U.S. Presidents
Celebrations
Poverty
Science, Health & Medicine
Dead Bodies
U.S. Politicians & Judges
Grieving
The New York Times
Arts & Fashion
Photos of Photos
International Protests
U.S. Elections
Shootings
Man-Made Disasters
Troops Without Guns
Memorials
Natural Disasters
Refugees & Migrants
Men & A Few Women With Guns
War & Conflict
United States Protests
Religion
The New York Times
Unable To Categorize

Fig. 11.2 Lorie Novak, 'Above The Fold', in my studio, July 2018, CC BY-NC-ND.

Images can often be classified in multiple categories, and I had to establish a sorting structure. In determining the hierarchy of image content, I let go of the neutrality I had sought for image classification.

| Hierarchy of Image Categories<br>*(Categories listed in order of priority if an image falls in more than one category)* |
|---|
| Men & A Few Women With Guns |
| Dead Bodies |
| United States Protests |
| International Protests |
| Refugees & Immigrants |
| Photos of Photos |
| Grieving |
| Memorials |
| War & Conflict |
| Terrorism |
| Shootings |
| Natural Disasters |
| Man-Made Disasters |
| Sexual Harassment & Assault |
| Arts & Fashion |
| Prisons & Prisoners |
| Crime |
| US Elections |
| US Presidents |
| US Politicians & Judges |
| International Elections |
| Foreign Politicians |
| Poverty |
| Life in Conflict Zones |
| Science & Health |
| Troops without Guns |
| Sports |
| Weather |
| Business |
| Celebrations |
| Human Interest US |
| Human Interest International |
| Unable to Categorize |

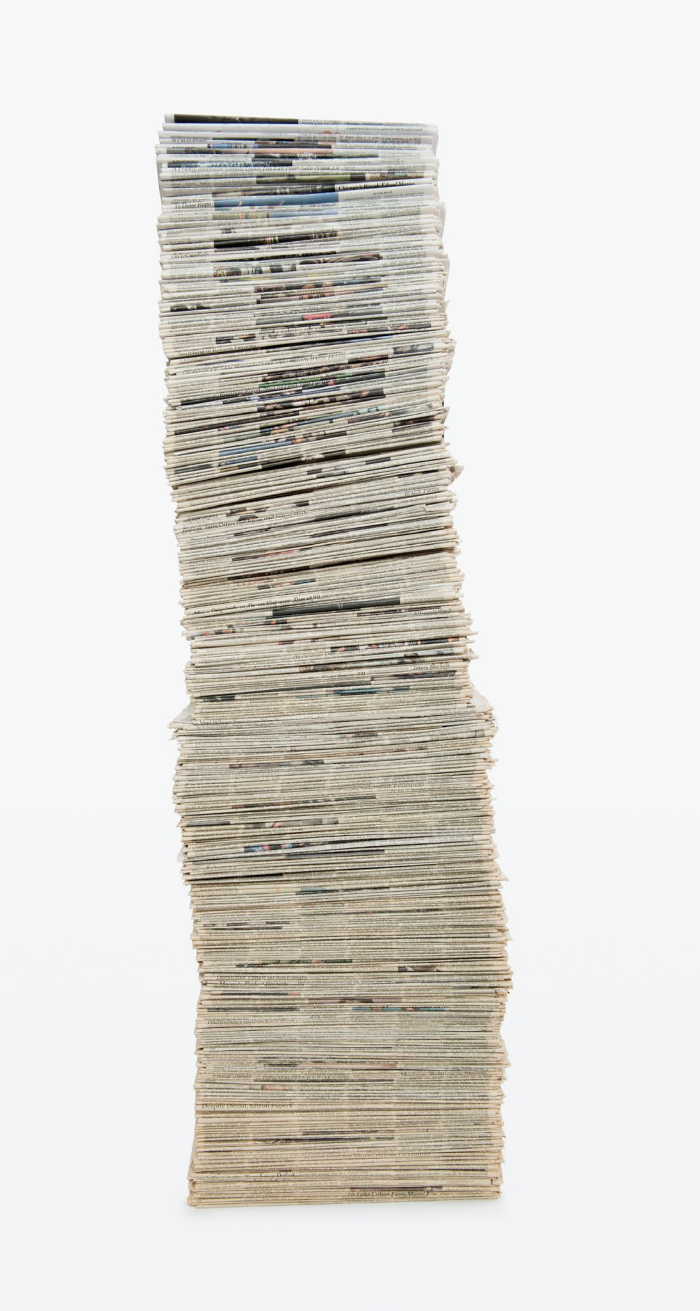


Fig. 11.3 Lorie Novak, ‘Men & A Few Women With Guns’, 60′ x 32′, inkjet photograph, 2017, CC BY-NC-ND.

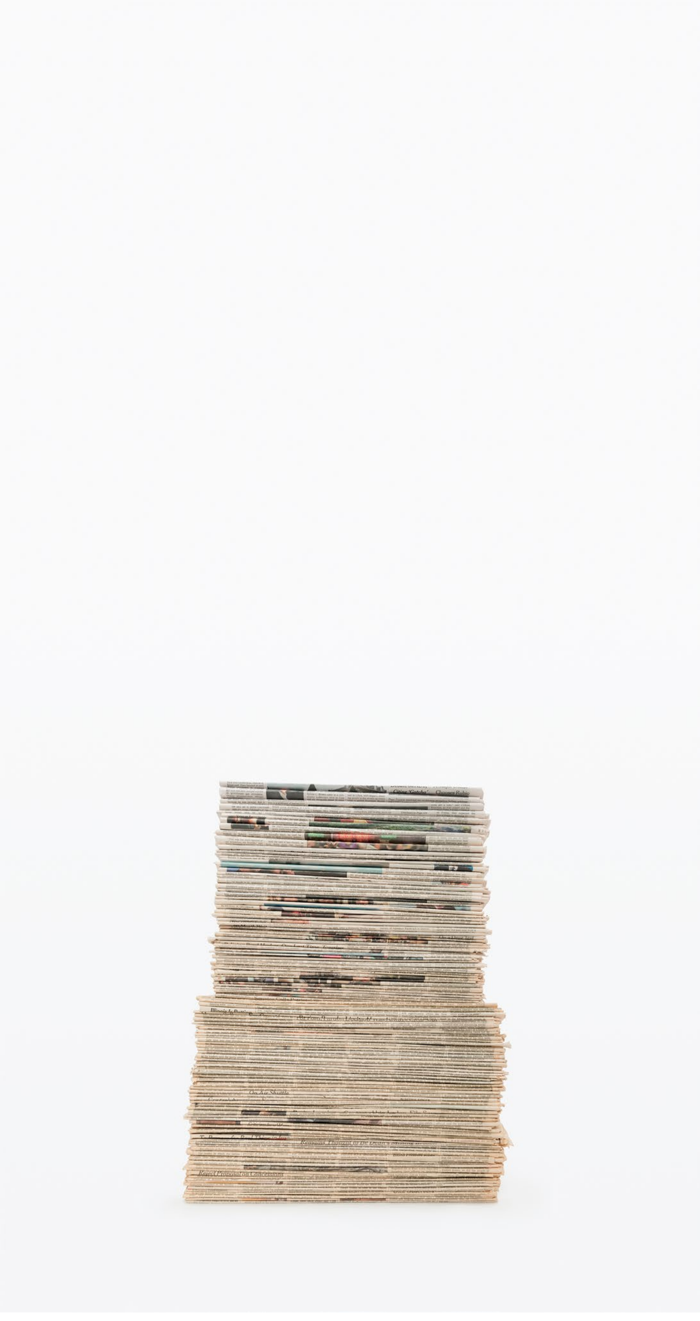


Fig. 11.4 Lorie Novak, 'Dead Bodies', 60′ x 32′, inkjet photograph, 2017, CC BY-NC-ND.

## Men With Guns, Dead Bodies, Grieving, Protest

As I began categorizing the photographs, what first stood out to me was the prevalence of guns. To show how the image of a man with a gun is glorified, I gave those photographs top priority. (Women holding guns appear fewer than 10 times.) Not surprisingly, Men & A Few Women With Guns is the second tallest pile after US Presidents. Dead Bodies, Grieving, and Memorials are the next 3 categories in my hierarchy and a window into how trauma and violence are visualized and given importance. The most heart-wrenching photos can be found in Grieving.

Protests as a whole comprise a sizeable portion of the collection, yet foreign protests are given far more prominence than protests in the United States. For instance, in the three years from 2011 to 2013, there were forty-two images of protests in Egypt alone, while there has been a total of ninety-five photos of the protests in the US spread over the entire nineteen years from the start of my collection through 2017. It is rather startling that only four photographs of anti-Iraq-War protests made it above the fold.

Images of protest of the Trump Administration's immigration policies have appeared six times since his inauguration on 20 January 2017 until 27 July 2018, the court-determined deadline for reuniting migrant families separated at the southwest border. In these eighteen months, other images of US protest include women's marches: twice; anti-abortion protest: once; gun reform marches: six times; anti-racism protests: twice. That is a total of seventeen front-page photos as compared to eighteen of international protests.

## Refugees and Migrants

Images of refugees were the impetus for this project. When I am lost in my archive, I think about the visualization of refugees and migrants in the mainstream US media and our current crisis caused by Trump with his travel ban, anti-immigrant rhetoric and violence, as well as more blatant racism and misogyny. I have conducted a close read of the images of refugees and migrants that have appeared above the fold of *The New York Times* from the beginning of the War in Kosovo in March 1999 to 27 July 2018.

| Date | Category | Total |
|---|---|---|
| **March–December 1999** | 15 Kosovo<br>1 Immigrant life in the US<br>1 Chechnya | **17** |
| **2000** | 7 Cuba<br>1 Hong Kong | **8** |
| **2001** | 2 Afghanistan<br>2 Macedonia<br>3 Mexico | **7** |
| **2002** | 2 Afghanistan<br>1 Haiti<br>1 Iraq<br>1 Palestine | **5** |
| **2003** | 1 Iraq<br>1 Sierra Leone<br>1 Zimbabwe | **3** |
| **2004** | 1 Hong Kong<br>1 Iraq<br>1 Mexico<br>1 immigrant life in the US | **4** |
| **2005** | 2 Indonesia<br>1 Iraq<br>1 Mexico<br>1 Sri Lanka<br>2 Sudan | **7** |
| **2006** | 3 immigrant life in the US<br>1 Colombia<br>1 Congo<br>1 Guatemala<br>1 Lebanon<br>1 Mexico<br>1 Pakistan<br>1 Palestine<br>2 Sudan | **12** |
| **2007** | 2 immigrant life in the US<br>1 China<br>1 Congo<br>1 Iraq<br>1 Laos<br>1 Liberia<br>2 Mexico<br>1 Somalia<br>1 South Asia<br>1 Sudan | **12** |

| Date | Category | Total |
|---|---|---|
| **2008** | 1 Georgia | **7** |
| | 1 Guatemala | |
| | 1 India | |
| | 1 Mexico | |
| | 1 Nigeria | |
| | 1 South Africa | |
| | 1 Zimbabwe | |
| **2009** | 4 immigrant life in the US | **11** |
| | 1 Afghanistan | |
| | 1 Colombia, | |
| | 1 Ecuador | |
| | 2 Pakistan | |
| | 1 Palestine | |
| | 1 Sri Lanka | |
| **2010** | 2 immigrant life in the US | **9** |
| | 1 Africa | |
| | 1 Botswana, | |
| | 1 Congo | |
| | 1 Haiti | |
| | 2 Kyrgyzstan | |
| | 1 Pakistan | |
| **2011** | 2 Africa | **7** |
| | 1 Botswana | |
| | 1 India | |
| | 1 Mexico | |
| | 1 Somali | |
| | 1 Tunisia | |
| **2012** | 1 immigrant life in the US | **12** |
| | 1 Afghanistan | |
| | 2 China | |
| | 1 Colombia | |
| | 1 Congo | |
| | 1 Mexico | |
| | 2 Sudan | |
| | 3 Syria | |
| **2013** | 1 Afghanistan | **10** |
| | 1 Congo | |
| | 1 Haiti | |
| | 1 Mexico | |
| | 6 Syria | |

| Date | Category | Total |
|---|---|---|
| **2014** | 1 immigrant life US<br>2 Africa<br>2 Central America<br>5 Iraq<br>2 Mexico<br>1 Myanmar<br>2 Palestine<br>4 Syria | **19** |
| **2015** | 3 Immigrant Life US<br>1 Haiti<br>1 Iraq<br>1 Middle East<br>4 Myanmar<br>6 Syria<br>1 Yemen<br>15 Africa & Middle East | **32** |
| **2016** | 1 Cameron<br>1 Central America<br>2 Iraq<br>1 Niger<br>1 Nigeria<br>6 Syria<br>1 Venezuela<br>7 Africa & Middle East | **20** |
| **2017** | 1 Afghanistan<br>1 Guatemala<br>1 Iraq<br>1 Ecuador<br>1 Honduras<br>2 Mexico<br>4 Rohingya from Myanmar<br>1 South Sudan<br>1 Syria<br>2 Africa & Middle East<br>3 immigrant Life in the U.S<br>1 US Border Patrol Capturing Migrants | **19** |
| **1 January–28 July 2018** | 3 Central America/Mexico<br>1 Guatemala<br>1 Niger<br>1 South Sudan<br>1 Syria<br>1 US Border Wall<br>4 US Border Patrol Capturing Migrants<br>3 US Detention Centers | **15** |

The horrors of the war in Kosovo in 1999 were depicted by displacement of families, as evidenced by fifteen front pages with photos of refugees from Kosovo. The plight of the refugee family continued into 2000, but with a shift in locale and a shift in tone to family melodrama. Seven of the eight refugee/migrant photos above the fold that year depicted the battle over the custody of five-year-old Elián González, who was found floating alone on an inner tube near Miami after leaving Castro's Cuba with his mother, who drowned on the journey.

As our century has progressed the visualization of the refugee/ migrant has become more complicated. More countries are represented and the displaced family is no longer the dominant trope. Three photos in the Dead Bodies category are of migrants. Five front pages in US Protests are about refugees and migrants during the sixteen years of the Presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Photos depicting protest against the Trump administration's travel ban and executive orders on immigration have appeared six times during his first eighteen months in office.

Advances in digital photography and cell phone cameras have had a huge impact on the range of images. We are much more aware of the perilous journeys migrants undertake, in part because of social media and the images circulated by refugees themselves and by the NGOs and volunteers helping them. With thirty-two images, 2015 has the most photos in one year in this category. The fact that 2016 has a third fewer photos despite the continued crisis of refugees and migrants worldwide may be a result of the seventy-six front page photos covering the 2016 presidential campaign and its aftermath. In 2017, nineteen images appeared depicting the number of Central American and Mexican migrants increasing. In the first seven months of 2018, focus has shifted in US media to the crisis at the US southern border and the cruel treatment of Mexican and Central American migrants seeking asylum.

Statistics can speak for themselves, with absence often speaking as loud as presence.

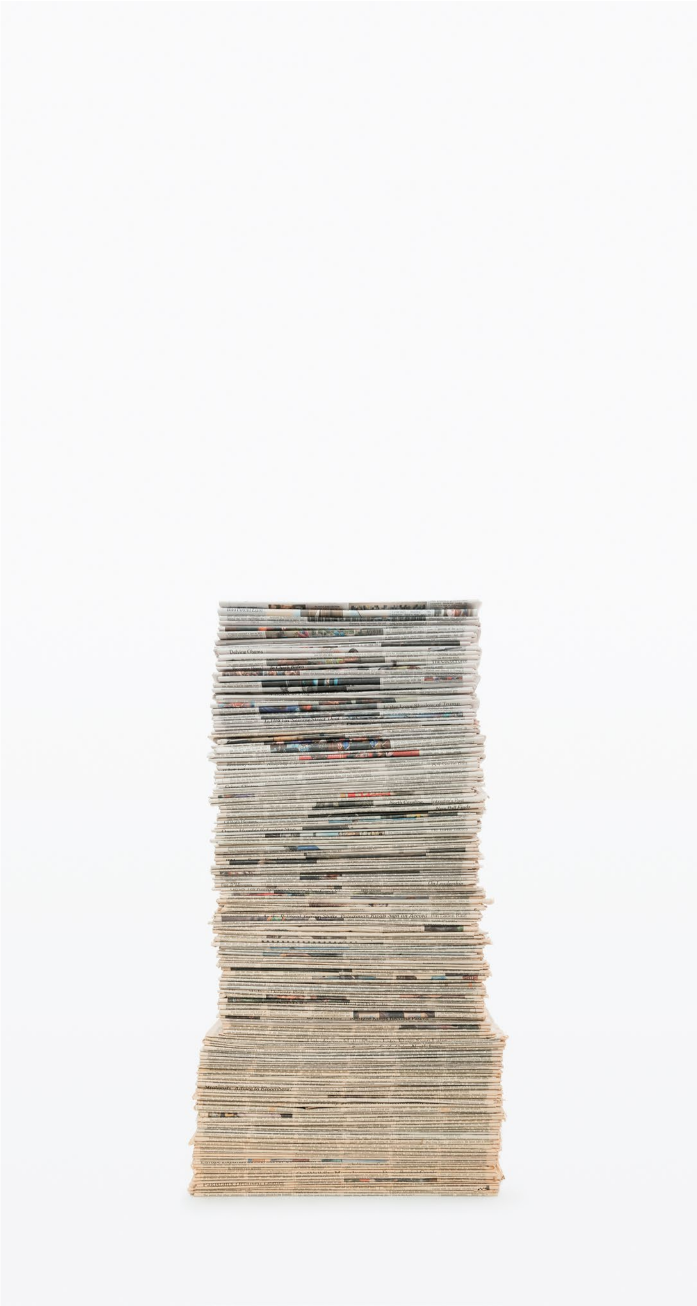


Fig. 11.5 Lorie Novak, 'Refugees & Migrants', 60' x 32', archival inkjet photograph, 2017, CC BY-NC-ND.

When I started this project in 1999, newspapers were primarily a print medium, and thus all *New York Times* readers saw the same front-page photo. But now, online reading is dominant. I, and many like me, go to nytimes.com several times a day, and each time I am greeted by a different photo that is often overshadowed by a large advertisement looming above. Usually that image on the screen is part of a slideshow or is not a photo but a video. If you return to the site later, that image may no longer appear and it is often hard or impossible to find again. The single image on the printed front page (or even the scanned version of 'Today's Paper' online) with no competing advertisement is a static and often powerful counterpart to the 24/7, always changing, up-to-the-minute online news cycle.

I look forward to opening my door each morning to pick up *The New York Times* to see what one photograph has been chosen to represent the news of the day. There is still power in the act of holding an image. My hope is that the image above the fold will give more attention to the ongoing worldwide refugee crises, anti-immigrant, racist, and misogynist sentiments and acts of resistance growing worldwide. I am often disappointed.

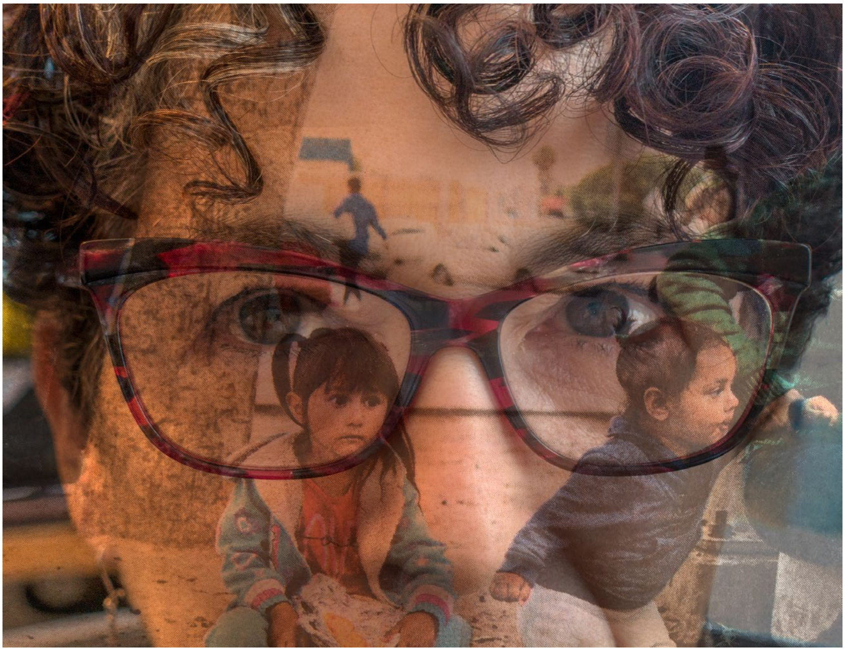


Fig. 11.6 Lorie Novak, 'Reading the News', 2018, CC BY-NC-ND.

# 12. Unveiling Violence: Gender and Migration in the Discourse of Right-Wing Populism

*Debora Spini*

---

Migrant women are the target of tangible and material forms of structural violence that are not visible to the public gaze: exploitation, abuse and, most of all, enslavement. Despite this, public attention tends to focus on their apparent status as oppressed victims of their misogynist cultures. Veils and burkinis — and the ocean of words that they never fail to provoke — hide the reality of the massive, enduring structural violence affecting migrant women. The structural violence to which they are subjected is related to the causes of their migration, primarily the need to leave in response to economic distress, human rights violations or political instability, and also to their condition of statelessness, which makes them extremely vulnerable. The symbolic violence exercised upon migrant women is no less real for its being elusive. It becomes manifest through practices of 'othering', constructing the migrant woman as a victim of oppression (by her own 'culture') and thus in need of rescue (by 'us').

This chapter explores the use of gender in the political discourse of European right-wing, ethnocentric and xenophobic populist movements, with a focus on the specific forms of violence, both structural

© 2019 Debora Spini, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.12

and symbolic, to which migrant women are subjected.[1] This analysis points to a broader framework, as the diverse forms of violence that are inflicted upon migrant women expose contradictions concerning the real place and role of women in Western political modernity. To this end, my chapter will consider how right-wing populism makes use of fear of rape and 'sexual terrorism', and how mechanisms of othering appropriate, manipulate and racialize issues that are traditionally part of a feminist agenda, turning them into weapons for xenophobic movements and parties.

## The Context: Europe's Invasion

Asylum and immigration are probably the most controversial issues in the European Union; mentioned seemingly in any public debate, from the crisis of welfare system to education, from gender to religion, they increase the emotional temperature to white heat. The perception of living through a migration or refugee crisis is widespread all over the European Union, and the term 'invasion' is now commonplace. A look at figures — necessary, unavoidable preparation for any kind of philosophical, political or ethical reflection — reveals the large gap between facts and perceptions.

EU official documents and policies clearly differentiate between immigrants and asylum seekers or refugees; yet, the two categories overlap in the common public perception.[2] This common sense is not altogether mistaken. The line separating immigrants and asylum seekers is in fact hard to draw, as political instability often causes or at least co-exists with extreme economic deprivation. Although poverty is a major push factor in migratory flows towards Europe, the category of 'economic refugee' is not included in EU legislation. In the common perception and in most media representations, therefore, the terms 'refugee' and 'immigrant' are interchangeable,[3] thus conveying the message that many asylum seekers are not 'real' refugees, but illegal immigrants, driven 'only' by poverty and famine, evidently not considered as valid reasons to roam freely around the world. The EU in fact welcomes 'high quality' immigrants (i.e. highly skilled workers) whilst discouraging unskilled migrants who are less promising members of the workforce.

---

[1] Bourdieu defines structural violence as that form of violence whereby structures of domination become interiorised. Symbolic violence allows situations of domination and oppression to survive even when the external structures of domination are removed. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*: *A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).As noted by Slavoj Žižek, symbolic violence does not replace but strengthens structural violence; see his *Violence*: *Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008).

[2] Whilst an immigrant is a person that voluntarily leaves his/her home country, an asylum seeker is a person leaving his/her country for fear of death or persecution because of gender, race, religion, opinion or membership of a specific social group, who would not have left in other circumstances.

By 'refugee crisis', official EU documents describe the more than one million people who tried to reach Europe in the last three years, mostly from Syria and to a lesser degree from other troubled places, 'the greatest mass movement of people since the Second World War'.[4] Undoubtedly, the past few years have seen a dramatic raise in the number of men and women trying to enter the EU — with a significant spike in 2015. According to the EU Commission website, asylum applications in the EU reached 2.5 million between 2015–2017, with 2.3 million illegal crossings detected during the same period. Statistics however indicate a decline in the second part of 2017 and in the first quarter of 2018. There were 650,000 asylum application requests in 2017.[5] Considering that the total population of the EU numbers 508 million inhabitants, calculating the extent of the 'invasion' is not difficult. By contrast, between 2015 and 2017 Lebanon received 1.2 million refugees, joining a total population of circa 4.5 million.[6]

Figures of refugee and asylum seekers must be matched with other numbers: those of deaths in the Mediterranean. As of 28 June 2017, the day of the Women and Migration Conference that inspired this volume, the estimated number of casualties was 2,557 people drowned or missing.[7] The first six months of 2018 see a sharp reduction in the number of arrivals via the Mediterranean (45,700, about 5 times lower than 2016), matched by an even sharper rise in the number of deaths: in the first months of 2018, about 1,000 human beings met their death crossing to European shores. The rate is now of 1 death every 7 crossings: one year ago, in the first half of 2018, the rate was 1 in 38.[8]

---

[3] This chapter will also apply the term 'immigrant' and 'migrant' both to women who are actually immigrants and to those who should be more appropriately defined as refugees or asylum seekers. This misuse of terms is intentional, so as to reflect common perceptions.

[4] European Commission, *The EU and the Refugee Crisis* (European Commission, 2016), https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1aa55791-3875-4612-9b40-a73a593065a3

[5] European Commission, *Eurostat. Statistics Explained. Asylum Statistics* (European Commission, 2018), http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics

[6] Ibid.

In 2016 the EU signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the government of Libya; under its auspices the Italian government signed an agreement with Libya in February 2017 in order to stop illegal departures from Lybia. According to Amnesty International, this agreement has resulted in at least 20,000 people being intercepted and transferred to Libyan detention centers.[9] Conditions in Libyan detention centers have been defined as 'horrific' by Amnesty International, which has repeatedly denounced various forms of torture that are allegedly used there, and charged European governments — Italy in particular — not only of being 'fully aware of these abuses but […] complicit in them'.[10]

Immigration and asylum are the sources of profound divisions within the European Union; these splits threaten to undermine the very foundation of the EU as a political project: a Europe without borders. Brexit is a brutal, yet not isolated, demonstration of how immigration-related fears and anxieties may jeopardize the very future of the European Union. The four 'Visegrad countries' (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) flatly refused to take in refugees, in violation of the spirit of all the treaties. In many other cases, frontiers were closed before being opened again, as in August 2017 when Austria sent troops to patrol its border with Italy. In 2018, French president Emmanuel

---

[7] European Parliament, *EU Migrant Crisis*: *Facts and Figures* (European Parliament, 2017), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78630/eu-migrant-crisis-facts-and-figures

[8] United Nations High Commission on Refugees, *As Mediterranean Sea Arrivals Decline and Death Rates Rise, UNHCR Calls for Strengthening of Search and Rescue* (UNHCR, 2018), http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/7/5b3f270a4/mediterranean-sea-arrivals-decline-death-rates-rise-unhcr-calls-strengthening.html

[9] Amnesty International, *Libya*: *European Governments Complicit in Horrific Abuse of Refugees and Migrants* (Amnesty International, 2017), https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/12/libya-european-governments-complicit-in-horrific-abuse-of-refugees-and-migrants/

[10] Ibid.

Macron closed the border with Italy across the Alps. Activists who helped immigrants stuck in the snow are now facing criminal charges.[11]

The most noteworthy phenomena in European politics is the growth of right-wing xenophobic populist movements and parties; although in most cases these existed well before the refugee crisis, they have thrived off it in their race towards power. Among them, Victor Orban's Fidesz in Hungary, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National in France, Geert Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid in Denmark, and Nigel Farage's UKIP[12] in the UK;[13] last but not least, Italy's elections of 4 March 2018 brought to power a populist coalition, whose main party is the openly xenophobic Lega, led by Matteo Salvini, now Deputy Prime Minister of Italy and Minster of the Interior. One of the first acts of the newly inaugurated government was the closure of Italian ports to NGO rescue ships. Salvini described rescue ships as 'seafaring taxis'[14] and repeatedly prevented Italian coastguard boats from providing help.[15] Hundreds of migrants were thus driven back to Libyan camps.

## Democracy's Distorting Mirror

The term 'populism' is extremely difficult to define and often improperly used as it may indicate either a mode of political communication or a complete ideology. Whilst Europe is currently home to a particularly rampant form of right-wing populism, different actors across the left/right political spectrum may be defined as 'populist' as demonstrated by many progressive and 'leftist' forces, beginning with the late nineteenth century Populist Party in the US, or Peronism in Latin America or, more recently, Podemos or the Occupy movement. Echoing the Latin American experience, radical philosopher Ernesto Laclau saw populism as the formation of an anti-hegemonic popular bloc.[16] The prevailing definitions in scholarly literature nonetheless focus on the anti-democratic potential of populism, arguing that its characteristic feature is its conception of 'people' as a homogeneous community, which does not allow for any internal diversification or dissent.[17] This anti-pluralist conception of 'the people' causes right-wing populist movements to display a particularly virulent brand of ethnocentric nationalism, whereby the 'nation' is no longer composed of citizens united by shared political principles, but as community yoked by 'natural' or 'cultural' bonds. Equally typical of populist movements and parties is the claim to represent the 'real' people (the man or woman in the street) against the corrupt and scheming elites. Populist movements thus nurture a profound distrust in representative democracy, arguing that it should be replaced by dubious forms of 'direct' democracy (such as extensive use of referenda or technological platforms that would replace parliamentary discussions).

---

[11] France24, 'Foreign Activists on Trial in France for Helping Migrants Enter the Country', 31 May 2018, https://www.france24.com/en/20180531-france-immigration-foreign-activists-trial-helping-migrants-enter-country-alps

[12] Nigel Farage has subsequently left UKIP, but he was formerly its leader and its most high-profile representative.

[13] Cas Mudde, *Populist Right Radical Parties in Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[14] Fiorenza Sarzanini, 'Migranti, scontro Italia-Malta. Salvini: "Porti chiusi all'Aquarius" Conte: "Noi lasciati soli"', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 June 2018, https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/18_giugno_11/migranti-salvini-la-aquarius-non-potra-approdare-un-porto-italiano-28e19a16-6cb2-11e8-8fe1-92e098249b61.shtml?refresh_ce-cp

[15] 'Lifeline soccorre 400 migranti, Salvini: "Stroncheremo mafia immigrazione"', *Mediterraneo Cronaca*, 21 June 2018, http://www.mediterraneocronaca.it/2018/06/21/lifeline-soccorre-400-migranti-salvini-stroncheremo-mafia-immigrazione/

Particularly fertile and relevant for this reflection is Nadia Urbinati's illuminating definition of populism as a distorting mirror of democracy. In fact populism could not exist without the affirmation of popular sovereignty, that is of 'the people' as the only legitimate source of political authority, which is, when all is said and done, the basic foundation of any democratic politics. As a mirror, populism reflects many traits of democracy, yet, it also distorts and perverts them, to the point of making them unrecognizable.[18] If we invert Urbinati's definition, we could say that populism helps us to see the real face of Western democracy, and how far it has come from its normative reference.

In the Western tradition, the notion of 'the people' is profoundly ambiguous as it often coincides with an even more controversial term, that of nation, which constantly oscillates between two poles. On the one hand, it connotes a diverse, plural version of citizenship, defined by political values; Jürgen Habermas' view of democracy is a paradigmatic example, where 'popular sovereignty' does not materialize in an anthropomorphic subject but is rather assimilated to a flow of discursive, deliberative processes whereby citizens participate in elaborating a common will. On the other, in Western modernity, 'nation' has in many cases meant a community that described itself as natural, kept together by notions such as 'blood' or 'heritage': this second view evidently paves the way for extreme ethno-centric interpretations.

---

[16] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 2015).

[17] Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*: *Opinion, Truth and the People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2014); Manuel Anselmi, *Populism*: *A Short Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[18] Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*.

References to gender are key for both conceptions, although in very different ways. The role of gender in the second understanding of the people is more straightforward and evident. Insofar as a political community is defined by 'natural' bonds, such as those of national/ethnic identity, women and their bodies play a key function, as the main guarantee for the reproduction of blood ties: hence the imperative to control women's bodies. The first model requires more thorough deconstruction and critical work, as gender equality and gender justice are supposed to be among the qualifying values of modern democratic citizenship.

However, modern democracy was born without women, in theory and in practice. Mainstream readings of the great canon of modern philosophy assume that authors such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau place at the center of their political theories an individual who is capable of political agency as a rational being who is master of himself. In fact, political philosophers who declared consent to be the only source of legitimate political authority never described such individuals in a neutral way, but spoke of male heads-of-family: essentially, patriarchs, who had the power to act for all their dependents, children and women. Carol Pateman has shown evidence of a pre-existing pact between men, which stipulates the subjection of women in exchange for protection.[19] The characteristics of those who subscribed to the original pact are routinely associated with masculinity (rational control over emotion, capacity for self-government), and considered alien to women. Incidentally, these features defining male political agency are also associated with European-ness or more generally whiteness.[20] Men, and men only, participate in the foundation of a legitimate political community, as they are considered as belonging 'naturally' to the public sphere, whist women are just as 'naturally' confined to the private sphere. The political covenant concerns only the public sphere, the sole province of men, and does not in any way undermine the permanence of patriarchal structures of power in the private sphere. Furthermore, the pact among brothers perpetuates male control of women and their bodies.[21] According to this argument, the public space has been defined for men and by men: in order to be accepted within it, women have to shed any characteristics that do not comply with the standards set by masculinity. Historical accounts match this philosophical critique, describing how women are latecomers to the public sphere of Western modernity and how they have had to fight during every step of their long march towards inclusion. These deep-set contradictions still have an impact on contemporary politics; that the presence of women in democratic public spaces is not only relatively recent but still quite insecure is demonstrated by a wide range of indicators, most obviously the small number of women in positions of political authority. The distorting mirror of democracy — populism — could not fail to reflect these contradictions, and appropriate them.

---

[19] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

[20] Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

## Racializing Otherness

Gender is a pivotal element in the discourse of right-wing populism in the context of a public debate framed by terms such as 'invasion', and influenced by political myths such as the clash of civilizations, or the Islamization of Europe. It is no surprise that right-wing populism makes abundant use of the most traditional stereotypes, because of the emphasis it places on people-as-a-natural-community; more surprising is its capacity to turn feminist agendas to its advantage. In the past, most right-wing populist parties and movements held a rather traditional view of gender roles, in which women were celebrated for their motherly mission; recently, right-wing populist discourse on gender is changing with amazing speed, as to appropriate many 'feminist' elements in a ethnocentric key.[22]

---

[21] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*; idem, *The Disorder of Women, Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[22] Mudde, *Populist Right Radical Parties*, pp. 90–95.

The reference to the 'Immigrant Woman' is an important facet of the rhetorical arsenal of European xenophobia. The construction of this fictional subject follows patterns of othering well known to postcolonial critique, basically reproducing the script of the 'third-world woman',[23] as well as sharing many features of the racialization process common to all immigrants. Being an immigrant is made to define every aspect of one's identity and erases social, cultural, historical differences. Just as 'tous les noires', all the Blacks, look alike,[24] so do immigrants, as though Vietnam and Mali could be the same, or the life experience of someone landing in Lampedusa on an inflatable boat could be the same of a second-generation PhD graduate. This racialization of 'the immigrant' also includes religious identity. The invasion of Europe is normally associated with one religion. The migrant person is almost invariably 'Islamic', as every non-Westerner has to be Muslim; Africans cannot be Christians, nor can Asians, even less Arabs. Within this forcibly homogenized identity, any differentiation is further denied and religion is identified with 'culture', which is also racialized. 'Culture' is always non-Western, as only in the West can people possess rationality and exercise autonomous moral judgement.[25] In her analysis of French media and popular culture, Rolhaya Diallo notices that crimes committed by immigrants are always explained with a reference to culture, which never happens when a European commits the same action. Gender-based violence is a typical demonstration: crimes perpetrated by Europeans are normally described in purely individualized and personalized terms, with culture never listed among the influential factors. Racialization thus depends on a wider process of the reification of culture.[26] Once conceived of as a monolith, in essentialist and ahistorical terms, a reified culture is not allowed any space for negotiation or autonomous reappropriation.[27] Islam is thus reformulated as an undifferentiated and monochrome 'culture' determining every aspect of collective as well as of personal behavior. Interestingly, this process of the racialization of religion in terms of the cultural foundations of collective identity is also affecting Western Christianity. In fact, xenophobic movements tend to reappropriate Christianity by defining it exclusively in terms of a way of life quintessential to national identity. This mechanism permits xenophobic movements to parade the Christian roots of Europe whilst at the same time being in open conflict with the basic values of human compassion that lie at the core of the Christian creed. Italian Deputy Prime Minister Salvini, for example, wanted to decorate with crucifixes those same ports he forbade to NGO ships saving human lives.

---

[23] Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*: *Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Chandra Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 30 (1988), 61–88.

[24] Rokhaya Diallo, *Racisme*: *mode d'emploi* (Paris: Larousse, 2011), p. 14.

[25] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 32.

[26] Sheyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*: *Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[27] Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*.

This process of racialization is itself a form of symbolic violence, as it consists of the continuous erasure of one's identity; migrant women experience it in specific forms. The identification between immigrant and Islam brings to light an array of myths, prejudices and fantasies when applied to women. The cultural and religious determination of identity — necessarily conducive to oppression and victimhood — becomes manifest in the Muslim woman's body, which thus becomes 'the ground on which national identity is constructed' and 'a marker of community's place'.[28] The Muslim woman is defined solely by her religious identity — and as religion is identified with reified culture, being Muslim defines her *in toto*. Consequently, 'Muslim women are all alike. Whether they come from Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, Bosnia or Indonesia they all come from 'Islamland'.[29] If culture is represented as monolith, any appeal for the co-existence of different communities within the same political space can easily be cast off as an impoverished multiculturalism summarized by the all-excusing mantra 'it's their culture…', a mantra that would necessarily first victimize women and their rights. In this black-or-white representation of identity there is no place for negotiation or innovative action. Groundbreaking theological explorations within Islam itself or the vibrant agency of individual activists or political movements are largely ignored; consequently the only route to freedom for immigrant women is to dismiss 'their culture' to embrace Western 'values'.

---

[28] Sherene Razack, *Casting Out*: *The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 86.

[29] Lila Abu Loghoud, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*? (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 69.

Along with culture and religion, feminism too is in the process of being racialized. Political forces on the extreme right present themselves as the true defenders of women's rights, which in turn are described as identity markers of European values.[30] Marine Le Pen proudly claims to be 'a free French woman, who for all her life could enjoy and cherish freedoms conquered by the hard struggles of our mothers and grandmothers', and affirms that 'the migration crisis marks the beginning of the end of women's rights'.[31] Sarah Farris' poignant definition of Femonationalism perfectly captures the appropriation of feminism by right-wing forces.[32] Femonationalism capitalizes on the mainstreaming of feminism that has, at least to a certain extent, marked Western societies — whether this transformation is genuine and far-reaching is not for these pages to discuss — whereby some kind of general consensus on notions such as 'women's rights' is now part of the *koiné* of most supernational institutions, from the United Nations to the European Union. Sectors of mainstream liberal Western feminism also fall into the trap of 'with us or against us', as is the case for Elizabeth Bandinter's appeal that women should not lower their guard before multiculturalism and *islamogauchistes*. On a much deeper and more articulate level, this is also true of the question 'is multiculturalism bad for women' asked by the late Susan Moller Okin.[33] This Femonationalist mechanism of appropriation extends to all issues pertaining to sexuality and the use of the body, to embrace even LGBT issues.[34] Whilst sexual liberation has been a battleground for the struggle for individual empowerment, 'the appropriation, in a postcolonial context of freedom and equality applied to gender and sexualities as the emblems of democratic modernity' may become a weapon for imperial politics. 'If "we" are defined by our democracy, "they" can only be the dark mirror of our Enlightenment'.[35] According to right-wing political propaganda, women's freedom is basically identified with the 'free' use of sexuality, which in turn entails the display of the body; conversely, the lack thereof is identified with hijabs, veils, burkas, burkinis and any other piece of cloth. Sexual democracy becomes the criterion to judge the possibility of immigrants' integration into Western society.

---

[30] Francesca Scrinzi, 'Gender, Religion, Secularism and the "Newness" of Marine Le Pen's Party', in A. Petö, M. Köttig and R. Bitzan (eds.), *Gender, and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 127–40; Leticia Sabsay, *The Political Imaginary of Sexual Freedom. Subjectivity and Power in the New Sexual Democratic Turn* (New York and London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016).

[31] Samuel Laurent and Pierre Breteau, 'Marine Le Pen, une féministe à la mémoire courte', 15 January 2016, *Le Monde*, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/01/15/marine-le-pen-une-feministe-a-la-memoire-courte_4848295_4355770.html

[32] Sarah Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights*: *The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[33] Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women*? (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[34] Eric Fassin, 'La démocratie sexuelle et le conflit des civilisations', *Multitudes*, 26 (2006), 123–31, https://doi.org/10.3917/mult.026.0123

The distinction between integration and inclusion is therefore essential to deconstruct such appropriation mechanisms. Integration is not immediately synonymous with inclusion into the sphere of democratic citizenship. Inclusion[36] implies extending to all members of a political community the concrete means to exercise individual autonomy. Inclusion is also the result of a series of struggles for recognition, in which different political subjects engage in transforming dialectic relationships.[37] The term integration still resounds with assimilation, in which 'others' are requested to become, by hook or by crook, 'like us'. Since, in this representation, immigrant women lack the non-negotiable prerequisite to exercise citizenship, i.e. autonomous agency, they become the target of 'inclusion policies' rather than being considered as bearers of rights.[38] This one-way notion of integration rests on the assumption that women's freedom and gender equality are exquisitely Western values, whilst all other cultures continue to be ossified through prejudice; in this perspective, becoming free is equivalent to rejecting one's 'culture' and adopting Western moral autonomy.

## Sexual Wars

Czech President Milos Zeman declared that the Muslim Brotherhood was using refugees in an invasion plan against Europe:[39] this is only one example of the widespread obsession with invasion. The vocabulary of invasion necessarily evokes war, and with war another specter makes its appearance: rape. In fact, sexual violence occupies a central place in the gender-varnished propaganda of xenophobic European parties and movements. Myths about sexuality are a crucial component of many responses to immigration, as well exemplified in Michel Houllebecq's blockbuster novel *Soumission* (2015). The rougher version of this discourse is well known: as Europe is being invaded, 'they' (immigrant men) come here to rape 'our women', whom it is imperative to defend. European media and social networks are simply bursting with stories of rapes committed by immigrants against European women. The mechanisms of othering create a weak, oppressed victim — the migrant woman — as reported above, and they find a mirror-like match in the image of aggressive masculinity embodied by the immigrant man. Immigrant men are described as hypersexualized and predatory, thus reproducing the old colonial fear of the rape of white women by Black men; however, in the European context they are more identified by their religion (Islam) than by color. Anti-immigration policies and even the most inhuman anti-asylum policies are justified by reference to the danger of rape. The Lega website bursts with accounts of rape perpetrated by 'immigrants'.[40] In the aftermath of the events in Cologne on New Year's Eve in 2015, in which over a thousand people made allegations of sexual assault and other crimes and in which the chief suspects were a group of male immigrants,[41] Marine Le Pen spoke of *males dechainés*, males unchained.[42] Dutch far-right populist leader Geert Wilders suggested an appropriate response would be to 'lock up' all male refugee asylum seekers as they are 'testosterone bombs'; immigrant masculine bodies

---

[35] Ibid., p. 127, translation mine.

[36] Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*: *Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

[37] Axel Honnett, *The Struggle for Recognition*: *The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1992).

[38] For an extensive analysis of such integration policies and their compatibility with a neoliberal economy, see Sarah Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights*: *The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[39] Matthew Day, 'Muslim Brotherhood "Using Migrants as Invasion Force" to Seize Control of Europe, Czech President Claims', *Telegraph*, 5 January 2016, https://

---

www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/czechrepublic/12082757/Muslim-Brotherhood-using-migrants-as-invasion-force-to-seize-control-of-Europe-Czech-president-claims.html

[40] https://www.leganord.org/

[41] For a profound analysis of the Cologne events, see Alessandra Bocchetti, Ida Dominijanni, Bianca Pomaranzi, and Bia Sarasini, 'Speculum the Other Man: Eight Points on the Spectres of Cologne', *Internazionale*, 3 February 2016, https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/bocchetti-dominijanni-pomeranzi-sarasini/2016/02/03/speculum-other-man-spectres-cologne

[42] Dominique Albertini, 'Le féminisme instrumentalisé par le FN', *Libération*, 14 January 2016, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/01/14/le-feminisme-instrumentalise-par-le-fn_1426486

are the weapons to fight a 'sexual jihad', and rape is a form of 'sexual terrorism'.[43]

The calculated use of supposedly 'feminist' topics has proven to be a very profitable operation for the far right, as on the one hand it helps to make xenophobia and racism presentable[44] and on the other, it provides as an enticing fringe benefit the chance of upsetting the ranks of progressive and democratic forces by playing different inclusion agendas against each other: women's rights or inclusion of immigrants? Beyond its most picturesque aspects, this strategy of appropriation sheds light on many unresolved knots within Western democracy and helps to show its real face. The 'defense' of women does not stem from a genuine commitment to women's freedom: it testifies to the desire of defending what is considered to be 'ours' — our country, our ways, and consequently 'our' women. The reference to rape once again makes the control of women's bodies an essential step in the construction of a political community. The reference to the 'rape of our women' connects with the narrative of invasion (Europe invaded by immigrants) and war (clash of civilisation, war against the West) that is so central in right-wing xenophobic propaganda. In war, rape is a sign of conquest, and in the colonial narrative the body of women represents the conquered land:[45] the fear of rape reflects the fear that Europe may be turned from colonizer to colonized. Women and their bodies are essential for the reproduction of the nation: consequently, rape is an attack on the deepest sources of the national community. Sexual violence thus plays a crucial role in nation-building. In a male dominated framework, 'Rape is a sign from men to men'.[46]

In the xenophobic manipulation of rape, the protagonists are immigrant men and 'our' women. The immigrant / refugee women are not in focus; they remain in the background, locked up in their condition of 'cultural victimhood'. The manipulative use of supposedly feminist arguments, such as the identification between integration and the adoption of Western sexual mores, or the references to the fear of rape, overshadow other forms and histories of violence, which do not consist of anything ghostlike, which are, on the contrary, horrifically material. The first form of structural violence that affects migrant women is monumental and this is the necessity to migrate in itself, caused by macro structures of injustice and domination. Within the wider framework of the structural violence at the root of migratory flows, other forms of violence target women specifically, whose origin can easily be reconstructed as a series of explicit political choices. A crystal-clear example is the current agreement between the EU and Libya, and its application by the Italian government. Female migrants and asylum seekers are exposed to rape on every step of their *via crucis* towards Europe; humanitarian organization list rape as a common occurrence in Libyan facilities.

---

[43] Janene Pieters, 'Wilders: Lock up all Male Asylum Seekers; Threat to Dutch Women', *NL Times*, 19 January 2016, https://nltimes.nl/2016/01/19/wilders-lock-male-asylum-seekers-threat-dutch-women

[44] Sylvie Tyssot, 'Bilan d'un féminisme d'État', *Plein Droit*, 75 (2007), 15–18 (p. 16).

[45] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (*The New Critical Idiom*) (London: Routledge 2005), p. 138.

[46] Catherine McKinnon, *Are Women Human? And Other International Dialogues* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 171.

Sexual slavery is another form of widespread violence against immigrant women. Human trafficking is in itself the cause of the displacement of large number of women; furthermore, the refugee crisis provides a tremendous opportunity for this crime. Asylum-seeking women become the easy prey of slave traders, who use them for a variety of purposes, from underpaid or forced labour to fully-fledged sexual slavery. According to Save the Children Italia, there were at least 15,846 victims of trafficking in 2016, 76% of them being women and 15% underage boys and girls; 67% of the victims have been channelled towards forced prostitution, and 21% to exploitative labour.[47] Not much of this iceberg makes it above water.

## Conclusion

Identity wars are fought on the bodies of women, sometimes around every inch of fabric that hides or reveals. In fact, these movements and parties are not in the forefront of fights for gender justice in issues such as the pay gap or gender-balanced presence in political and economic decision-making bodies. And as far as sexual democracy is concerned, it is worth noticing that many of the political movements so enraged by a veil did not support the fight of 'their own women' to access contraception, abortion, nor for legislation or policies that would undermine the patriarchal organization of the family or fight sexual abuse. The defense of the right of immigrant women to a 'free' sexuality and to the 'free' use of the body does not go hand-in-hand with support in their fight for political equality. The outcry over the condition of oppression and victimhood of immigrant women is not a sufficient reason to support their requests of full citizenship rights, which would be, if not the sole, at least a main defense against violence and inequality. A typical example is Italy, where the same right-wing populist forces that vocally denounce the oppression of Muslim women who are denied their right to suntan on the beach have opposed, with cast-iron determination, the *ius soli* laws on citizenship. Evidently, voting rights are not required for 'freedom', whilst a bikini is. The political forces that are so vocal in denouncing the sad plight of women's oppression among immigrant communities are the same that would deny non-Europeans the basic right to seek sheer physical survival by leaving their countries[48] as well as to find a decent livelihood and a dignified way of life. Equally, anti-refugee policies are justified by the need to fight trafficking, but very little attention is paid to the demand such trafficking feeds — that is, European men making use of human flesh, transforming (mostly, but not solely Black) female bodies into a commodity.

---

[47] Save the Children Italia, 'Tratta e sfruttamento', 27 July 2018, https://www.savethechildren.it/press/tratta-e-sfruttamento-nel-mondo-10-milioni-di-bambini-un-solo-anno-vittime-di-lavoro-forzato

The swift appropriation of feminist themes by xenophobic movements must be taken as a wake-up call, as it shows the need for a renewed commitment to a genuine feminist critique, aimed first of all to identify these and other ambiguities within Western modernity itself. This critical work may be conducive to genuine dialogue and practical acts of solidarity, allowing us to break free of the manipulative mechanisms that seek to hide structural violence behind a veil of symbols and myths.

---

[48] For a conceptualization of immigration as a human right, see Kieran Oberman, 'Immigration as a Human Right', in Sarah Fine and Lea Ypi (eds.), *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 32–56.

# Bibliography

Abu Loghoud, Lila, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*? (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Albertini, Dominique, 'Le féminisme instrumentalisé par le FN', *Libération*, 14 January 2016, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/01/14/le-feminisme-instrumentalise-par-le-fn_1426486

Alexander, Jacqui, and Chandra Calpade Mohanti, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

Amnesty International Italia, *Italia-Libia, un anno fa l'accordo sull'immigrazione*, 1 February 2018, https://www.amnesty.it/italia-libia-un-anno-laccordo-sullimmigrazione/

Amnesty International, *Libya: European Governments Complicit in Horrific Abuse of Refugees and Migrants*, 12 December 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/12/libya-european-governments-complicit-in-horrific-abuse-of-refugees-and-migrants/

Anselmi, Manuel, *Populism: A Short Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

Benhabib, Sheyla, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Benhabib, Sheyla and Drucilla Cornell (eds.), *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Bocchetti, Alessandra, Ida Dominijanni, Bianca Pomaranzi, and Bia Sarasini, 'Speculum the Other Man: Eight Points on the Spectres of Cologne', *Internazionale*, 3 February 2016, https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/bocchetti-dominijanni-pomeranzi-sarasini/2016/02/03/speculum-other-man-spectres-cologne

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Day, Matthew, 'Muslim Brotherhood "Using Migrants as Invasion Force" to Seize Control of Europe, Czech President Claims', *Telegraph*, 5 January 2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/czechrepublic/12082757/Muslim-Brotherhood-using-migrants-as-invasion-force-to-seize-control-of-Europe-Czech-president-claims.html

Diallo, Rokhaya, *Racisme: mode d'emploi* (Paris: Larousse, 2011)

European Commission, *Eurostat. Statistics Explained. Asylum Statistics*, 2018, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics

European Commission, *The EU and the Refugee Crisis* (European Commission, 2016), https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1aa55791-3875-4612-9b40-a73a593065a3

European Parliament, *EU Migrant Crisis: Facts and Figures*, 30 June 2017, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78630/eu-migrant-crisis-facts-and-figures

Farris, Sarah, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

Fassin, Eric, 'La démocratie sexuelle et le conflit des civilisations', in *Multitudes*, 26 (2006), 123–31, https://doi.org/10.3917/mult.026.0123

—, 'National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe', in *Public Culture*, 22:3 (2010), 507–29, https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2010-007

Fine, Sarah, and Ypi, Lea (eds.), *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

'Foreign Activists on Trial in France for Helping Migrants Enter the Country', *France24*, 31 May 2018, https://www.france24.com/en/20180531-france-immigration-foreign-activists-trial-helping-migrants-enter-country-alps

Habermas, Jürgen, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

—, *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1996).

Honnett, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

Houllebec, Michel, *Soumission* (Paris: Flammarion, 2015).

Kotting, Michaela, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö (eds.), *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (New York: Springer, 2017).

Laclau, Ernesto, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 2015).

Laurent, Samuel and Pierre Breteau, 'Marine Le Pen, une féministe à la mémoire courte', 15 January 2016, *Le Monde*, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/01/15/marine-le-pen-une-feministe-a-la-memoire-courte_4848295_4355770.html

'Lifeline soccorre 400 migranti, Salvini: "Stroncheremo mafia immigrazione"', *Mediterraneo Cronaca*, 21 June 2018, http://www.mediterraneocronaca.it/2018/06/21/lifeline-soccorre-400-migranti-salvini-stroncheremo-mafia-immigrazione/

Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (*The New Critical Idiom*) (London: Routledge 2005).

Mahamood, Saba, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

McKinnon, Catherine, *Are Women Human*? *And Other International Dialogues* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Mohanty, Chandra, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 30 (1988), 61–88.

Moller Okin, Susan, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women*? (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Mudde, Cas, *Populist Right Radical Parties in Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Oberman, Kieran, 'Immigration as a Human Right', in Sarah Fine and Lea Ypi (eds.), *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 32–56.

Pateman, Carole, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

Pateman, Carole, *The Disorder of Women, Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Phillips, Anne, *Multiculturalism without Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Pieters, Janine, 'Wilders: Lock up all Male Asylum Seekers: A Threat to Dutch Women', *NL Times*, 19 January 2016, https://nltimes.nl/2016/01/19/wilders-lock-male-asylum-seekers-threat-dutch-women

Razack, Sherene, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

Sabsay, Leticia, *The Political Imaginary of Sexual Freedom: Subjectivity and Power in the New Sexual Democratic Turn* (New York and London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016).

Said, Edward, *The Myth of the Clash of Civilization* (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 1993).

Sarzanini, Fiorenza, 'Migranti, scontro Italia-Malta. Salvini: "Porti chiusi all'Aquarius" Conte: "Noi lasciati soli"', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 June 2018, https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/18_giugno_11/migranti-salvini-la-aquarius-non-potra-approdare-un-porto-italiano-28e19a16-6cb2-11e8-8fe1-92e098249b61.shtml?refresh_ce-cp

Save the Children Italia, 'Tratta e sfruttamento', 27 July 2018, https://www.savethechildren.it/press/tratta-e-sfruttamento-nel-mondo-10-milioni-di-bambini-un-solo-anno-vittime-di-lavoro-forzato

Scrinzi, Francesca 'Gender, Religion, Secularism and the "Newness" of Marine Le Pen's Party', in A. Petö, M. Köttig and R. Bitzan (eds.), *Gender, and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 127–40.

Spivak, Gayatri C., *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Tyssot, Sylvie, 'Bilan d'un féminisme d'État', *Plein Droit*, 75 (2007), 15–18.

United Nations High Commission on Refugees, *As Mediterranean Sea Arrivals Decline and Death Rate Rises, UNHCR Calls for Strengthening of Search and Rescue*, 6 July 2018, http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/7/5b3f270a4/mediterranean-sea-arrivals-decline-death-rates-rise-unhcr-calls-strengthening.html

Urbinati, Nadia, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth and the People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2014).

Wadud, Amina, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (New York: Oneworld Publication, 2013).

Young, Iris M., *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008).

# 13. A Different Lens

## *Maaza Mengiste*

She reclines on a rock, propped on her elbow and squinting into the sun. A valley unfolds in wide, easy sweeps over her bare shoulders. That she is naked from the waist up is an uncomfortable detail, but not unusual. This is Ethiopia and this is 1937, and you know the larger history that frames this photograph, a familiar story involving words like invasion and war and Europe and colonialism. What you notice instead is the tiny cross that hangs around her neck and the rings that adorn four fingers of one hand. Her short curls are patted into a perfect bloom. She looks to be at the start of a smile — the set of her mouth suggests it, as if she were snapped in the middle of an easy verbal exchange with the photographer. Her pose echoes Manet's *Olympia* but in this version, it is the Black woman who takes center stage, regal and sure, aware of her sexuality and seemingly in command of it.

Slivers of paper pasted onto the photo offer an Italianized spelling of her name, Balainesc [Belaynesh], and the town, Scianò [Shano]. At the bottom, in florid handwriting, is the date: 1937. Belaynesh is the first photo in an album once owned by an Italian soldier, a member of the Fascist army that invaded Ethiopia in 1935. The war ended in 1936 and Italy declared victory. This photo was taken a year into the Italian occupation of the country. On its own, it carries no real weight. It is exploitative but relatively benign, and not as bad as some. You turn the page, and the next, and the next and what stares back is a series of women, mostly Ethiopian, nearly all of them bare-chested, many completely nude. At first, you are simply taken aback by the

© 2019 Maaza Mengiste, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.13

careful arrangement of the album. It is curated: photos organized and meticulously labeled, guided by a patient eye. Many photographs include a label with the subject's name. The cities indicated form a zigzag across Ethiopia: Dessie, Shano, Debre Berhan, Debre Sina. At times, as if it is unacceptable to leave a picture unmarked, a label simply announces the subject as *donna abissina*, Abyssinian woman. This designation sheds light on the growing unease you have felt creeping in since you turned the first page of the album, and it solidifies when you pause to consider what is in front of you. Some of those deemed women are simply girls, their youth obscene in this context. The full horror sets in and builds, and you have to shut the album and put it away.

In 1935, Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in the hopes of colonizing it. His actions galvanized anti-fascist and pan-African protests around the world. Groups on both sides of the issue rushed to organize fundraising drives and marches. African Americans in Harlem held rallies in support of Emperor Haile Selassie and signed up to fight for Ethiopia. Pro-fascist Evelyn Waugh used the war as the setting for his satirical and racist novel, *Scoop*, in 1938. Across Italy photographs of East African women, often nude or semi-nude, were distributed to recruit young men into the fascist army. The world's attention was riveted. News reports gave breathless accounts of an ancient African culture rooted in timelessness, both naive and crude, worthy of sympathy and caution. This was an epic battle easily framed in Homeric and biblical language. The world's oldest Christian nation was preparing to face the nation blessed by the Vatican: it was a clash of gods. Here was a modern-day David preparing to meet its Goliath.

Yet despite all the noise, no one really expected Ethiopia to defeat the giant. Emperor Haile Selassie's army was untrained in the tactics of modern warfare. Most of its military was comprised of peasants and farmers. Those answering the emperor's mobilization call were told to bring whatever weapons they had, so they brought their spears and outdated rifles, many carrying the same guns their fathers used when Ethiopia rebuffed Italy's earlier attempts to colonize it in the decisive Battle of Adua in 1896. Though the country's telecommunication abilities were increasing, at the start of the war few of its commanding officers had radios. Fascist Italy, on the other hand, was known as one of the largest and most modern military forces in the world. It had perfected air warfare and the use of poison gas to devastating effect in Libya. Still stinging from Italy's defeat in 1896, Mussolini vowed to pour every resource into this war, to prove to the world Italy's might. This was, as much as anything, an exhibition of Italian prowess. It was an effort to debunk the stereotypes of Italy as an affable, irresponsible Mediterranean country and present a muscular and violent European power. It was also a carefully orchestrated campaign to promote a cohesive Italian identity, one that melded an idealized masculinity with a devotion to fascism. Young men were encouraged to enlist in the new African adventure with promises of sexually compliant East African women.

The Italian army marched into Ethiopia singing a popular fascist song, *Faccetta nera*, Little Black Face. The lyrics speak of the soldiers' authority over Ethiopian women, of the women's expected willingness to accept the soldiers' every command, to become their sexual slaves. Today in Italy, *faccetta nera* is considered derogatory, a term that evidences the hideous racism and misogyny that were a foundation of Mussolini's fascist dreams. Fascist Italy would not only attack the military and political fabric of Ethiopia, but it would advance on its women as well. Women suddenly found themselves both the intended spoils of war and the territory on which a new kind of conflict was fought. They became objects of ridicule and desire, victims of military and sexual aggression.

As the 1935 Italian invasion escalated into pitched battles, Ethiopian women willingly stepped into the fray. They followed behind their soldiers, using song to coax greater acts of courage and condemn any sign of fear. They cared for the wounded and helped to bury the dead. They supplied troops with food and water. They put themselves in the path of danger, exposing themselves to the same destructive forces coming at their army. They, too, swallowed mouthfuls of poison gas in those brutal sweeps of Italian planes. They, too, suffered the devastations of bombings and artillery fire. As the war grew increasingly brutal, they were there, lifting their arms, raising their fists, their anthems and lamentations both a salve and a stinging rebuke in the midst of this new, horrifying reality.

I am looking at a dispatch from Harar that appeared in the *New York Times* in November 1935: 'Woman General Leading 2000 Ethiopian Troops', the headline shouts. It is a brief piece, but it confirms what family stories and other accounts have told me before: that some women also turned themselves into soldiers. They fought in the front lines with men. Women lifted their rifles if they had them, raised their spears if they didn't, and charged at the Italian army. Some women, like this one in Harar, even commanded thousands of men. They were powerful on the battlefield, but they were eventually powerless to harness the fickle nature of history and upend the assumption that war unfolded primarily in the world of men. They could not control what was spoken of them. They could not command the language of their legacy. They remained stuck in fragmented narratives, their numbers reduced to the one or two or three who managed to rise to the surface in newspapers, only to disappear again. What are left are the echoes of old songs and the pictures, like the ones in this album that I own, their achievements ignored and their stories deliberately distorted.

There is another photograph towards the end of the album of a woman named Bogalech from Debre Berhan. Unlike the others, she is fully clothed in her traditional Ethiopian dress. She has a shawl draped across one shoulder and stands with her chin raised, a rifle in her hand. The muzzle is pointed up, as if it is aimed at the sky. Bogalech is not afraid, nor is she demure. She looks determined and resilient, strong. She is a startling vision to come across in an album such as this. It would be easy to look at this picture and praise it for its positive portrayal of an African woman. Taken on its own, it might even symbolize the photographer's leanings towards a more complex understanding of women. But in an album otherwise full of half-clothed or naked subjects, the photo of a woman with a gun becomes not a sign of female strength, but a mockery of it. Her implied weakness is exposed by all the other pictures that came before her. She is bound by their fate.

In 1936, after a brutal war that saw Ethiopians subjected to mustard gas, endless bombings and massacres, Mussolini declared victory. Ethiopia, however, would prove stubbornly rebellious to the fascist attempt to lay claim to the entire country. Italy's increased use of force *after* Mussolini declared the end of the war did nothing to quell the rumblings across the country. The arrests and torture, the executions and transfers to concentration camps, the rapes, the racial segregation laws, the indiscriminate use of poison gas: none of it resulted in the total submission the fascists hoped for. Instead, Ethiopian fighters became more determined to resist. Their numbers swelled and as the Italians increased their use of brute force, often targeting civilian populations, women and children joined other patriots, called *arbegnoch.* For them, Mussolini's proclamation of victory was meaningless. The war had not ended, it had simply taken on new form.

The date pasted on Belaynesh' photo, 1937, was a year of growing dissent across Ethiopia. Her relaxed image is a stark contrast to the conflict occurring beyond the valley and throughout the country. Her picture symbolizes how much is often left out and sanitized when recounting narratives of conflict. To look at her without context is to become complicit in the corrosive nature of conquest. It is to stand in front of one man's fantasies and misinterpret his growing insecurities as signs of virility. It is to miss the finer details of a so-called victory. The photographs are an attempt to claim dominion over what refused to submit. It was an attempt to recreate a familiar trope in order to pretend everything was falling into place as expected. Because for the Italians, nothing was predictable. A placid face could hide a treasonous plan. No sign of obedience could be taken for granted. To look at someone familiar was not a guarantee of unencumbered recognition. To photograph a woman might demand the extra step of stripping her bare, not as a reminder of what a woman looks like but as an attempt to confirm what manhood means.

I have long been fascinated by the events of the years between Italy's invasion and its expulsion. I have spent more than a decade collecting photographs from that period and another several years researching and writing what is my new novel, a book focused on the lives of Ethiopian women fighters during that time. I have used the pictures in my collection to peer into this little-known conflict, trying to decipher what might rest, unspoken, in the faces of those girls and women who stare at, or hide from that other invading force: the camera. I have been searching for what remains after the shutter's release, after the photographer walks away and all a woman has is the conquered ground beneath her feet and a body that has been framed and focused and exposed. What remains after all is done, after a woman's body has been declared both a trophy and the field on which a new kind of battle will be fought?

By 1941, fascist Italy was ousted from Ethiopia. Mussolini would be dead by 1945, hung upside down and displayed by the same people who cheered him into power decades before. History reminds us of the proud Italian partisans who fought to remove the fascist from power. We hear less about the first conflict and loss that began Mussolini's downward spiral. As surely as Mussolini rose to power in Italy, there were women in Ethiopia, rich and poor, privileged and peasant, who helped to bring him down. Today, we cannot see them clearly enough: time has passed, most have died, and their history has been left to the new generations to dig up and find. It might be impossible to gather all their stories, but it is not so difficult to pause and look again when we encounter hints of their lives and ask what rests just beyond the frame. To help pull them out of obscurity, we must confront and embrace the same unstable ground they were forced to traverse as they fought for survival. It is the work of the imagination, but one made imperative by the realities of historical memory. We know that war has often minimized the power and place of women, yet we also know that Mussolini's fascist regime was brought down in part by the very same mothers, wives, sisters, and lovers that it originally boasted were under its control. This was true of Ethiopia; it was also true of the women in Italy.

To claim a woman's body as conquered is to underestimate the strength of that body. To deem it irrelevant or unworthy of the full rights accorded to all human beings is a deliberate erasure of what makes all of us, regardless of gender, valuable members of society. To see women as political fodder for greater public support is to forget what it means when one woman and another and another stand together and declare themselves an immovable wall. I go back to the album and force myself to look at the images, and I begin to consider the very real possibility that some of those women and girls might have stepped back into their dresses, walked away from the camera, and headed home to continue the fight for freedom.

# 14. Reinventing the Spaces Within: The Early Images of Artist Lalla Essaydi[1]

## *Isolde Brielmaier*

> I am writing. I am writing on me, I am writing on her. The story began to be written the moment the present began. I am asking, how can I be simultaneously inside and outside? I didn't even know this world existed, I thought it existed only in my head, in my dreams.
>
> — Lalla Essaydi,
> excerpt from autobiographical text
> written on a photograph

At the beginning of the year 2000, Lalla Essaydi began working on a body of photographs that are set in Morocco, in a large, unoccupied house belonging to her family. She had spent some time thinking about this particular interior because it was here that she was sent, as a young girl, when she disobeyed or stepped outside the permissible spaces of her culture. She was accompanied by servants but spoken to by no

---

[1] This essay has been expanded by the author based upon her Spring 2005 article in *Aperture* magazine, 'Re-Inventing the Spaces Within: The Images of Lalla Essaydi', *Aperture*, 178 (2005), 20–25, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24478815

© 2019 Isolde Brielmaier, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.14

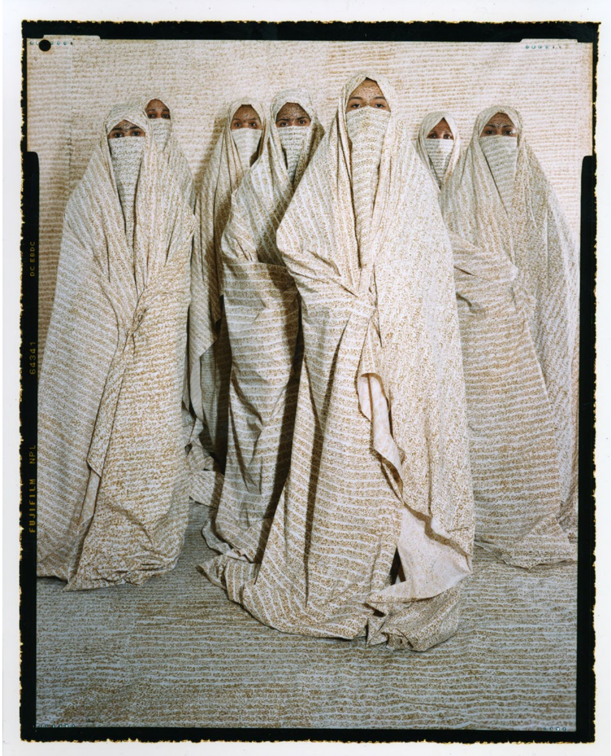


Fig. 14.1 Lalla Essaydi, 'Converging Territories #26' (2000–01). © Lalla Essaydi, New York. Courtesy Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York.

one, ultimately spending up to an entire month in this house alone at various times. Often, she would sit and do nothing. At other moments she imagined the world outside, bringing it inside by the force of her imagination. Years later, that house — with its cool, stone walls and the enclosed spaces of its dark rooms — is, for Essaydi, both a literal and psychological space delineated by her experiences there, marked by the memories that she articulates in her photographs.

Essaydi's earliest work began as a continual exploration of this tenuous relationship between memory and experience. It enabled her to revisit her early memories, to encounter her past in order to cast it visually and publicly in the light of the present. She explains that 'after having visited this house many times in making some of my earliest photographs, and thinking about my own complex relation as artist to this space of childhood, I have become aware of another, less tangible, more ambiguous space […] the space of imagination, of self-creation.'[2] Today, as a woman and artist, Essaydi's view of her childhood is richly informed by and filtered through the sum of her reflections, experiences, and ever-broadening perspective. She has used her art to expand the cultural pictures of Islam, Arab women, the role of a photographer, and the power of the image, in all their complexity. Her introspection and clear intention are evident in many of her photographs: we see Essaydi turning 'space' into something more than just the delimited enclosures of that house of her childhood.

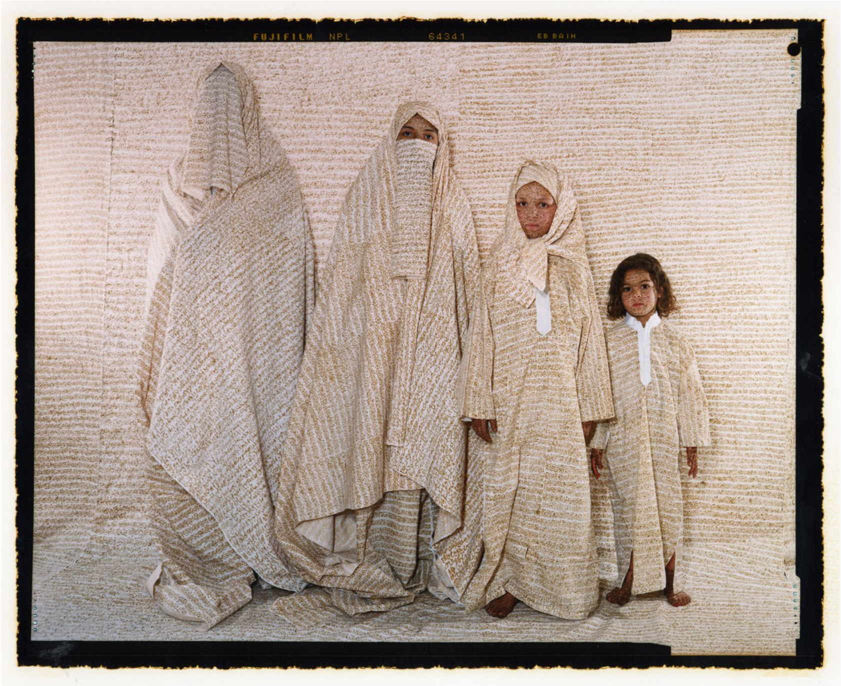


Fig. 14.2 Lalla Essaydi, 'Converging Territories #30' (2000–01). © Lalla Essaydi, New York. Courtesy Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York.

Traversing boundaries and expanding ideas of physical and social space are not new challenges for Essaydi. She has lived in many locations, and in many fundamentally divergent cultures. She grew up in Morocco and lived for many years in Saudi Arabia. She attended classes at L'École des Beaux Arts in Paris, and then moved to Massachusetts, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Tufts, and later completed her Master of Fine Arts at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts. Currently, she works and resides in the United States. From her earliest efforts as both a painter and a photographer, Essaydi has been concerned with the status, perception, and self-perception of Arab women, with the diversity within Muslim culture, and above all with the malleable nature of identity itself. She makes no claim to serve as a spokesperson for all Arab women. Instead, Essaydi has focused on presenting to Arab, European and American audiences the multifariousness of Arab female identities. She seeks to convey these ideas and intersectional experiences through a personal perspective that brings together her reflections and interpretations of her own life. 'In my art,' Essaydi says, 'I wish to present myself through multiple lenses — as an artist, as Moroccan, as traditionalist, as liberal, as Muslim. In short, I want to invite the viewer to resist stereotypes and rigid categorizations; to think and see in new ways.'[3]

---

[2] Conversation with the artist, New York City, Winter 2005.

In her earliest series, 'Converging Territories,' Essaydi highlights and then expands upon the concept of space by positioning her female subjects within an enclosed area — she staggers their bodies, 'pushing' them up against a flat wall to create the sense of an overflowing, crowded field (see Fig. 14.1). The women blend with the walls and tiles of the seemingly narrow spaces within the photographs' frames. They appear confined as well as decorative — referencing European fantasies and presumptions about Arab culture and Islam. The images very clearly echo common tropes of Orientalist painting — the odalisque, the mystery of concealment, the veil, the harem. Yet Essaydi, in urging for a critical reconsideration, is pushing for something else as well.

Conceptually, the notion of 'space' in Essaydi's work extends beyond the physical realm. In her photographs the artist interrogates psychological and social spaces through the use of poses, clothing, and the activities of the women depicted. She uses these visual details to resist the more familiar images of Arab women, where the viewer is given a sort of voyeuristic entrée into a foreign, 'forbidden' and often, static culture. Instead, the women's poses, their gestures and actions as well as their clothing are in many ways self-referential, defying the age-old binary notion of a margin-to-center relationship. For as Françoise Lionnet has asserted, this more traditional approach relies ultimately upon transnational minorities remaining in a reactive state, focused on the idea of a dominant majority rather than being actively engaged in the relationship with and significance of one another.[4] Accordingly, the women in Essaydi's image draw the viewer's attention to the built environment in which their bodies are situated and to the ways in which this environment exists in a culturally specific mode — one that references 'the Far East' and 'Arab' cultures — within the mind. As we scan the image as viewers we map our own visions and ideas onto this space, often drawing on Orientalist tropes. Yet the artist underscores that *how* we see the image is actually resisted by the women pictured — in their poses, actions and gazes — and she thereby allows the women themselves to *create* it.

---

[3] Ibid.

There is no doubt that her images are constructed. In the field of photography, where 'authenticity' and 'truth' are so often the goals, Essaydi's work is plainly performative; it is purposefully artificial. The models are family acquaintances who are fully aware of her project and of their involvement within it. And although the softly lit interiors often appear smaller than they actually are, crowded with the physical forms of women, the viewer is also made aware of the expansive female power inherent in the women's collective presence. In this way, the women pictured also dictate the definition of the space, blurring any perceived notion of a major and minor relationship.

In the image from 'Converging Territories' that opens this piece, seven women fill the frame of the photograph entirely. Although concealed in willowy, white cotton *haiks*, they nonetheless engage the viewer directly with their full-frontal poses. Essaydi also creates calligraphic writing in henna, marking the subjects' bodies with this sacred Islamic art that is usually inaccessible to women. By subversively combining calligraphy, a 'male-only' art form, with henna, a traditionally 'female' adornment, Essaydi and her subjects have turned a confined area into their own private space of creative transgression.

---

[4] Françoise Lionnet, 'Transcolonial Translations: Shakespeare in Mauritius,' in Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei-Shih (eds.), *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 201–22 (p. 207).

As Essaydi puts it: 'The 'veil' of decoration and concealment has not been rejected but instead has been integrated with the expressive intention of calligraphy.' Her photographs thus convey agency through a sort of cultural self-appropriation. Visually, they break with traditional codes of conduct and dress in order to relay cultural memory, experience, status, and history. And the women pictured somehow appear to subsume their own cultural markers, powerfully transforming them into something else; something that is both 'other' and yet still their own.

At a time when many of the images in circulation continue to portray Arab people in increasingly negative and insidious ways, Essaydi reclaims and reconsiders ideas of what it means to be Arab and female on her own terms. She says: 'My photographs are about the women subjects' participation in contributing to the greater emancipation of Arab women, while at the same time conveying to an outside audience a very rich tradition of practice, relationships, and ideas that are so often misunderstood and misrepresented in the West.'[5] She rejects a simplistic reading of Islamic culture. Islam, as depicted in her work, is multi-layered. It is both confining and liberating, fluid and rigid. It is, in essence, indefinable. And in this context, Essaydi challenges not only our perceptions of Muslim societies, but also our expectations of a photographer in this world. What are we expecting to see when we look at a picture of veiled Muslim women? What is Essaydi revealing to us? What is she concealing? What 'truths' do photographs really hold, and whose stories do they tell?

---

[5] Conversation with the artist, New York City, Winter 2005.

# 15. Swimming with E. C.

*Kellie Jones*

Sara Ahmed opens her book *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) thinking about the myriad of feminist stories and multiple ways of approaching feminist narratives. But she also hears them, asking 'When did the sound of the word *feminism* become your sound?'[1] Starting with the 1970s, offering us perhaps the best known works by the artist Elizabeth Catlett. This essay works back in search of the beginnings of E. C.'s feminist 'sound' or calling, one that seems to have been initiated at her very birth and even earlier, by female ancestors who offered a Black radical inheritance. For now we begin with the importance of 1971.

## Tijuana, 1971

Early in 1971 artist and gallerist Alonzo Davis found himself driving to Mexico and loading art into his van in Tijuana for a return trip to Los Angeles and to Brockman Gallery. He and his brother, Dale Brockman Davis, had opened the gallery barely four years earlier as a place to showcase works by African-American artists. After initially presenting group exhibitions, they started offering solo shows in 1970. The majestic Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012) — born in the United States,

---

[1] In honor of curatorial generations, Samella Lewis, Lowery Stokes Sims, Rujeko Hockley, and all the rest of us. With special thanks to Madeline Weisburg for research assistance. A version of this essay originally appeared in Rujeko Hockley and Catherine Morris (eds.), *We Wanted A Revolution, Black Radical Women 1965–1985, New Perspectives* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2018).
Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 4.

© 2019 Kellie Jones, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.15

but long resident in Mexico — was most probably the first woman artist they presented in a one-artist exhibition. With her reputation and accomplishments, this was certainly a catch for an upstart gallery showing many young and lesser-known artists.[2]

The Brockman Gallery exhibition was Elizabeth Catlett's first solo show in the US in over two decades. A lot had changed since she presented her early work at the Black-owned Barnett-Aden Gallery in Washington, D.C., in 1947. But then, a lot hadn't. African Americans still fought for recognition in the art world. However, actions in the 1960s and 1970s were changing that. Still, such scattered exhibition histories plagued women artists, even as the feminist decade of the 1970s came into its own. This was the case with Betye Saar (b. 1926), whose star also began to shine brighter in this period; she was featured in article after article, which also commented on the older ages of successful women artists, remarking on their perseverance. As with Saar, the 1970s became Catlett's breakout decade, buoyed by the Black Arts Movement and carried by a tide of feminist activism, though Catlett herself was a decade older than Saar.[3]

While Catlett's return to exhibiting in the US and in the solo format began at the Brockman Gallery in 1971, that wasn't the only show she had that year. In fact, an exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem — an 'artistic homecoming' according to art historian Richard J. Powell — has dominated Catlett's narrative.[4] Opening at the end of 1971 and continuing into 1972, it was an expansion of the Brockman show, similarly encompassing prints and sculpture. She would have no fewer than eight solo shows in the US through 1975. Key support came from other African-American-focused exhibition spaces (Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston; Atlanta Center for Black Art), from her alma mater (Howard University), and from the historically Black college and university circuit (Fisk University, Southern University, Jackson State College). In addition, we also find a strong link to the thriving California art scene of the 1970s and to networks of women. Scripps College in Claremont, California, was one site, where Samella Lewis (a former student of Catlett's) taught, providing a perch from which she created all manner of exhibitions, films, and publications. Further north, another solo show opened at Berkeley's Rainbow Sign Gallery, where E. J. Montgomery was in charge. Even earlier, Catlett had participated *in absentia* in the series 'The Black Arts Today' (1969) at San Jose State College, where a former student of Lewis's, Marie Johnson, was a member of the faculty, eventually becoming chair of the art department.[5]

---

[2] Karen Anne Mason, interview with Alonzo Davis, *African-American Artists of Los Angeles*: *Oral History Transcript, 1992–1993* (Los Angeles: Oral History Program of the University of California, 1994), pp. 199–202. Catlett's show opened at Brockman Gallery on 7 February 1971.

[3] For more on Betye Saar with regard to these issues, see Kellie Jones, *South of Pico, African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), chapter 2.

[4] Richard J. Powell, 'Face to Face: Elizabeth Catlett's Graphic Work,' in Jeanne Zeidler (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett*: *Works on Paper, 1944–1992* (Hampton: Hampton University Museum, 1993), p. 49. The majority of works on view at the Studio Museum in Harlem were either courtesy of Brockman Gallery or listed as owned by the artist. Catlett's iconic *Black Unity* (1968) went into the collection of Brockman Gallery founder Alonzo Davis. See Elizabeth Catlett with a foreword by Elton C. Fax and a commentary by Jeff Donaldson, *Elizabeth Catlett*: *Prints and Sculpture*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1971).

With all the effort it took to get these works to the US and on view after two decades in Mexico, it is not surprising that Catlett set her prices at a point to encourage their sale; indeed all the pieces would remain in the US. It is undoubtedly during this period that major works, which now inform our understanding of the 1960s and 1970s, entered the US and became part of the art-historical narrative, including the three earliest works by Catlett in the *We Wanted a Revolution* exhibition: *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (1968), *Malcolm X Speaks for Us* (1969) and *Target* (1970).

Though Catlett resided in Mexico for most of her adult life in the late 1960s, inspired by Black activism of the period, she began to center her work on the African-American activist body. Although the artist noted that she reserved her print production for the exploration of political themes and that her sculptural work was dedicated to investigating form, those decisions changed somewhat as she began to focus on events in her country of birth. In sculptures from this time, Catlett meshes her understanding of the needs of form with those of political efficacy. And as with her sculpture throughout her career, these ideas are narrated predominately through figures of Black women.

---

[5] Catlett collaborated with Marie Johnson and San Jose State College around the Freedom for Angela Davis movement. For a detailed listing of exhibitions during this period, see Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*: *An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), pp. 214, 210. For more on Samella Lewis and Marie Johnson (Calloway), see, Kellie Jones (ed.), *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, University of California and New York: DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2011). For a look at Samella Lewis's amazing and expansive Black art project, see Jones, *South of Pico*, pp. 172–80.

*Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (1968) is an excellent example of Catlett's genius in marshaling representational aims through figures that are abstracted. The verticality and strength of the body are emphasized by a fist shot straight up, the very pinnacle of the sculpture. As in the majority of her sculpted women, indications of a skirt, broad hips, and ample breasts emphasize the femaleness of her content. Adept in imagining figures in clay, stone, and wood, she crafted *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* from cedar. Catlett amplifies the qualities of the natural material, using its sensuousness and configuration as her guide, burnishing the wood to enhance the optical qualities of the grain.[6] As scholars have argued, the central ovoid opening in the piece signals fecundity — appearing womblike — but also the core energy force of all beings.[7] The political message of Catlett's work is borne by several sculptures of the Black female form in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the exquisite *Political Prisoner* (1971; now in the collection of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), whose torso becomes the flag of Black liberation.

Thus, at the dawn of the 1970s Elizabeth Catlett stepped into her role as the reigning queen of the Black Arts Movement. For her, art in the late twentieth century was about liberation, survival, and communication, using creative methods that, as she noted, 'help me make my message clearer.'[8] As she would throughout her career, she framed her audience as the everyday working class, the majority of hardworking people worldwide, to whom artists were in service.

Several pieces from this late-twentieth-century period explore the violence visited on Black bodies, referring to aspects of daily life and state suppression as people battled for civil and human rights. *Target* (1970) is a concise statement of this situation, in which the artist crafts a Black male head in bronze, the crosshairs of a gun sight hovering before his face. Yet Catlett never relinquished her feminist perspective. For instance, the hand-colored lithograph *The Torture of Mothers* from the same year views an incident akin to that of *Target* from inside the mind of a woman imagining the possible death of her son. In the linocut *Malcolm X Speaks for Us* (1969), women and girls frame the radical's face, providing a feminist context for his activism. Catlett's female-centered imagery at the height of the Black Arts Movement offered an embodied and intersectional perspective that insisted on acknowledging the full range of women's lives inflected by race, class, and gender. The artist privileged an activist primary subject and centralized '"women's self-recorded realities."'[9] Catlett, indeed, always considered herself a feminist, yet one defined outside the narrow constructs often associated with its second wave, and instead more broadly interested in women's liberation, fulfillment, and ability 'to enrich the world, humanity.'[10]

---

[6] Elizabeth Catlett, quoted in Samella Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett* (Claremont, CA: Hancraft Studios, 1984), p. 90.

[7] Samella Lewis calls this form 'embryo-like'; see Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 162. See also Lowery Stokes Sims, 'Elizabeth Catlett: A Life in Art and Politics,' in Lucinda H. Gedeon (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett Sculpture: A Fifty-Year Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Purchase: Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York; distributed by University of Washington Press, 1998), p. 22; and Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 142.

[8] Elizabeth Catlett artist statement in Samella S. Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy (eds.), *Black Artists on Art*, Vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts Publishers, 1971), p. 107.

Across her lifetime Catlett addressed such issues in her copious objects but also through her intellectual acuity, which was evident in significant articles she published over the years. In writings from the 1960s and 1970s we see her, like so many others in this period, thinking about the role of Black artists and their art: what should their priorities be; how should they balance form and content? She was also capacious in her understanding of what art *could* be. Writing in 1975 she proposed that

> [art] does not need revolution as its subject in order to be revolutionary. Up to now it has had little effect on political or social revolution. It will not create authentic social change, but it can provoke thought and prepare us for change, even helping in its achievement. For art can tell us what we do not see consciously, what we may not realize, and that there are other ways of seeing things […][11]

---

[9] Sims, 'Elizabeth Catlett,' pp. 21–22. See also Frieda High W. Tesfagiorgis, 'Afrofemcentrism and its Fruition in the Art of Elizabeth Catlett and Faith Ringgold (A View of Women by Women),' *Sage*: *A Scholarly Journal on Black Women*, 4:1 (1987), 25–29.

[10] Elizabeth Catlett, quoted in Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 102.

[11] Elizabeth Catlett, 'The Role of the Black Artist,' *The Black Scholar*, 6:9 (1975), 10–14 (p. 13).

Catlett reminded us that Blackness was also part of the larger world, something she learned from residing in a place just outside US borders; something she came to know by adopting a home place and creating a family in Mexico. We thus recall not only the proximity of Mexico but also its significance in African-American history, as a place of refuge and imagination, and as part of an important transnational network. As a bilingual and bicultural artist, at the opening of the 1960s, Catlett encouraged Black artists to 'broaden our horizons.'[12] Along with reaching out to Latino populations and the feminist movement within the US, African Americans should seek common ground around the globe.

> Culture can be a beginning for our involvement with other peoples who share with us racial or national discrimination and exploitation by a common enemy. Today it is difficult to wrap ourselves in 'Blackness,' ignoring the rest of exploited humanity for we are an integral part of it. Blackness is important as a part of the struggle — it is our part — not only of Blacks in the US, Africa and the Caribbean, but of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the US, and the peoples of Asia and Latin America exemplified at the moment by the Chileans and Vietnamese.[13]

## Mexico City, 1947

In a testament to the power of women, and to the tenacity and focus required to will a creative career into existence, in 1946–47 Elizabeth Catlett accomplished the following: after less than a year in Mexico she returned to her hometown of Washington, D.C.; got a divorce; married for a second time, to a feminist (Francisco Mora, eight years her junior); gave birth to her first child; had a solo show at Washington, D.C.'s Barnett-Aden Gallery; and returned to Mexico City.[14]

For much of the next decade, while her children were young, she focused on printmaking. Like Betye Saar, she found the print medium more user-friendly with babies underfoot.[15] She also worked collectively, finding support in the renowned Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP; Popular or People's Graphic Workshop). From its founding in the 1930s, like Mexico's better-known mural movement, the goal of TGP was to make art available to the country's citizens. As part of the nation's institutional revolution, TGP created things that were useful in people's lives, such as posters for literacy and flyers for workers. The workshop attracted people from all over the world who came to participate and study, including Catlett in 1946. She found facilities to work, and thrived with the sustenance of the collective: its weekly meetings, critiques, shared projects, and mission. Through TGP she learned the importance of political content joined with form. She discovered that she wanted to direct her 'art towards […] the main mass of people.'[16]

---

[12] Elizabeth Catlett, 'The Negro People and American Art,' *Freedomways*, 1:1 (1961), 78.

[13] Catlett, 'The Role of the Black Artist,' p. 14.

[14] Catlett divorced African-American artist Charles White and married the Mexican artist Francisco Mora. She asserted in numerous interviews that Mora's feminism allowed her to thrive as a creator. She claimed the same for Frida Kahlo, who was married to Diego Rivera. See 'Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Glory Van Scott,' 8 December 1981, excerpted in 'Elizabeth Catlett: Sculptor, Printmaker,' *Artists and Influence*: *The Journal of Black American Cultural History*, 10 (1991), 1–27. Barnett-Aden Gallery opened in 1943 and was run by one of Catlett's former Howard University professors, James Herring.

Like Saar, who moved on to a broader assemblage practice once her children were older, Catlett returned to sculpture when her youngest son entered kindergarten in the 1950s. She had perfected her practice in clay in Mexico, studying with Francisco Zuñiga at La Esmeralda (Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado; National School of Painting, Sculpture and Printmaking) in 1946 and utilizing the coil technique. She had cast in bronze and done sporadic work with stone. Now she added wood carving, returning to *La Esmeralda* to work with José L. Ruiz.[17]

Yet Catlett's themes remained remarkably consistent over time: celebrations of women — their power, their politics, their bodies, the bond with their children. Rarely working from models, she employed a technique learned from art educator Viktor Lowenfeld while she was in residence at Hampton University in the early 1940s. It involved imagining structure from inside her own body; how did this movement, pose, or angle feel from the interiors of her own being?[18]

Scholar Tina Campt's discussion of the haptic nature of photographic practice can be easily applied to Catlett's working method. A constellation of ideas relating to the sense of touch constitute the haptic. Through physical touch we understand the tactility of things; with indexical touch we absorb the contextual framing of the Black female body as sign; and affective touch describes how an object stirs us emotionally. In Campt's view the haptic also signals our own modes of perception, how we as viewers connect to an object. What are our responses to the encounter with Catlett's sculpture? Catlett's own sense of the haptic also comes from within. As a champion swimmer and lifeguard, she would have had intricate knowledge of human movement and power, feeling for the body in space, its mass, its weight (and weightlessness in water), which could be translated into sculpture.[19]

---

[15] See Jones, *South of Pico*, pp. 50–56. Saar had three daughters, while Catlett had three sons. All of these children would go on to work in the arts.

[16] 'Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Glory Van Scott,' p. 4.

[17] Catlett had studied with Zuñiga at La Esmeralda in 1946; Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, pp. 66–69, 71.

[18] Ibid., pp. 34–36.

As Campt explains, these expanded notions of the haptic often exist in tension with actual touch. To this we can add the nodes of friction (and balance) that the artist recognized between figuration and abstraction, and the requirements for the solitary of the making life against the solidarity of working 'with and for others,' in which Catlett was so very invested.[20]

Catlett's sculpture from the 1950s and 1960s is replete with elegant, vibrant figures. Consider her bronze *Figure* (1961), or her *Seated Woman* (1962) and *Mujer* (1964), both in mahogany. All signal the embodiment of women, with ample hips and bosoms, along with Catlett's signature spiraling and draped skirt that emphasizes the lower regions but also gives the figures a gracious femininity. Clothing here is mere suggestion, allowing her to focus on the contours of the body without creating a nude. For, given the vulnerability and exploitation of Black bodies throughout world history, nakedness continued to be a conflicted subject in the art of African Americans.[21] As art historian Melanie Anne Herzog suggests, the artist offered nothing less than 'a pioneering reclamation' of bodies and beings that were both Black and female.[22]

---

[19] Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters, Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), part 1, and Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), chap 3.

[20] Elizabeth Catlett quoted in Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, 95, 93. Campt, *Image Matters*, 32–33.

[21] Judith Wilson, 'Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-US Art,' in Gina Dent (ed.), *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), pp. 112–21.

[22] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 21.

Michael Brenson describes Catlett's figures as 'modestly dressed' and as such 'unmarked by covetousness, envy, anger, gluttony or any of the other seven deadly sins they have clearly encountered in the world around them.'[23] Such imaginative properties of the sculpture find continuity in formal ones for Brenson, in which Catlett's sculptural surfaces seek and are 'touched and tended by light,' and exquisitely maneuver the play of positive and negative space.[24] For Lowery Stokes Sims, Catlett's 'figurative style inflected by abstraction,' making conscious use of African and pre-Columbian forms, is nothing less than heroic.[25] Richard Powell reminds us that Catlett's insistence on forwarding Black and brown standards of beauty and aesthetics had an 'emotional depth,' and arrived at a crucial time in Black diaspora history (1940s–1970s) and was thus significant in 'race pride and ideology.'[26]

Other sculpture reimagined the classically Western, overwhelmingly biblical, but also truly global theme of a mother with her offspring. Two examples evince Catlett's explorations and range. *Mother and Child* (1956), in terracotta, turns on rounded, organic forms and naturalistic rendering. A later *Mother and Child* (1959), hewn from mahogany, is angular and abstracted, gleaming with the polished surface that would continue to mark the artist's works in wood.

However, we should remember that the centering of the female form, being, and intellect went back to the very beginning of Catlett's oeuvre. We see it in *Pensive* (1946), a woman in bronze hugging her body and communing with her thoughts — her blouse a sheer layer revealing the feminine form, whose sleeves provide a spiraling pattern that the artist would eventually apply to womanly hips, bringing it to life as a skirt. And it was her earliest *Mother and Child* (1940) that won Catlett the first prize in sculpture at Chicago's American Negro Exposition in 1940. Already we see Catlett's draped skirt on view. (The work's rounded naturalism would be echoed in Catlett's 1956 terracotta). Created in limestone and most probably her first work in stone, its location is currently unknown.[27]

---

[23] Michael Brenson, 'Elizabeth Catlett's Sculptural Aesthetics,' in Gedeon (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett Sculpture*, p. 28.

[24] Ibid., pp. 28–29.

[25] Sims, 'Elizabeth Catlett,' p. 11.

[26] Powell, 'Face to Face,' p. 51.

While imaging a body that bespeaks African American history and heritage, the artist also thought about the people of her adopted home. They appear in both her own prints and those created with the collective TGP, and show up in sculpture, too. If pieces such as *Figure* (1961), *Seated Woman* (1962), and *Mujer* (1964) refer to a Black female body, others such as the seated *Rebozo* (1957) and the bust *Rebozo* (1968), both in limestone, developed an iconic Mexican (and perhaps more specifically indigenous) feminine profile.[28] These appear slightly more abstract than her other figures, with the shawl-like *rebozo* enveloping, rather than emphasizing, bodily curves. Draping, though, continues to play a significant role.

Catlett returned to the US only once per decade during this period, visiting in 1954 and again in 1961. Her commitment to raising three small children, the financial and other burdens of international travel, and eventually her responsibilities as a professor (and chair of sculpture) at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plasticas in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, made such trips an understandable challenge. There were also Cold War politics at play. McCarthyism reached across the border into Mexico, where the government took a more conservative turn. Catlett was harassed by US authorities during the 1950s. This tense situation built to a terrifying pitch in 1959 when one night, home alone with her children, she was spirited away to jail as a 'foreign agitator'. Given this state of affairs, Catlett eventually became a Mexican citizen, in 1962. However, she was then prevented from returning to the US for a decade, labeled an 'undesirable alien' in the country of her birth.[29]

---

[27] For more on Chicago's American Negro Exposition of 1940, see Adam Green, *Selling the Race*: *Culture, Community and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chapter 1; and Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building*: *Black Americans in the Worlds of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), chapter 4.

[28] Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 163.

[29] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 79. See also 'Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Camille Billops,' pp. 23–24. In the early 1960s, in the years before the Black Arts Movement took hold, writer Elton Fax also records Black artists' fear and avoidance of Catlett after she was marked as a McCarthy-era communist enemy. Indeed, various incarnations of the House Un-American Activities Committee were part of

In Mexico, Catlett had her first solo show, in 1962, a mix of sculpture and prints that would continue to characterize her one-artist shows. Several years later another exhibition featured more monumental works, the result of greater studio space afforded by her position as a university professor. Held at Mexico City's Museo de Arte Moderno in 1970, *Experiencia negra* foregrounded a politicized Black experience responding to the era of Black Power. Indeed, a list in the exhibition brochure confirms that a number of works that have shaped our understanding of Catlett's Black activist oeuvre were first shown in Mexico: prints such as *The Torture of Mothers* (1970); *Malcolm X Speaks for Us* (1969); *Watts/Detroit/Washington/Harlem/Newark* (1970), and of course the series *Negro es Bello* (*Black Is Beautiful*) (1968–69) along with sculptures such as *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (1968) and *The Black Woman Speaks* (1970).

Critic Raquel Tibol quotes the artist extensively in her *Experienca negra* brochure text. Finding beauty in 'dirty' (s*ucio*) materials, and always in search of forms that can best express an idea, these images offer a petition against Black death, against yet another generation of African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s, young and beautiful, becoming victims of inhumane repression, who are being killed for simply wanting to feed and educate their children. For Catlett the display demonstrated to a Mexican public contemporary African-American life. She created what she understood as a total experience by having jazz played throughout the installation and attending the opening in African finery. Translated easily into English as 'Black Experience,' the Spanish exhibition title could be read as gendered. The word (*la*) *experiencia* uses a feminine declension, requiring *negra* (as opposed to *negro*), meaning Black woman. Certainly this was not lost on Catlett.[30]

Both the content and the emphasis of *Experiencia negra* led to Catlett's many solo shows in the US in the first half of the 1970s. She was finally allowed back into the land of her birth in 1971, for her New York museum opening, but only after vigorous work on her behalf by the director of the Studio Museum in Harlem Edward Spriggs, writer Elton

---

American life from 1945 to 1975. See Elton C. Fax, *Seventeen Black Artists* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1971), p. 29.

[30] Raquel Tibol, *Experiencia negra*: *Escultura y grabado de Elizabeth Catlett*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Museo de Arte Moderno, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1970), unpaginated.

Fax, artist Romare Bearden (1911–1988), and numerous others, and after she had provided a detailed itinerary. As she would recount to Tibol in the pages of the Mexican daily *Excelsior*:

> It's true, from the legal point of view I am a Mexican citizen; but how will some consul, some ambassador, some bureaucrat, some president be able to erase the color of my blood, erase my twenty-some years of life as a black citizen of the United States, where I went to segregated schools, where I traveled in the back of the bus reserved for blacks, where I sat in stations, in theaters, in restaurants in the section that said negroes only!?[31]

Once she became a Mexican citizen, Catlett raised her political profile once again. In 1963 she traveled to Cuba as part of the Mexican delegation to the Congress of Women in the Americas. Inspired by Cuba's emerging socialism, she created the linocut *Integración racial en Cuba, or Education in Cuba* (1964), celebrating the island nation's commitment to racial, educational, and social equity. Along with creating and translating documents, she made posters and flyers in the tradition of TGP. And she organized the *Comité Mexicano Provisional de Solidaridad con Angela Davis* in 1969, part of the worldwide movement agitating against the militant thinker's unjust imprisonment. The artist's monumental polychrome cedar *Political Prisoner* (1971) certainly speaks to her work on behalf of Angela Davis, who was freed in 1972.[32]

## Washington, D.C., 1935

Alice Elizabeth Catlett was born in 1915 and raised in the nation's capital. Her father, John Catlett, had been on faculty at Tuskeegee Institute, teaching mathematics alongside pioneers of education Booker T. Washington and Carter G. Woodson; he was also a musician and artist.[33] Elizabeth Catlett's activism began in high school, when she took part in an anti-lynching campaign, protesting in front of the Supreme Court building with a noose around her neck.

---

[31] Raquel Tibol, quoted in Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, pp. 148–49. On Catlett's 1971 visa problems, see Herzog, pp. 150, 213, 214.

[32] With Catlett's help, the Unión Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas (an organization begun after the 1963 sojourn in Cuba) became Mexico's official national political voice on Angela Davis's incarceration. See Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 136; and 'Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Camille Billops,' p. 24.

[33] Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 1.

As was the pattern with so many African-American artists in the first part of the twentieth century, Catlett sat for the entrance exams to the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) — only to be rejected because of her race. Heading instead to her hometown institution of Howard University, Catlett entered what would become a leading center of the Black artistic world of the moment, especially when it came to the training of young artists. James Herring had set up the art department in 1921 and opened the Howard University Art Gallery in 1930, the first institution of its kind at a historically Black college or university. Herring was keen on fostering an aesthetic of eclecticism and bringing 'cross-cultural experiences'[34] to Howard students and the city of Washington itself. Among other things, the gallery hosted exhibitions of African art, and versions of Impressionist and early modern pieces from the Barnes Foundation. James A. Porter (a graduate of the department) began teaching at Howard in 1927; in 1943 he would publish *Modern Negro Art*,[35] one of the first comprehensive studies of African American artists. Alain Locke, a luminary of the Harlem Renaissance who was also involved in many curatorial projects, had taught at Howard since 1912. Eminent printmaker James Lesesne Wells (1902–1993) was also on the faculty, as was painter and designer Löis Mailou Jones (1905–1998). Catlett continued her activism in college, participating in actions against war and fascism as part of Howard's Liberal Club, and with the National Student League.

Graduating *cum laude* in 1935, Catlett moved to North Carolina, where she taught elementary and secondary schools to earn money for graduate school. The University of Iowa (U.I.) had a reputation for accepting African-American students. She recalls her warm welcome when she disembarked from the train in Iowa City in 1937; how students of color helped her navigate the terrain, including finding a place in a Black rooming house, since they were not allowed to live in campus dorms. Catlett eventually roomed with Margaret Walker, studying creative writing, whose poetry would shortly energize the Chicago Renaissance. Decades later both Carnegie Mellon and the University of Iowa would apologize to Catlett for their discriminatory practices, offering honorary degrees, buying and commissioning art, and creating scholarships, with U.I. even naming a residence hall after her.[36]

---

[34] Keith Morrison, *Art in Washington and Its Afro-American Presence, 1940–1970* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1985), p. 37, cited in Brenson, 'Elizabeth Catlett's Sculptural Aesthetics,' p. 32. See also Kathleen A. Edwards, 'The Fine Art of Representing Black Heritage: Elizabeth Catlett and Iowa, 1938–1940,' in Lena M. Hill and Michael D. Hill (eds.), *Invisible Hawkeyes*: *African Americans at the University of Iowa During the Long Civil Rights Era* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016), p. 53.

[35] James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1943).

As Kathleen A. Edwards has suggested, U.I. played an important role in mapping American art in the 1930s. Modern (and European) abstract tendencies were championed by art department chair Lester Longman. It was also a site for the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP, the precursor to the WPA) and the related Regionalist style, represented on the teaching staff by Grant Wood (1891–1942). Harry Stinson, Catlett's sculpture professor, and Wood were both part of the PWAP (the project also operated at Howard University). Catlett was drawn to Wood's interest in art's public presence and availability in murals, prints, and representational schemas. Jean Charlot (1898–1979), a Frenchman affiliated with Mexican muralism, was also in residence at U.I. during Catlett's years there, completing two murals. She already had exposure to Mexican and Latin American traditions at Howard, where they were taught by James Porter. Catlett took metalworking classes in the Engineering School and studied Northern Renaissance art and architecture with a young German immigrant, Horst W. Janson, decades prior to the release of his tome *History of Art* (1962), which defined the study of art history for generations.[37] In 1940 Catlett became the first person in the US to receive the M.F.A. degree in studio art from U.I's innovative program.[38] Her thesis show featured works in terracotta, bronze, and stone, including the signature *Negro Mother and Child* (1940).

---

[36] Christóbal McKinney, 'UI Names Residence Hall After Elizabeth Catlett: Madison Street Residence Hall Will Carry the Name of Renowned African American Alumna,' Iowa Now, 7 September 2016, https://now.uiowa.edu/2016/09/ui-names-residence-hall-after-elizabeth-catlett; 'Elizabeth Catlett,' in *Graduate Education at Iowa 2011–2012, Annual Report*; Monica Hayes, 'Making Amends: CMU Lauds Famed Black Artist 76 Years After It Denied Her Admittance,' *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 19 May 2008, https://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2008/05/19/Making-amends-CMU-lauds-famed-black-artist-76-years-after-it-denied-her-admittance/stories/200805190178. See also 'Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Glory Van Scott,' p. 4; and Edwards, 'The Fine Art of Representing Black Heritage,' pp. 60–61.

[37] Catlett had worked briefly (and unsuccessfully) with the PWAP at Howard University; see 'Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Camille Billops,' p. 16. See also

Upon receiving her graduate degree, Catlett headed to New Orleans, where she assumed the chair of the art department of the historically Black Dillard University. After her first teaching year, she spent the summer of 1941 in Chicago, connecting with Margaret Walker and the Black artistic milieu that came to be known as the Chicago Renaissance. This movement, inspired by social realist style and leftist politics, 'shared a profound faith in the capacity of cultural work to leverage transformations in the social and political sphere on behalf of America's poor and working classes.'[39] Catlett extended her studies in ceramics at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and did printmaking at the newly opened South Side Community Arts Center, a fulcrum for the Black arts community, including Margaret Burroughs (1915–2010), Eldzier Cortor (1916–2015), Charles Sebree (1914–1985), and painter Charles White (1918–1979), whom she would marry later that year.

Catlett returned to Dillard University with White, who taught drawing there during 1941–42. They would leave Dillard at the end of the academic year, after learning of a new mandate to teach during the summer months. However, they may also have found the teaching environment in the South so restrictive as to be untenable.[40] One of Catlett's students from her time at Dillard was Samella Lewis. A native of New Orleans, Lewis found in Catlett an uncompromising champion of Black equity and Black artists; 'a commanding and fascinating individual' who was not afraid to confront the status quo. In her life in the South, Catlett stood up to segregation in public transportation, in museums, and in swimming pools; confronted police brutality; insisted on expanding the art curriculum to include the study of nude models;

---

Edwards, 'The Fine Art of Representing Black Heritage,' pp. 51–65.

[38] Ibid., p. 51.

[39] Stacy Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*: *African American Art and Literature, 1930–1953* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 2. On the Chicago Renaissance, see Darlene Clark Hine and John McClusky Jr. (eds.), *The Black Chicago Renaissance* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012). Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright, Theodore Ward, and Katherine Dunham were also active in Chicago during this period.

[40] See Andrea D. Barnwell, *Charles White* (Rohnert Park: Pomegranate Communications, 2002), p. 30.

and battled to raise salaries for Black teachers. In New Orleans she was someone who lived in the French Quarter with everyday folk rather than on campus.[41]

Indeed, as Catlett herself would frame it, an incident at Dillard would have significant impact on the art she would make going forward. Late in the fall of 1941,

> when a retrospective exhibition of Picasso's paintings — including the 'Guernica' mural — came to New Orleans's Delgado Art Museum [now the New Orleans Museum of Art], I decided to take the 130 young Black men and women in my art history class to see it. But the museum was closed to us because it was in City Park, where Blacks were not permitted.
>
> Through a friend I arranged a visit for us on a Monday when the museum was closed, and we were bussed in. The students were excited and fascinated by the paintings. They ran from room to room exclaiming, calling to one another, uninhibitedly enjoying these 'strange paintings with glowing *color!' No one was bored. No one had ever been in an art museum before.*[42]

Samella Lewis was one of those students. Lewis would follow Catlett to Hampton University, where she was in residence in 1943, while White completed his *fresco-secco* mural *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943) for Clarke Hall. Catlett and Lewis would collaborate throughout their lifetimes. Lewis included Catlett in the second volume of *Black Artists on Art* (1971),[43] documenting more than 150 Black practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s. Catlett was an enthusiastic supporter of Lewis's magazine *Black Art*: *An International Quarterly*, first published in 1976, contributing her *Mother and Child* (1971) to the cover of the inaugural issue. Inside, a section focusing on her work included a foldout offset print, suitable for framing. Lewis would write the monograph *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett* in 1984, publishing it under her own imprint, Hancraft Studios.

---

[41] Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, pp. 11, 14–16. Catlett also integrated the pool at University of Iowa while in graduate school. See Edwards, 'The Fine Art of Representing Black Heritage,' p. 61.

[42] Elizabeth Catlett, 'Responding to Cultural Hunger,' in Mark O'Brien and Craig Little (eds.), *Reimagining America*: *The Arts of Social Change* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), p. 244. Italics in the original.

[43] Samella S. Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy (eds.), *Black Artists on Art*, 2 vols. (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts Publishers, 1969–71).

Newlyweds Catlett and White landed in New York in the summer of 1942, where they sublet the apartment of baritone Kenneth Lee Spencer, a Hollywood figure and a regular at Café Society, the nightclub frequented by progressive and leftist New York. His address at 409 Edgecombe Avenue in Harlem thrust them into the heart of New York's creative Black world. Over the years the building was home to the innovations of Duke Ellington and W. E. B. Du Bois, and legal and diplomatic luminaries such as Thurgood Marshall and Ralph Bunche. In Harlem, White and Catlett found a vibrant art world filled with a community of painters such as Charles Alston (1907–1977), Aaron Douglas (1899–1979), Norman Lewis (1909–1979), Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence (respectively, 1917–2000 and 1913–2005), printmaker Robert Blackburn (1920–2003), and writers such as Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and Ann Petry.[44]

Like Chicago, New York was a site of African American leftist networks in the first half of the twentieth century. Catlett jumped right in. She joined the Arts Committee of the National Negro Congress, and devoted teaching time to serving at schools run by the Communist Party USA, including the Greenwich Village Jefferson School (teaching ceramics), and Harlem's George Washington Carver School, where she worked in 'fundraising and publicity'[45] and taught sculpture and sewing. These institutions served working people, with the Carver School attracting Harlem's 'cooks, maids, janitors, elevator operators, garment industry workers' and the like.[46] On numerous occasions, Catlett identified her teaching as a lens through which to see what was required of her art practice, whether it was daring to bring students to a museum in the segregated South, inspiring them to experience their own beauty, or creating things that she felt spoke to the mass of Black people's conditions.

Catlett's connection to American Contemporary Artists (ACA) Galleries also involved her with a leftist cohort. Opening in 1932, ACA was one of the few galleries to showcase American art; its roster was incredibly diverse, featuring women, Asian, African-American, and Jewish artists and others, most demonstrating a radical if figurative bent. In the mid-1940s Catlett would contribute to the gallery's magazine, outlining some of her ideas about Black education and exhibition making.[47]

---

[44] Kenneth Spencer was at work on the Black-cast Hollywood musical *Cabin in the Sky* (1943). See Barnwell, *Charles White*, p. 30. See also Fax, *Seventeen Black Artists*, p. 22. On Café Society, see Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Harlem Nocturne*: *Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II* (New York: Civitas Books, 2013).

[45] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 36.

[46] Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 9.

In continuing to see Black women — their beauty, intellects, and bodies — as a source of inspiration and as a major thematic through which to narrate an art practice and navigate the world, Catlett found incredible support in New York City at midcentury. Scholars have unpacked the discourse of 'Black left feminism' developing from the 1920s through the 1950s in the US. Nurtured in part in Communist Party USA and Popular Front circles, it was a standpoint that placed working-class Black women at the center of social struggle in ways that spoke to the nexus of race, class, gender, and ultimately transnational discourse. Activists and writers like Esther Cooper Jackson and Marvel Cooke were part of Elizabeth Catlett's New York milieu.[48]

Beginning with her days as an organizer with the Southern Negro Youth Congress in the 1940s, and membership in the Communist Party USA, Esther Cooper Jackson was important in Black leftist circles into the 1980s as the managing editor of the journal *Freedomways*, the magazine of the contemporary struggle. Jackson included Catlett's 1961 article 'The Negro People and American Art' in its inaugural issue, and artists such as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence would create imagery specially for its pages over the years.

Catlett and Cooper Jackson used their maiden names, as many progressive women and self-identified Black feminists did at that time. They were also among the numerous Black women publicly and unceasingly harassed by McCarthyism in ways onerous to women and their children. Esther Cooper became Esther Cooper Jackson when red-baiting accelerated in the 1950s as a way to connect herself to a husband who went underground as a result of this governmental persecution. Such a strategy of 'familialism' relied on more staid notions of family than many of these radical women had heretofore practiced, according to historian Erik S. McDuffie. Campt might say it was a performance of family, which mobilized the sign of 'maternal touch.' In this political context we see how Catlett's signaling to the family through repeated images of the mother and child might conform to such logic while continuing to press a feminist agenda. Born two years apart, Catlett and Cooper Jackson both had enslaved grandparents, who lived through Emancipation, and who chastened them with tales of this horrific past; such memories undergirded their ongoing activism.[49]

---

[47] Elizabeth Catlett, 'The Negro Artist in America,' *American Contemporary Art*, 1:2 (1944), 3–6; and Elizabeth Catlett, 'A Tribute to the Negro People,' *American Contemporary Art* (Winter 1946), 17. See also Elizabeth Catlett, 'Responding to Cultural Hunger,' in O'Brien and Little (eds.), *Reimagining America*, pp. 244–49.

[48] See Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*: *Black Women*, *American Communism*, *and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Griffin, *Harlem Nocturne*; and Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist*: *The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

It was in her MA thesis in sociology for Fisk University in 1940 that Cooper Jackson initially presented her major thoughts on the role of Black working women as a vanguard whose position in the larger society was a true gauge of democracy. In her thesis, 'The Negro Woman Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism,' she focused on the efforts of these workers to organize a union. This allowed her to examine the pitiable working conditions for Black women in the US. Included was a discussion of the horrors of the so-called Bronx Slave Market, where 'girls are shipped up in car loads from the south to stand on corners waiting for work for 25 to 35 cents per hour' as domestic day laborers.[50]

As McDuffie points out, journalism enabled Black feminists to bring their ideas to the world. Marvel Cooke was one such journalist, perhaps best known for her exposés of the Bronx Slave Market, where she went undercover as a maid for hire, getting her story from the women who waited on corners and potential employers alike. She was the first woman to write for the *Amsterdam News*, publishing on cultural topics including visual art. Cooke was also Catlett's downstairs neighbor at 409 Edgecombe and an early collector, including a splendid *Mother and Child* (1942–44). Catlett and Cooke would come together again to support the Free Angela Davis Committee, on which Cooke held a prominent position. At the George Washington Carver School, Catlett would work with Hermina Dumont (Huismond) a significant organizer who had been a part of the Harlem Tenants League, a progressive organization addressing Black women's economic issues in the 1920s.[51]

---

[49] For citations in this paragraph, see Campt, *Image Matters*, p. 53. See also Esther Cooper Jackson, *This Is My Husband, Fighter for His People, Political Refugee* (New York: National Committee to Defend Negro Leadership, 1953); Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, pp. 4–6; and McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, chapter 5. Indeed, Catlett may have known Cooper Jackson's husband, James E. Jackson Jr., at Howard University. Though Catlett was an undergraduate and Jackson was in graduate school at the College of Pharmacy, and they may have overlapped only during 1934–35, both were active in progressive groups such as the Liberal Club.

[50] Esther Victoria Cooper, 'The Negro Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism' (M.A. thesis, Fisk University, 1940), p. 98; quoted in Erik S. McDuffie, '"No Small Amount of Change Could Do": Esther Cooper Jackson and the Making of a Black Left Feminist,' in Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (eds.), *Want to Start A Revolution*? *Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 25–46 (p. 33).

Though it was completed at Taller de Gráfica Popular in Mexico City in 1946–47, Elizabeth Catlett began her important series *The Negro Woman* in New York, energized by an activism that was Black and feminist. The work is epic in its historical breadth but accomplished through a series of linocuts, each hardly larger than eight by ten inches. The serial format is reminiscent of that used by Jacob Lawrence for his sixty tempera-panel series, *The Migration of the Negro* (1940–41). Catlett's fifteen linocuts also rely on text, beginning with the tightly framed portrait *I am the Negro Woman.* However, her first-person narrative creates a different mood from Lawrence's almost omniscient observer, engaging viewers as participants in a more intimate fashion.[52] They picture, for Catlett, the working people she willingly served with her practice. As with Lawrence's *Migration, The Negro Woman* series had a specific order determined by its text:

> I am the Negro Woman, I have always worked hard in America […] In the fields […] In other folks' homes […] I have given the world my songs. In Sojourner Truth I fought for the rights of women as well as Negroes. In Harriet Tubman I helped hundreds to freedom. In Phyllis Wheatley I proved intellectual equality in the midst of slavery. My role has been

---

[51] Marvel Cooke's exposé of the Bronx Slave Market appeared in the *Amsterdam News* in 1939 and the *Daily Compass* in the early 1950s, along with other analyses of Black prostitution and youth drug culture. When Cooke began work at the *Daily Compass*, she became the first Black woman employed at a white-owned daily as a writer. She also wrote for Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s *The People's Voice*. Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke's 'The Bronx Slave Market' appeared in the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine in 1935. See 'Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Camille Billops,' pp. 20–21. On Hermina Dumont (Huismond), see McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, chapter 1.

[52] See Powell, 'Face to Face,' p. 52.

> important in the struggle to organize the unorganized. I have studied in ever increasing numbers. My reward has been bars between me and the rest of the land. I have special reservations […] Special houses […] And a special fear for my loved ones. My right is a future of equality with other Americans.[53]

Catlett's imaging of Black female labor here is in direct dialogue with her friends Esther Cooper Jackson and Marvel Cooke, as well as other Black feminists who were a part of New York's radical communities in the 1940s. These images also pay homage to her mother, who upon the death of her husband, washed floors by day and worked the dancehall coat check at night, though like her husband she had been trained as a teacher.[54] One of Catlett's first prints completed in Mexico, *Domestic Worker* (1946) engages with this theme as well.

In *The Negro Woman* series, Catlett's 'sheroes' are also present. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Phyllis Wheatley are figures she would reimagine over the years and in a variety of mediums. Pieces such as *Harriet* (1975) and *Madonna* (1982), featured in the exhibition *We Wanted a Revolution*, are indicative of how Catlett conceived of signature themes anew.

Over the years, scholars have read the contemporary feminist movement in the US, and rights movements at the end of the twentieth century generally, as building on the successes of the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. However, more recent scholarship sees earlier Black left feminism as setting the stage for the more visible feminist work of the 1970s. Indeed, women like Cooper Jackson and Cooke would continue to be active into the 1970s and beyond, mentoring the second-wave feminist generation.

Through her sculpture and prints Catlett would do the same. As she would tell Michael Brenson in 1997, 'I like seeing things develop from inside out'; her love of building sculpture up from a lump of clay or an interior armature could also be applied to her activism. She fought inequities throughout her life and understood these fights (as a swimmer) from inside the body, from an embodied subjectivity that was Black, and female, and part of Mexico, and creative, and more. It is, too, Campt's haptics — touches, engagements — of the visual, in motion. Brenson's queries on modernist sculpture — 'What does the aesthetic experience of form mean? What effect does it have? What is its purpose?' — are defiantly answered by Elizabeth Catlett's eight decades of practice, he realizes. Her pieces luxuriate in light and 'seem hungry for the world around them. They are creatures of restraint but also of engagement, of introspection but also of action, of self-control but also of desire.'[55]

---

[53] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 59. The full series is published in Melanie Anne Herzog (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett*: *Image of the People*, exh. cat. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[54] Mary Carson Catlett eventually became a truant officer; Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, p. 2.

---

[55] Brenson, 'Elizabeth Catlett's Sculptural Aesthetics,' pp. 28, 38, 27. Brenson interviewed Catlett in Cuernavaca, Mexico, 10–13 January 1997.

# Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

Barnwell, Andrea D., *Charles White* (Rohnert Park, CA: Pomegranate Communications, 2002).

Brenson, Michael, 'Elizabeth Catlett's Sculptural Aesthetics,' in Lucinda H. Gedeon (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett Sculpture*: *A Fifty-Year Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Purchase: Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York; distributed by University of Washington Press, 1998), p. 8.

Campt, Tina M, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

—, *Image Matters, Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

Catlett, Elizabeth, 'Responding to Cultural Hunger,' in Mark O'Brien and Craig Little (eds.), *Reimagining America*: *The Arts of Social Change* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), pp. 244–49.

—, 'The Role of the Black Artist,' *The Black Scholar* 6:9 (1975), 10–14.

—, with a foreword by Elton C. Fax and a commentary by Jeff Donaldson, *Elizabeth Catlett*: *Prints and Sculpture*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1971).

—, 'The Negro People and American Art,' *Freedomways* 1:1 (1961), 78.

—, 'A Tribute to the Negro People,' *American Contemporary Art* (Winter 1946), 17.

—, 'The Negro Artist in America,' *American Contemporary Art* 1:2 (1944), 3–6

Cooper, Esther Victoria, 'The Negro Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism' (M.A. thesis, Fisk University, 1940).

Edwards, Kathleen A., 'The Fine Art of Representing Black Heritage: Elizabeth Catlett and Iowa, 1938–1940,' in Lena M. Hill and Michael D. Hill (eds.), *Invisible Hawkeyes*: *African Americans at the University of Iowa During the Long Civil Rights Era* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016).

'Elizabeth Catlett,' in *Graduate Education at Iowa 2011–2012*, *Annual Report*.

'Elizabeth Catlett: Sculptor, Printmaker,' *Artists and Influence*: *The Journal of Black American Cultural History*, 10 (1991), 1–27.

Fax, Elton C., *Seventeen Black Artists* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1971).

Green, Adam, *Selling the Race*: *Culture, Community and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Griffin, Farah Jasmine, *Harlem Nocturne*: *Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II* (New York: Civitas Books, 2013).

Hayes, Monica, 'Making Amends: CMU Lauds Famed Black Artist 76 Years After It Denied Her Admittance,' *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 19 May 2008, https://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2008/05/19/Making-amends-CMU-lauds-famed-black-artist-76-years-after-it-denied-her-admittance/stories/200805190178

Herzog, Melanie Anne (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett*: *Image of the People*, exh. cat. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

—, *Elizabeth Catlett*: *An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

Hine, Darlene Clark and John McClusky Jr. (eds.), *The Black Chicago Renaissance* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

Jackson, Esther Cooper, *This Is My Husband*, *Fighter for His People*, *Political Refugee* (New York: National Committee to Defend Negro Leadership, 1953).

Jones, Kellie, *South of Pico*, *African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

— (ed.), *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, University of California; New York: DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2011).

Lewis, Samella, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett* (Claremont, CA: Hancraft Studios, 1984).

Lewis, Samella S. and Ruth G. Waddy (eds.), *Black Artists on Art*, 2 vols. (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts Publishers, 1969–71).

Mason, Karen Anne, 'Interview with Alonzo Davis', in *African-American Artists of Los Angeles Oral History Transcript, 1992–1993* (Los Angeles: Oral History Program of the University of California, 1994), pp. 199–202.

McDuffie, Erik S., '"No Small Amount of Change Could Do": Esther Cooper Jackson and the Making of a Black Left Feminist,' in Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (eds.), *Want to Start A Revolution*? *Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 25–46.

McDuffie, Erik S., *Sojourning for Freedom*: *Black Women*, *American Communism*, *and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

McKinney, Christóbal, 'UI Names Residence Hall After Elizabeth Catlett: Madison Street Residence Hall Will Carry the Name of Renowned African American Alumna,' *Iowa Now*, 7 September 2016, https://now.uiowa.edu/2016/09/ui-names-residence-hall-after-elizabeth-catlett

Morgan, Stacy, *Rethinking Social Realism*: *African American Art and Literature, 1930–1953* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

Morrison, Keith, *Art in Washington and its Afro-American Presence, 1940–1970* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1985).

Porter, James A., *Modern Negro Art* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1943).

Powell, Richard J., ‘Face to Face: Elizabeth Catlett’s Graphic Work,’ in Jeanne Zeidler (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett*: *Works on Paper, 1944–1992* (Hampton: Hampton University Museum, 1993).

Sims, Lowery Stokes, ‘Elizabeth Catlett: A Life in Art and Politics,’ in Lucinda H. Gedeon (ed.), *Elizabeth Catlett Sculpture*.

Tesfagiorgis, Frieda High W., ‘Afrofemcentrism and its Fruition in the Art of Elizabeth Catlett and Faith Ringgold (A View of Women by Women),’ *Sage*: *A Scholarly Journal on Black Women*, 4:1 (1987), 25–29.

Tibol, Raquel, *Experiencia negra*: *Escultura y grabado de Elizabeth Catlett*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Museo de Arte Moderno, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1970).

Washington, Mary Helen, *The Other Blacklist*: *The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Wilson, Judith, ‘Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden’s Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-US Art,’ in Gina Dent (ed.), *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), pp. 112–21.

Wilson, Mabel O., *Negro Building*: *Black Americans in the Worlds of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

# PART FOUR

# RECLAIMING OUR TIME

# 16. Kinship, the Middle Passage, and the Origins of Racial Slavery

## *Jennifer L. Morgan*

As the transatlantic slave trade developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, African women and the appropriation of their bodies were at the heart of the development of racial slavery. Slave traders and slaveowners both violently appropriated their bodies and attached meaning to their reproductive potential in ways that powerfully echo in the aftermath of slavery. The very idea of race depends on a notion of heredity that is impossible to think about without controlling the 'issue' of women's wombs. The women who were the first forced migrants of the African diaspora comprise a foundation on which the edifice of racial slavery rests — but that foundation is not merely symbolic, it is material, and it reverberates not just for the European men who demanded their compliance, but for the African women who refused it. The story of the Black diaspora is rooted in African women's wombs.

From the very first written descriptions of European involvement in the slave trade, even before large numbers of captives were being transported across the Atlantic, traders understood enslavement and reproduction to be interwoven. Before 1700 it was quite common for slave ships to transport equal numbers of women and men to slavery in Europe and the Americas, and at times ships were packed with significantly more female captives than male. Indeed, among all migrants

© 2019 Jennifer L. Morgan, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.16

to the Americas, both voluntary and involuntary, African women outnumbered European women by four to one until 1800.[1] African women, then, were there at the very beginning, and it was through their bodies that European slave traders and slave owners developed the notion of race on which Atlantic slavery depended. These women were among the first Africans enslaved by Europeans. Their reproductive capacity was embedded in the very fact of their enslavement, a core part of the way they learned to understand the new terms of their vastly altered reality.

On a single cold day in February 1663, for example, an English settler purchased twelve women and eight men, the female majority bound for his sugar fields but also, perhaps, purchased with the musings of his contemporary Richard Ligon in mind. Ligon wrote of the men and women purchased in Barbados that:

> We buy them so as the sexes may be equal; for, if they have more Men than Women, the men who are unmarried will come to their masters, and complain, that they cannot live without Wives […] and he tells them, that the next ship that comes, he will buy them Wives, which satisfies them for the present.[2]

There is a lot to say about the way that this Englishman described the concession to African men's desires, but for now, I want to read it only from the perspective of those twelve women. Arriving to a plantation, these women were summarily assigned either to a man with whom they had survived the crossing or to one on whom they had never laid eyes. They would then be subjected to a quick and clear education as to the outlines of their future and the presumptions on which that future rested. For these women, there was a clear connection between the terms of their labor in the cane fields, their sexual availability, and their reproductive future.

Although I want to attend primarily to what that meant for these women, it is important to reckon with another fact. The labor system, which so clearly subjected both women and men to a speculative violence based on their reproductive futures, took place in broad daylight. The twelve women and eight men sold at the Bridgetown port had experienced the shock of being marketed as part of the daily life of the colonial town. It was not until decades later that auction houses and slave markets became designated as permanently demarcated structures. Sales of enslaved men and women were part and parcel of the messy colonial society that greeted them when they disembarked after months of stultifying, disorienting travel. On corners, in the back of shops, in the post-office or the public house, on wharfs, on piers, on board ships, after long marches through towns and into the countryside, from the backs of wagons, inside urban living rooms, with a stranger, with a child, with a spouse, alone or in full view of those whose sale would come next. Sold by men, sold by women, sold by strangers, sold by those who had known them long enough to call them by a name.[3] Sold, in other words, in hundreds and thousands of small transactions, in which their reproductive capacities and identities as women and men were simultaneously accounted for and dismissed as transactional rather than a matter of feeling or family. This is a manifestation of quotidian violence that we have simply not calculated. These are moments in which the potential for pity, compassion or connection were irrevocably set aside in favor of a moral economy where skin color enabled enslavement, and childbirth was relegated to the balance sheet.

---

[1] David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jennifer L. Morgan, 'Accounting for "The Most Excruciating Torment": Gender, Slavery, and Trans-Atlantic Passages', *History of the Present*, 6 (2016), 184–207.

[2] Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1657), pp. 46–47, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A48447.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=fulltext

This would have been brutally clear, even for women whose child-bearing capacity entered the equation of their capture and transport prior to the point of sale. In the 1440s, a Portuguese chronicler wrote of coming across a woman who his men tried to subdue and take on board ship along with her children. Her strength in resisting her assailants was surprising, and it was not until the three men who'd failed to force her into the boat realized that they could simply 'take her son from her and carry him to the boat; and love of the child compelled the mother to follow after it,' did they capture her.[4] It was her identity as a mother that enabled her capture. If she survived her contact with the Portuguese, she would have spent the remainder of her life in the knowledge that her capture was inextricably linked to her love for her son.

---

[3] Robert E. Desrochers Jr., 'Slave-for-Sale Advertisements and Slavery in Massachusetts, 1704–1781', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 59 (2002), 623–64.

[4] Gomes Eannes de Azurara, 'The Discovery and Conquest of Guinea (1453),' in Elizabeth Donnan (ed.), *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, 1441–1700*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1930), pp. 18–40 (p.40),

Mothers and children, fathers and siblings, were always part of the Middle Passage and of the sales that ensued once ships landed in Europe and the Americas. The archive doesn't always point clearly to them, but records of slave ships testify to the presence of childless women and mothers alike. Their stories come buried in some very brutal calculus. In 1683, according to agents of the Royal African Company stationed in Barbados, the ship *Bright* arrived with a third of the captives being 'very small most of them noe better then sucking children nay many of them did suck theire Mothers that were on boarde.' The captain responded to this complaint with an indifference towards the infants that would be shocking if not for one crucial detail: it had enabled the slave trade to begin in the first place. He argued that bringing them 'cost not much and the ship had as good bring them as nothing.'[5] His reasoning was logical, though the rational calculus covered far more complicated equations than he was capable of considering — equations that would be obvious to those nursing mothers and carers for motherless children, who would understand that their economic value would become tethered to their reproductive capacity in the Americas.

For some captured women, the linkage between their enslavement and their motherhood was even more entangled. We know from a variety of sources that children were born on slave ships. Perhaps the most famous is the first person account written by Ignatius Sancho who was himself born on a slave ship in 1729, and became a prominent writer and composer in eighteenth-century England. Sancho's mother would have experienced the onset of her labor amidst the roiling rhythms of a fetid ship, and likely would have greeted her son's birth with profoundly mixed emotions. Whatever the nature of those feelings, arrival to the Spanish colony of New Granada (Columbia) soon put an end to them: she died shortly thereafter of fever.[6] Sancho's mother was seemingly

---

https://archive.org/stream/documentsillustr00donn/documentsillustr00donn_djvu.txt

[5] PRO T70/16 f49, Steede and Gasciogne, Barbados, April 1683 cited in David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 110–11; Voyage 15076, *Delight* (1683), www.slavevoyages.org

[6] Sancho's father — whether a man with whom she shared a life prior to capture or one with whom she forged a connection along the slave route — could not bear the

resigned to namelessness and obscurity, which was only interrupted by her son's rise to literacy and public prominence. She gave birth to a child in an act that immediately and violently showed her that the future she had imagined was no longer in her grasp. Further, Sancho's appropriation as the property of the Englishman who bought his mother embodied the reproductive logic of a system of slavery based on racial identity: the harsh fact of his mother going into labour on board the slave ship exemplified this logic in microcosm.

Her experience was not unusual. On board the ship James in 1675, one woman died days before the ship left the African coast where its crew had been loading men and women for months. It is very difficult to apprehend her misery. She 'miscarreyed, and the child dead within her and Rotten, [she] dyed two days after delivery.' The agony of the experience seeps through the disciplinary columns of the ship captain's *Account of the Mortality Aboard the James.* The connections between her and another woman lost during the passage may not have been obvious to the crew. Yet, they seem intimately linked: a little over two months later, another mother on board the ship succumbed after what the captain saw as maternal madness. 'Being very fond of her Child, Carrying her up and downe, wore her to nothing by which means fell into a feavour and dyed.'[7]

There were, of course, many women who survived the Middle Passage without being or becoming pregnant and without children to care for, or at least without children whom the captains felt compelled to record. But even then, their reproductive capacity was part of their earliest understanding of what was happening to them. The very first description of the end point of the Middle Passage was written in 1444 by a Portuguese chronicler, who described the sale of more than 250 men, women, and children at the Lisbon port:

> […] though we could not understand the words of their language, the sound of it right well accorded with the measure of their sadness. But

---

conditions under which he found himself and committed suicide, leaving the baby to a slaveowner who risked the toddler's life on another Atlantic crossing before delivering him to enslavement in England. 'Ignatius Sancho,' in Vincent Carretta (ed.), *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 77–109 (p. 100).

[7] Voyage of the *James*, 1675–76, in Donnan (ed.), *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade*, vol. 1, pp. 206–09.

> to increase their sufferings still more, there now arrived those who had charge of the division of the captives, and who began to separate one from another, in order to make an equal partition […]and then was it needful to part fathers from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from brothers […] the mothers clasped their other children in their arms, and threw themselves flat on the ground with them, receiving blows with little pity for their own flesh, if only they might not be torn from them.[8]

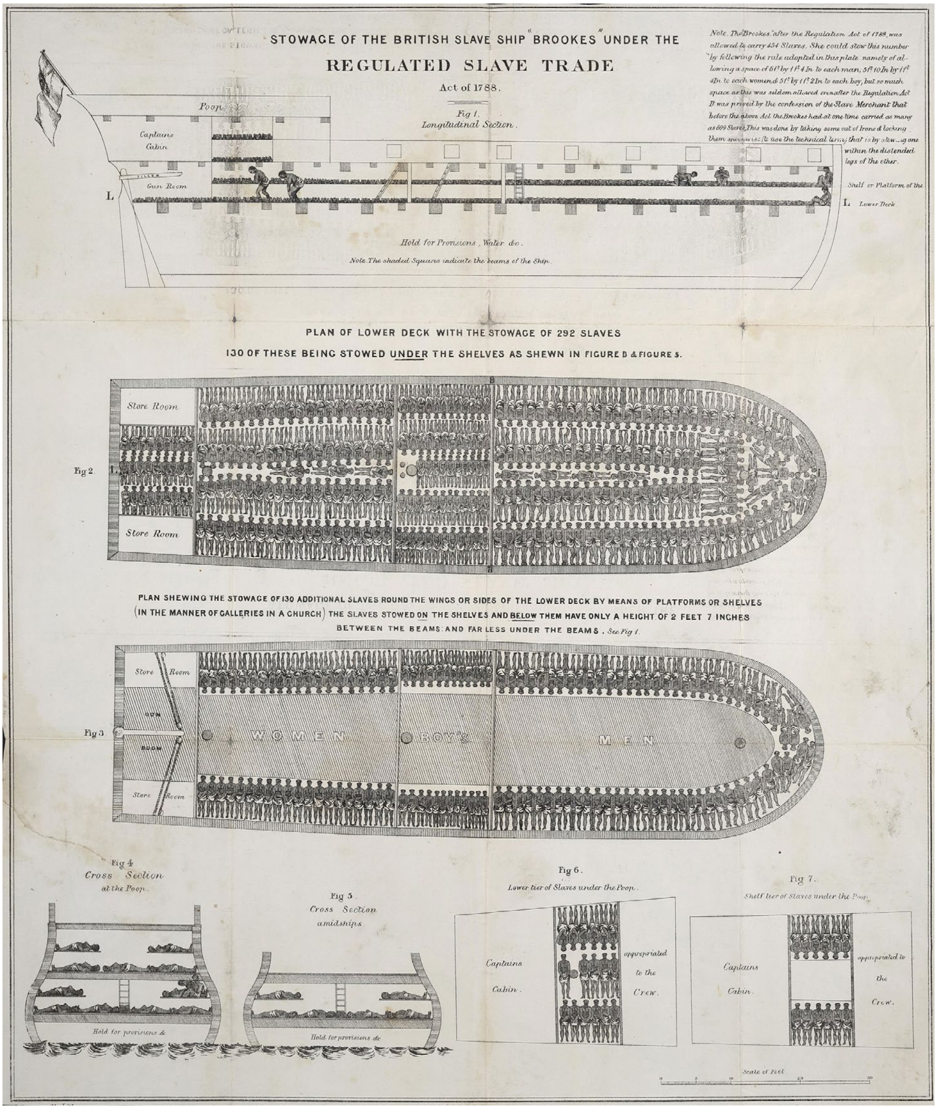
The lesson learned on board this ship, by those both with and without family ties, would reverberate in an endless echo of dissonance and dependence, kinship and enslavement. Such a lesson would be equally excruciating for those who lost kin at the moment of sale, and for those who left kin far behind at the starting point of their capture.

It appears, then, that women were there from the very first moment that Europeans contemplated the economic benefit of transporting captive laborers across the Atlantic ocean. If we know this beyond a shadow of a doubt, how does that change the way we visualize and understand the Middle Passage? Is the brutality of the slave ship perhaps best captured by the horrifying image of a woman giving birth on board? As we struggle to visualize the agony of forced migration and enslavement, the classic image of a slave ship is often the most powerful one to come to mind.[9] Looking at Fig. 16.2 below, which circulated among abolitionist circles in the early nineteenth century, one can only assume that the illustrator inserted the image of the woman giving birth as a way to shock his viewers into action. Seen alongside the more ubiquitous image of the *Brookes* (Fig. 16.1), one can almost be forgiven for not immediately noticing her, and then being stunned at the moment of recognition. But the ability to include such a moment on board a slave ship depended on generations of evidence, of stories circulating, and experiences retold. The birth on board that ship was no more a surprise to the nineteenth-century viewer than the news that sugar on English tables and tobacco in their pipes depended upon hundreds of bodies crammed into those ships. The shock comes only from the inability to turn away, to close our minds to the truism that these floating portents of death and kinlessness were also spaces of birth. The reality was that the

---

[8] Gomes Eannes de Azurara, *Crónica dos Feitos da Guiné*, in Robert Edgar Conrad (trans. and ed.), *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 5–11 (p. 10).

[9] Cheryl Finley, 'Schematics of Memory,' *Small Axe*, 15 (2011), 96–99.



STOWAGE OF THE BRITISH SLAVE SHIP "BROOKES" UNDER THE
REGULATED SLAVE TRADE
Act of 1788.

Note. The "Brookes," after the Regulation Act of 1788, was allowed to carry 454 Slaves. She could stow this number by following the rule adopted in this plate namely of allowing a space of 6 ft by 1 ft 4 In to each man; 5 ft 10 In by 1 ft 4 In to each woman, & 5 ft by 1 ft 2 In to each boy, but so much space as this was seldom allowed even after the Regulation Act. It was proved by the confession of the Slave Merchant that before the above Act the Brookes had at one time carried as many as 609 Slaves. This was done by taking some out of Irons & locking them spoonwise (to use the technical term) that is by stowing one within the distended legs of the other.

PLAN OF LOWER DECK WITH THE STOWAGE OF 292 SLAVES
130 OF THESE BEING STOWED UNDER THE SHELVES AS SHEWN IN FIGURE D & FIGURE 5.

PLAN SHEWING THE STOWAGE OF 130 ADDITIONAL SLAVES ROUND THE WINGS OR SIDES OF THE LOWER DECK BY MEANS OF PLATFORMS OR SHELVES (IN THE MANNER OF GALLERIES IN A CHURCH) THE SLAVES STOWED ON THE SHELVES AND BELOW THEM HAVE ONLY A HEIGHT OF 2 FEET 7 INCHES BETWEEN THE BEAMS AND FAR LESS UNDER THE BEAMS. See Fig 1.

Fig 1.
Longitudinal Section.
Poop
Captains Cabin
Tiller
Gun Room
L
Shelf or Platform of the
L Lower Deck.
Hold for Provisions, Water &c.
Note. The shaded Squares indicate the beams of the Ship.
Fig 2.
Store Room
Store Room
Fig 3.
Store Room
Gun Room
Store Room
WOMEN
BOYS
MEN
Fig 4
Cross Section at the Poop.
Hold for provisions &c
Fig 5.
Cross Section amidships.
Hold for provisions &c
Fig 6.
Lower tier of Slaves under the Poop.
Captains Cabin.
appropriated to the Crew.
Fig 7.
Shelf tier of Slaves under the Poop.
Captains Cabin.
appropriated to the Crew.
Scale of Feet
0
5
10
20
30

Fig. 16.1 'Stowage of the British Slave Ship Brookes Under the Regulated Slave Trade Act of 1788.' Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Slaveshipposter.jpg

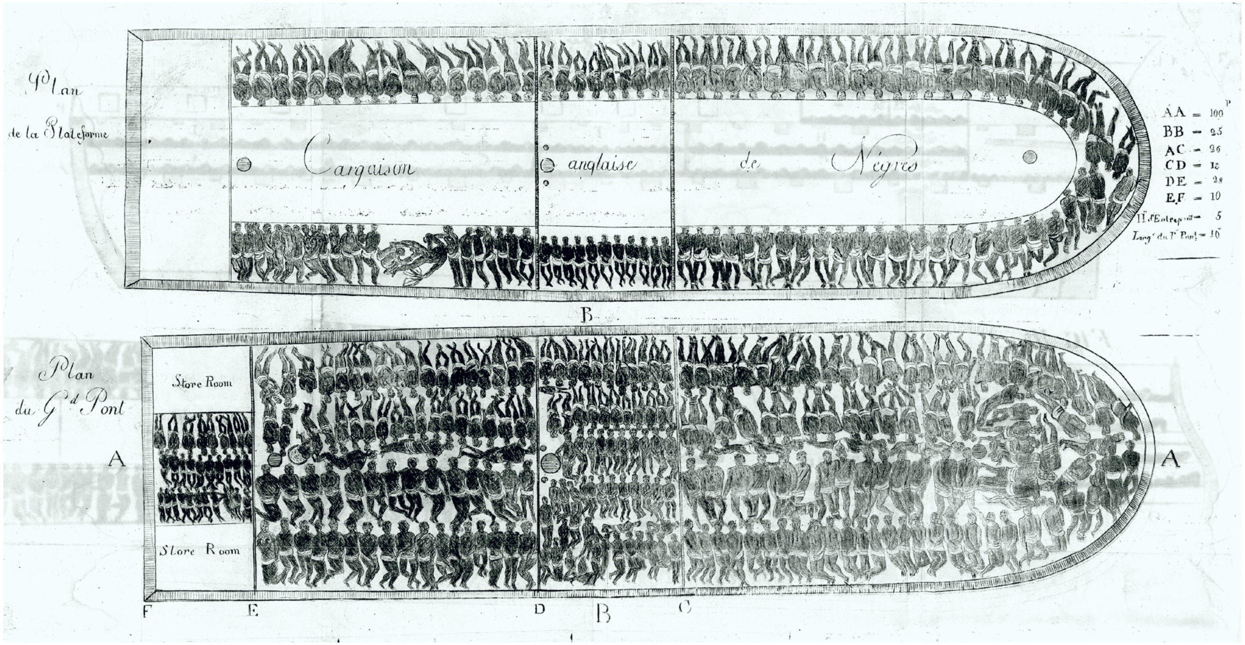

Plan de la Plateforme
Cargaison anglaise de Negres
Plan du Gd Pont
Store Room
Store Room
A
A
B
B
C
D
E
F
AA = 100p
BB = 25
AC = 26
CD = 12
DE = 28
E.F = 10
H. d'Entrepont = 5
Larg. du Pont = 16

Fig. 16.2 'Diagram of the Decks of a Slave Ship, 1814', from *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, CC BY-NC 4.0, http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/2004[10] entire economy of the colonies depended upon African women giving birth to slaves, not to children — not to daughters, not to sons, not to kin. In order to fully face that reality, we must restore enslaved women to our understanding of what the Middle Passage entailed. Moreover, we must reflect on how their lives were embedded in the unfolding structures of the slave trade from its earliest iterations.

---

[10] Image Reference JCB_01138-1. *Slavery Images* is compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library. Original source: *Résumé du témoignage donné devant un comité de la chambre des communes de la Grande Bretagne et de l'Irelande, touchant la traite des negres* (Geneva, 1814), fold-out plate, following title page in 4th pamphlet of vol. 15 of a collection with binder title 'Melanges sur l'Amerique' (Copy in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University).

Succumbing to the shock of the nineteenth-century illustration will not suffice. Rather, we need to consider the ubiquity of such women's presence in the slave trade in general. This means asking two crucial questions. First, how did that birth reinforce the reality of what slave trading meant? Second, how would being on board the slave ship have utterly and unimaginably transformed the experience of pregnancy, as well as the expectations attached to it? Such a mother would likely have been captured during the early stages of her pregnancy. In turn, the dawning reality of her condition would have probably coincided with the various phases of her capture — forced overland marches, confinement in a slave fort, a long wait on board a ship anchored close to land, and then the realization that the view of the coast and all it held was slipping permanently away. Her pregnancy marked her journey into a future that she could not have predicted, her desire to protect or parent her child growing increasingly impossible.

Motherhood on board a slave ship was rarely a source of anything but increased vulnerability. Indeed, for some, it may have even occasioned further violation. This was the case for a woman known only by the number 83, which was assigned to her in the captain's record of slaves. She was raped 'brutelike in view of the whole quarter deck' on a mid-eighteenth-century voyage to Jamaica. The captain promised that 'if anything happens to the woman I shall impute it to him [that raped her], for she was big with child.' Of course, something quite profound had already 'happened to the woman'. She would join the other mothers on board that ship as they grappled with a perverted future foretold by their pregnant and captive bodies.[11]

Women were captured through their maternity, gave birth on ships, and watched other women succumb to maternal madness. They disembarked with children they'd grown attached to, or with groups of men whom they were expected to reproduce with. They were sold and moved and marched and led onto fields and into barracks, whether with or without a swollen belly and infants at the breast. In those hundreds and thousands of small transactions, women were learning something profound about the claims that were being made through their bodies, something that planted seeds and suggested origins. Focusing on the experience of the slave trade's first female victims leads me to suggest that the Black Radical tradition is rooted there with them. It springs from that moment of transport and sale, when the relationship between capitalism and kinship was laid absolutely bare.

---

[11] Entry 31 January 1753 in John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750–1754* (London: Epworth Press, 1964).

I use that phrase 'the Black Radical tradition' in homage to the late Cedric Robinson, who argued under the Black Marxist tradition that one could locate one's origins in the Maroon camps of the seventeenth-century Caribbean and Latin America. Here we find an articulation of political sovereignty routed through ethnic cohesion, a retention of the African past, military engagement, and the claim-making of territoriality.[12] But political sovereignty is not the only route to radical thinking. Perhaps maternity is as well.

I am not making an argument about motherly love, or the redemptive power of parenting under the agonizing conditions of enslavement. To create kinship during and after the Middle Passage is not a matter of 'agency' or an assertion of 'humanity.' I reject these framings as they seem facile in the face of the complexity of human violation. Slavery scholars have used 'agency' as a way to argue that Black people had humanity — this argument has long struck me as complicit with white supremacy, as it suggest that white slaveowners treated Black people so poorly because of an error or misrecognition. It suggests that they had fully realized the shared humanity of the enslaved, and therefore perpetrated unspeakable violence. The point, then, is not to assert that the enslaved were human. Instead, it is to grapple with the ways in which their humanity was used against them, and if, how, and when they pitted their lives and loves and joys and anguish against the terms used by their kidnappers to rationalize their dispossession.[13]

---

[12] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 130–40.

[13] Walter Johnson, 'To Remake the World: Slavery, Racial Capitalism, and Justice,' *Boston Review*, 19 October 2016, https://bostonreview.net/race/walter-johnson-slavery-human-rights-racial-capitalism

Creating kinship in these conditions is to refuse the structures of commodification that undergird not just racial slavery and human hierarchy, but indeed the edifice of colonial extraction that fueled early modern capitalism. Did every woman whose labor pains brought her to her knees, whether on board a slave ship or in a holding pen awaiting sale, see her birthing as an act of such profound disruption? No. Of course not. But did the birth of a child — either lost to sale or retained in defiance — steep those women in a space of love, loss, and anguish that categorically rejected the terms that slaveowners endeavored to render normative, rational, and humane? Did they claim connection in the face of commodification? Did they then produce a counter-narrative, rooted in affective claims to kinship from the very onset of transatlantic slavery? I think so. And I think that such a corporeal rejection constitutes an origin story for the Black Radical tradition. In these terms, the Black Radical tradition both builds upon and expands Robinson's. It is one in which sovereignty is impossible to envision without kinship, and in which kinship is understood as antithetical to the marketplace's assertion that Black people were fundamentally and successfully commercialized. This is a kinship that is rooted in the body, irrevocably formed in the crucible of a forced migration. It is a kinship that resulted in children left behind, empty arms filled with other women's babies, families formed in adulthood. Cousins were chosen and sibling bonds crafted, at times so strong that they would preclude marriage with someone with whom the passage had been endured: survival turned them into kin so real that incest prohibitions took hold.[14] It is a kinship infused with new meaning and rendered visible to slavery scholars who hold women's experience of forced migration and enslavement at the center of their work.

---

[14] Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

# Bibliography

Azurara, Gomes Eannes de, 'The Discovery and Conquest of Guinea (1453),' in Elizabeth Donnan (ed.), *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, 1441–1700*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1930), pp. 18–40, https://archive.org/stream/documentsillustr00donn/documentsillustr00donn_djvu.txt

Azurara, Gomes Eannes de, 'Crónica dos Feitos da Guiné', in Robert Edgar Conrad (trans. and ed.), *Children of God's Fire*: *A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 5–11.

Bennett, Herman L., *Africans in Colonial Mexico*: *Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

Carretta, Vincent (ed.), *Unchained Voices*: *An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

Desrochers Jr., Robert E., 'Slave-for-Sale Advertisements and Slavery in Massachusetts, 1704–1781', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 59 (2002), 623–64.

Eltis, David, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Finley, Cheryl, 'Schematics of Memory,' *Small Axe*, 15 (2011), 96–99.

Galenson, David W., *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*: *Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Johnson, Walter, 'To Remake the World: Slavery, Racial Capitalism, and Justice,' *Boston Review*, 19 October 2016, https://bostonreview.net/race/walter-johnson-slavery-human-rights-racial-capitalism

Ligon, Richard, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1657), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A48447.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=fulltext

Morgan, Jennifer L., 'Accounting for "The Most Excruciating Torment": Gender, Slavery, and Trans-Atlantic Passages', *History of the Present*, 6 (2016), 184–207.

Newton, John, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750–1754* (London: Epworth Press, 1964).

Robinson, Cedric J., *Black Marxism*: *The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

*Slavery Images*: *A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, www.slaveryimages.org

# 17. Black Women's Work: Resisting and Undoing Character Education and the 'Good' White Liberal Agenda

*Bettina L. Love*

## Reclaiming Our Time

In early August 2017, a video of Maxine Waters — US Representative for Californian's 43rd congressional district — went viral when Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin tried to elude Waters' questioning by giving long-winded, convoluted, and irrelevant answers. Every time, and I mean every time, Mnuchin attempted not to answer Waters' initial question, she interrupted him and repeated the phrase: 'reclaiming my time.' Although the phrase is a documented rhetorical maneuver in the handbook of the *House Floor Procedure*, the words 'reclaiming my time' aimed at a powerful White man meant something more to people of color: how racism literally takes our time and the hard, never-ending work of reclaiming it.[1] Toni Morrison once said, 'The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps

---

[1] Louise M. Slaughter, *House Floor Procedure*, 7 January 2019, https://archives-democrats-rules.house.gov/archives/floor_man.htm

© 2019 Bettina L. Love, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.17

you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.'[2]

## Don't Believe the Hype

As a Black woman, I want to use Waters' words to think about the magnitude of time that has been taken from children of color, who grow up to be disillusioned adults because they believed in the American dream of meritocracy; and to explore whose work it becomes to undo the 'good White liberals' agenda, partially in the field of education. What I am describing may sound like racial hyperbole, but in June 2017 a study published in the journal *Child Development* found that youth of color from working-class families who grow up believing in America's narrative of hard work, perseverance, and grit — all components of the education of the White liberal character — are more likely to participate in risky behavior and have lower self-esteem.[3] The study is grounded in the social psychology theory of 'system justification', which explains how humans believe, defend, and rationalize the status quo because they see social, economic, and political systems as fair and legitimate. For the low-income youth of color in the study, 91 percent believed in the 'American Dream.' While holding system-justifying beliefs, these youth lacked the skills to interpret a world that is, sadly, filled with intersectional, systemic oppression.

Erin Godfrey, the study's lead author, remarked on her team's findings in an article in *The Atlantic*: 'We cannot equivocate when it comes to preparing our children to face injustices.'[4] Godfrey's study confirms what Black, Brown, and Indigenous people have always known: 'You cannot continue to oppress a consciously historical people.'[5] If children of color are attending schools that do not help them interpret the racist, sexist, Islamophobic, patriarchal, homophobic, transphobic and xenophobic world they are living in, then not only is the status quo maintained, but Whiteness is never disrupted; therefore, White supremacy stays on track.

---

[2] Toni Morrison, 'Black Studies Center Public Dialogue', Portland State, *Special Collections*: *Oregon Public Speakers*, 90 (1975), https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/orspeakers/90

[3] Erin B. Godfrey, Carlos E. Santos, and Esther Burson, 'For Better or Worse? System-Justifying Beliefs in Sixth Grade Predict Trajectories of Self-Esteem and Behavior Across Early Adolescence', *Child Development*, 90:1 (2019), 180–95; first published 2017, www.doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12854

[4] Melinda D. Anderson, 'Why the Myth of Meritocracy Hurts Kids of Color,' *The Atlantic*, 27 June 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/07/internalizing-the-myth-of-meritocracy/535035/

[5] John Henrik Clarke, *Africans at the Crossroads*: *African World Revolution* (Trenton: African World Press 1992), p. 36.

## What We Had

Before the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which found that separate schools for Black and White students were unconstitutional, Black schools were proud institutions that 'provided black communities with cohesion and leadership'.[6] Black schools' facilities and books were inferior to their White counterparts, but not their education. Oral history interviews of Black teachers reflecting on Black schools before *Brown* consistently stated, 'black schools were places where order prevailed, where teachers commanded respect, and where parents supported teachers'.[7] Educating Black children was viewed as the collective responsibility of the community, with schools as the anchors and teachers as leaders both inside and outside school walls. As schools desegregated, over 44,000 Black teachers and 90% of Black principals lost their jobs due to the closing of all-Black schools together with the fact that White parents did not want their children taught by a Black teacher. Legal scholar Derrick Bell has argued that Black people would have been better served if the court had rejected *Brown v. Board of Education* and enforced the 'equal' part of 'separate but equal'.[8]

Since *Brown*, educators of color, particularly women — since many more men of color than women were pushed out of the profession after *Brown* — have been trying to reclaim our time with our children and our community. School integration came at the cost of the collective ability of Black children and their communities to interpret, analyze, research, critique, and resist oppression. *Brown* opened the door for White racist normative standards concerning Black children's educational aims to become the pervasive marker of Black success. As a direct result of the *Brown* decision, an overwhelming majority (roughly 88 percent) of teachers in the United States are White women, and they walk into the classroom with little to no understanding of the longstanding fight by people of color against cultural genocide. Alongside some White allies (though not enough), women of color are fighting to undo what educational historian Joel Spring calls 'ideological management' that takes place in schools where cultural and linguistic genocide are masked as assimilation.[9]

---

[6] Adam Fairclough 'The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration', *The Journal of American History*, 91:1 (2004), 43–55.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Adam Fairclough, 'The Cost of Brown: Black Teachers and School Intergration', *The Journal of American History* 91:1 (2004), 43–55.

## Keep Swimming

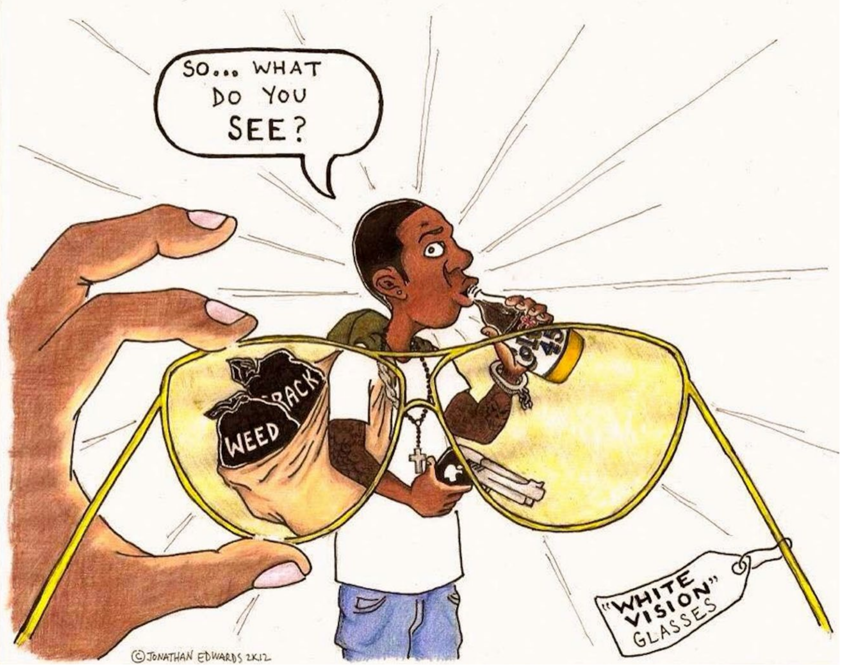


Fig. 17.1 Jonathan Edwards, *Grit*, 2018. © Jonathan Edwards. All rights reserved.

In his book *Work Hard, Be Hard*: *Journeys Through 'No Excuses Teaching'* (2016), Jim Horn describes how most Boards of Directors of charter schools are typically comprised of wealthy philanthropists, representatives of corporate foundations, and Wall Street hedge fund managers who believe children of color need to learn discipline, character education, rudimentary academic skills, and full submission to white economic demands. These beliefs are not new nor are they egalitarian; they are the very fabric of America's racism. Ibram X. Kendi, author of *Stamped From The Beginning*: *The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (2016) writes, 'The principal function of racist ideas in American history has been the suppression of resistance to racial discrimination and its resulting racial disparities.'[10] No white liberal educational reform model, regardless of the era (i.e. Separate but Equal, *Brown v. Board of Education*, or No Child Left Behind), has promoted Black consciousness for resistance, self-determination, and/or empowerment. The model is for youth of color to keep swimming against the tide of systemic oppression while so-called 'good' character goals weigh them down, even as the sharks circle (i.e. gang violence, lack of jobs, being pushed out of school, and the intentional gutting of public housing). This is an education for survival, never to thrive or resist.

---

[9] Joel Spring, *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality*: *A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States* (New York: Routledge 2016), p. 178.

The single-minded narrative of character education, built on catchy buzzwords like grit, persistence, and zest, is not only racist, but undermines people of color's frustration, disappointment, anger, and determination to fight systemic oppression. For example, when reflecting on his school experiences, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes:

> The streets were not my only problem. If the streets shackled my right leg, the schools shackled my left. Fail to comprehend the streets and you gave up your body now. But fail to comprehend the schools and you gave up your body later. Suffered at the hands of both, but I resent the schools more […] Educated children never offered excuses — certainly not childhood itself. The world had no time for the childhoods of black boys and girls. How could the schools? […] Perhaps they must be burned away so that the heart of this thing might be known.[11]

As a former elementary school teacher and now a professor of education I know, sadly, the accuracy of Coates' piercing words. We cannot burn down schools; all we can do is undo what has already been done. Fortunately, there is a playbook for the undoing, and Black women wrote it.

---

[10] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped From The Beginning*: *The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), p. 10.

[11] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), p. 16.

## Black Women's Work

In this chapter I am going to focus on two civil rights icons and master teachers, Ella Baker and Septima Clark. Baker is a name unfamiliar to most people; however, she was one of the most courageous and brilliant civil and human rights activists of all time. She was a community organizer who worked from the premise that 'Strong people don't need strong leaders.'[12] Baker worked alongside W. E. B. Du Bois, Thurgood Marshall, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but never aspired to be a celebrity. She believed in grassroots community organizing, and became the first director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In the spring of 1960, after the Greensboro sit-ins, she founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to develop emerging activists as they did the work of the civil rights movement.[13] Julian Bond, Bob Moses, Bernice Johnson-Reagon, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and Marian Wright Edelman are all political protégés of Baker.[14] She believed in the power of everyday people to transform society through leadership that was decentralized and non-hierarchical. Baker taught people to understand just how strong and brilliant they were, both individually and collectively, and stressed the idea of a radical democratic practice in which the oppressed, excluded, and powerless became active in positions of power with decision-making opportunities.[15] Baker emphasized that people needed to understand their self-worth and be personally empowered before they could change systems of injustice. She believed in the power of people, all people, to fight for a just world.

Even fewer people know the name of Septima Clark. Dr. King called her 'The Mother of the Movement.' Clark was a master educator and activist, and developed the literacy and citizenship workshops that were the backbone of the voting rights and civil rights movements. Her 'Citizenship Schools' taught adults how to read by ensuring they felt invested in what they were learning. Her goal was not just for her students to be able to pass the literacy test to vote, but also to feed her students with cultural pride, personal pride, self-determination, leadership skills, and a deep understanding of their rights as citizens. Citizenship Schools were established inside homes, tents, beauty parlors, and of course, churches. Clark also trained other women to teach her approach to citizenship pedagogy, which she crafted while working as a teacher at the Highlander Folk School, an interracial adult education center in Tennessee.

---

[12] Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 3.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

According to Katherine Mellen Charron, author of *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (2009), citizenship pedagogy linked literacy with political and economic literacy, encouraging people to overcome their fear of white reprisals and accept the responsibilities of being a citizen leader in their community, with an understanding of the fundamental issues it faced. After attending Citizenship School, many students indicated that it was the 'First time I have felt like a human being.'[16] Septima did not view citizenship as just about registering people to vote. Citizenship was a pedagogy of mattering: people acknowledging and accepting America and its policies as anti-Black, racist, and unjust; learning the socio-political landscape that characterised their communities and themselves; and lastly, everyday people engaging in civic education informed by radical democratic principles of shared leadership in the fight for humanity and intersectional justice.

## Undoing

These two women understood how to systemically fight systemic oppression by providing people of color with a curated education focused on cultural pride, personal pride, self-determination, leadership skills, and harnessing the grit passed down by their ancestors. We need more like Ella and Septima to fight to reclaim the time we have lost in educating our children. We need an updated and contemporary Citizenship School. We cannot teach our children to take on White supremacy while being taught through the lens of Whiteness. Schools in the US have become more anti-Black, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and anti-gay every day. Telling kids just to keep swimming, while they are drowning before our eyes, is educational malpractice.

---

[16] Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher*: *The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 3.

We need to return to the work of Black women master-teachers who did not rely on gimmicks, acronyms, or buzzwords to chip away at one of the largest mountains of oppression: White supremacy. The education of children of color needs to be intentional, thoughtful, and conducted out of a love for Blackness and Black joy. The education our children receive now only prepares them to survive oppression, at best, because it is not their character that is being questioned, it is their Black skin and Blackness.

# Bibliography

Anderson, Melinda D., 'Why the Myth of Meritocracy Hurts Kids of Color,' *The Atlantic*, 27 June 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/07/internalizing-the-myth-of-meritocracy/535035/

Charron, Mellen, *Freedom's Teacher*: *The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

Clarke, John Henrik, *Africans at the Crossroads*: *African World Revolution* (Trenton: African World Press, 1992).

Coates, Ta-Nehisi, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

Fairclough, Adam, 'The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration', *The Journal of American History*, 91:1 (2004), 43–55.

Godfrey, Erin B., Carlos E. Santos, and Esther Burson, 'For Better or Worse? System-Justifying Beliefs in Sixth Grade Predict Trajectories of Self-Esteem and Behavior Across Early Adolescence', *Child Development*, 90:1 (2019), 180–95; first published 2017, www.doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12854

Kendi, Ibram X, *Stamped From The Beginning*: *The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016).

Morrison, Toni, 'Black Studies Center Public Dialogue', Portland State, *Special Collections*: *Oregon Public Speakers*, 90 (1975), https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/orspeakers/90

Ransby, Barbara, *Ella Baker and the Black Movement*: *A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Slaughter, Louise M., *House Floor Procedure*, 7 January 2019, https://archives-democrats-rules.house.gov/archives/floor_man.htm

Spring, Joel, *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality*: *A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

# 18. Filipina Stories: Gabriela NY and Justice for Mary Jane Veloso

## *Editha Mesina*

According to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, there are over 10 million Filipino workers in over 200 countries all over the world. Women comprise over half of these overseas workers. Severe economic factors in the Philippines and a lack of sustainable policies to employ women lead to a shortage of opportunities, which drives women to emigrate. These women work worldwide in the domestic service industry as nannies and maids, and also in the medical profession, many as nurses. There are also a number who leave to become marriage migrants and au pairs. My current work has focused on the issues of these Filipino women, these Filipinas.

I have been photographing a Filipina organization called Gabriela New York, a local branch of Gabriela USA. It works with the Gabriela National Alliance of Women, a grassroots alliance that includes over 200 organizations advocating for the human rights of migrant workers and oppressed Filipino women. On 28 April 2015, Gabriela NY, along with other Filipino human rights groups, held a candlelight vigil in support of Mary Jane Veloso. A migrant worker accused of smuggling heroin into Indonesia, she was subsequently jailed and sentenced to death. Mary Jane, a mother of two, maintained her innocence. She claimed that she was duped into carrying a suitcase into Indonesia by her god-sister, who convinced her to go to Indonesia after losing a job in Malaysia. The vigil was held the night before Mary Jane, alongside eight other convicted

© 2019 Editha Mesina, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.18

drug smugglers from Australia, Brazil, Indonesia, and Nigeria, was to be executed on 29 April 2015 at 1am. The case highlighted Indonesia's extreme capital punishment and drug prohibition laws. More so, the case underscored the risks many women like Mary Jane face in order to secure jobs far from home and provide for their families. At midnight on 29 April 2015, while the other eight convicted drug smugglers were executed, Mary Jane was granted a stay of execution on the condition that she would serve as a witness during the trial of her alleged human traffickers. Currently, Mary Jane remains on death row in Indonesia, while her family and advocates continue to seek the commutation of her death sentence. Mary Jane Veloso's case highlights the great struggle that migrant workers and trafficked victims face as a result of dire poverty and forced migration.

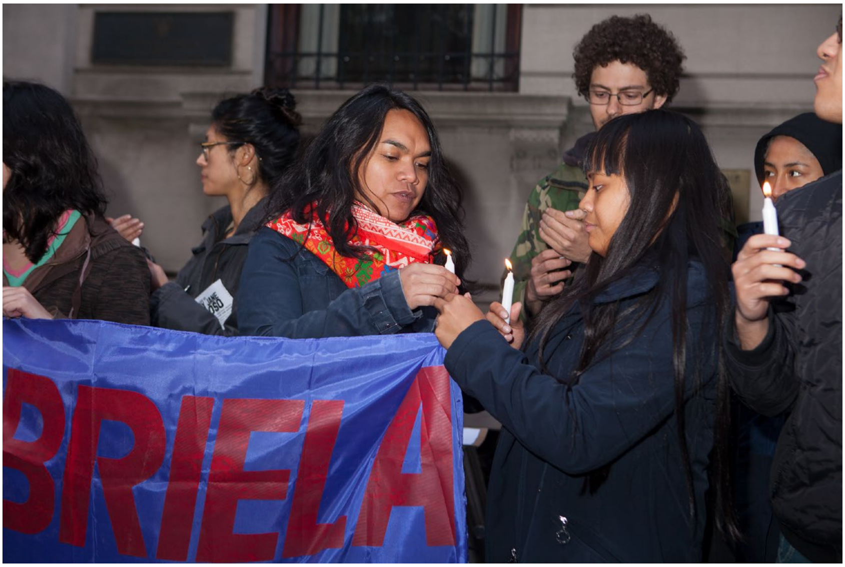


Fig. 18.1 Edith Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina.

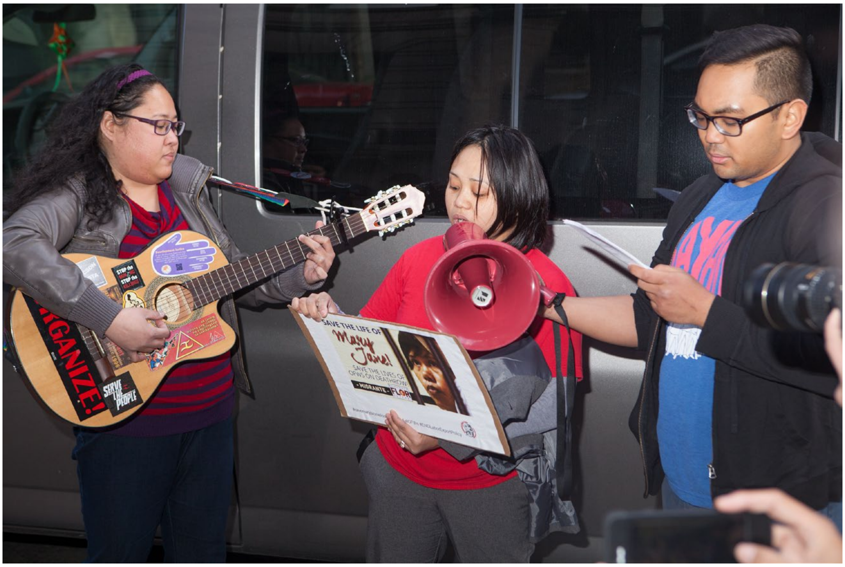

SAVE THE LIFE OF
Mary Jane!
SAVE THE LIVES OF OFWS ON DEATHROW
MIGRANTE
ORGANIZE!
SERVE THE PEOPLE

Fig. 18.2 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina.

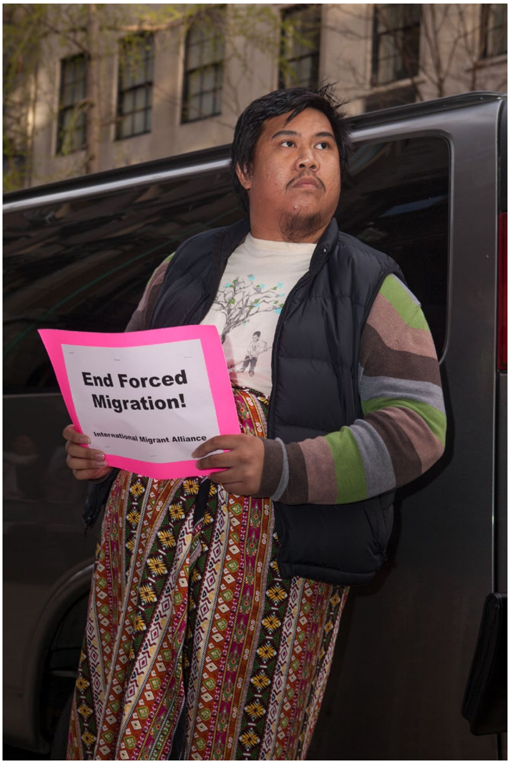

End Forced Migration!
International Migrant Alliance

Fig. 18.3 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina.

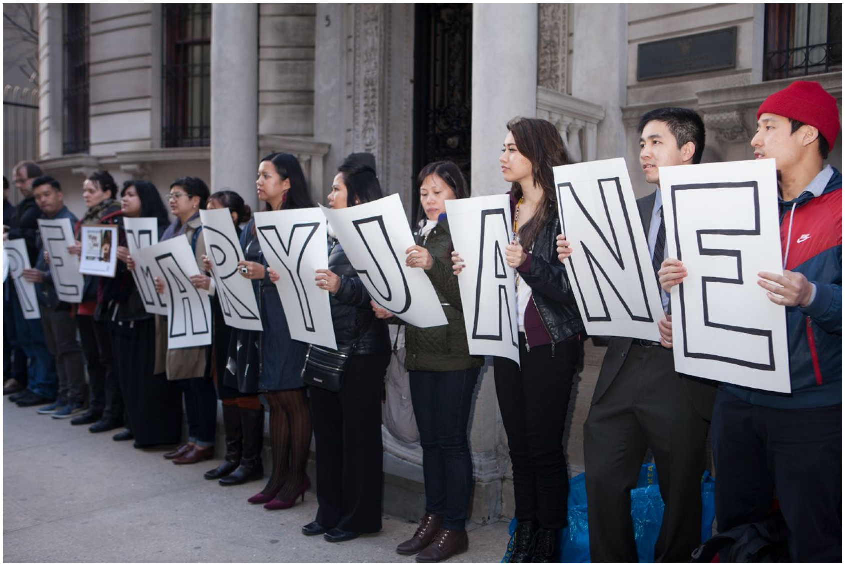


Fig. 18.4 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina.

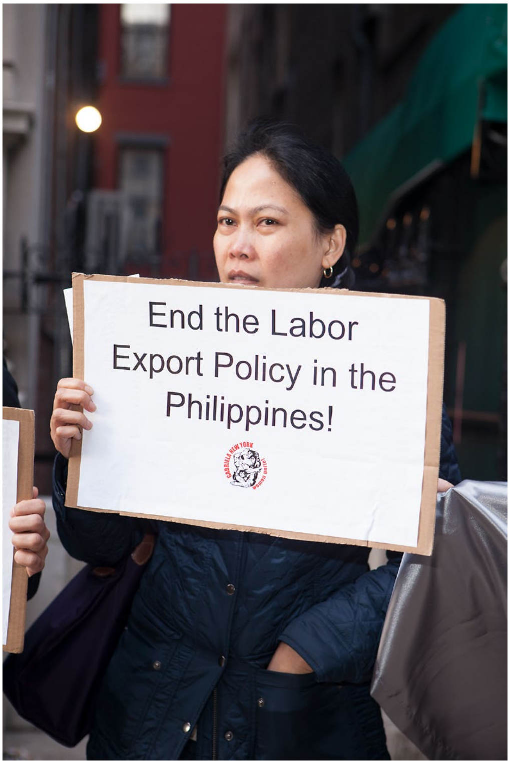

End the Labor
Export Policy in the
Philippines!
GABRIELA NEW YORK

Fig. 18.5 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina.

# Filipina Stories: Gabriela, NY and NBC's *Mail-Order Family*

As an advocate for migrant women, Gabriela works to highlight women's issues in the mainstream media and supports the education of the public through the positive and informed representation of Asian women.

In October 2016 NBC announced the development of a new sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*, the story of a widowed father who buys a Filipina mail-order bride to take care of his children. The mail-order-bride industry thrives between consumer countries like the US and countries that supply potential brides. Asian countries are the most notable suppliers, with the Philippines being one of the largest sources of these women. This industry is contingent on global economic inequalities that drive impoverished women to desperation so that they seek a better life in the West. Attracted largely by stereotypes of docile and subservient women, Western men often seek Filipina women who speak English and are family-oriented.[1] Unfortunately, many men exploit the needs of impoverished women who have few options in their own country. Since the passing of the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA) in 2006, Congress has still not implemented federal laws to protect mail-order brides from exploitation and abuse.[2]

Unfortunately, many of these women suffer severe consequences in marriages to men they do not know. The sexual exploitation and violent abuse of these women continues to be documented.[3] With exploitative irony, NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*, intended to use the pain of women living in dire poverty as content for comedy. Anyone with a conscience surely saw this as disrespectful and inhuman. In a world with increasingly diverse viewers, NBC should be in the business of portraying a more positive image of Asian women, instead of perpetuating tired racist stereotypes that display Asian women as commodities. On 6 October 2016, Gabriela NY held a protest rally outside of NBC Studios, which I photographed. After a robust social media campaign in which Gabriela USA petitioned for the cancellation of *Mail-Order Family*, NBC stopped further development of the planned sitcom. The protest at NBC illustrates Gabriela NY's role in speaking out against the continued, unregulated mail-order-bride industry. Here, we see an instance where everyday people came together to voice their outrage, and in doing so made a difference.

---

[1] Lisa Belkin, 'The Mail-Order Bride Business', *New York Times*, 11 May 1986, https://www.nytimes.com/1986/05/11/magazine/the-mail-order-bride-business.html

[2] US Government Accountability Office, *Immigration Benefits: Improvements Needed to Fully Implement the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act*, Government Accountability Office, 10 December 2014, https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-3

[3] Tahirih Justice Center, 'Report Finds Law to Protect Foreign Brides Has Not Been Fully Implemented', Tahiri Justice Center, 18 December 2014, http://www.tahirih.org/news/report-finds-law-to-protect-foreign-brides-from-abuse-and-exploitation-has-not-been-fully-implemented/

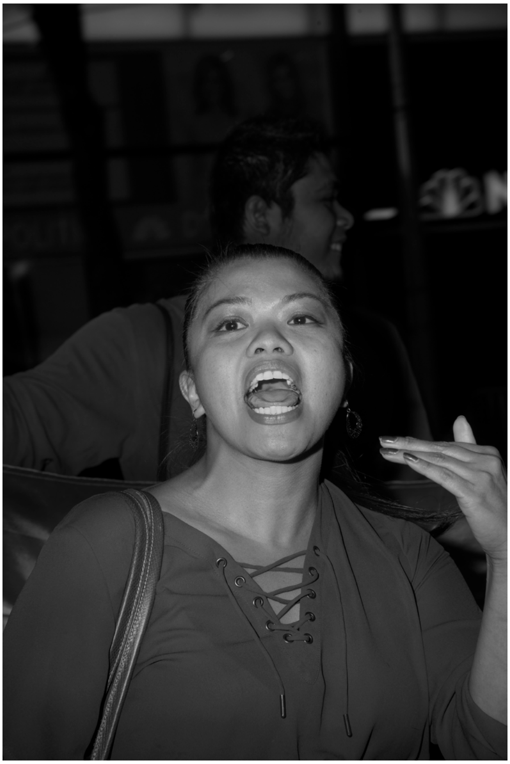


Fig. 18.6 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. NBC Headquarters, New York City, 6 October 2016. © Editha Mesina.

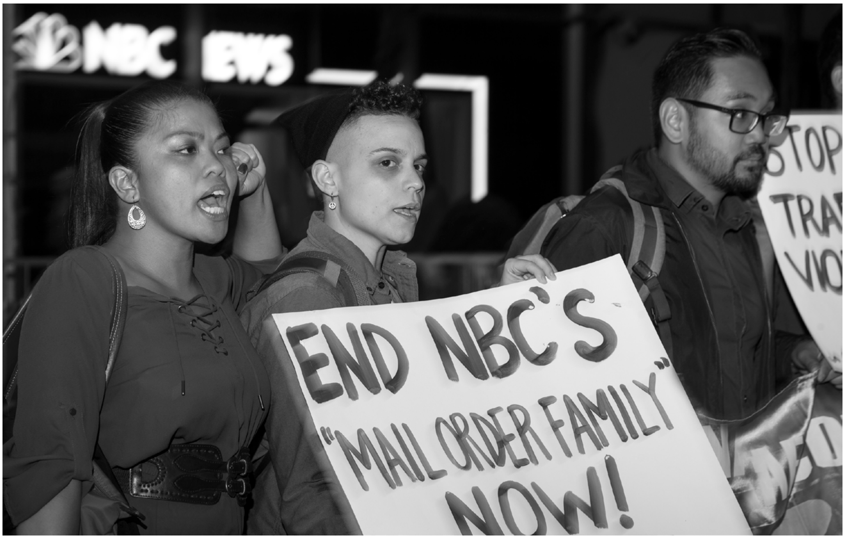

NBC NEWS
END NBC'S "MAIL ORDER FAMILY" NOW!
STOP TRA VIO

Fig. 18.7 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. NBC Headquarters, New York City, 6 October 2016. © Editha Mesina.

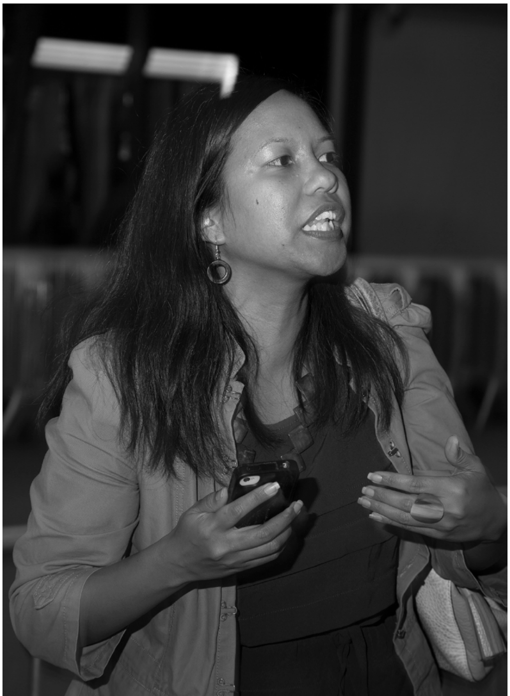


Fig. 18.8 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. NBC Headquarters, New York City, 6 October 2016. © Editha Mesina.

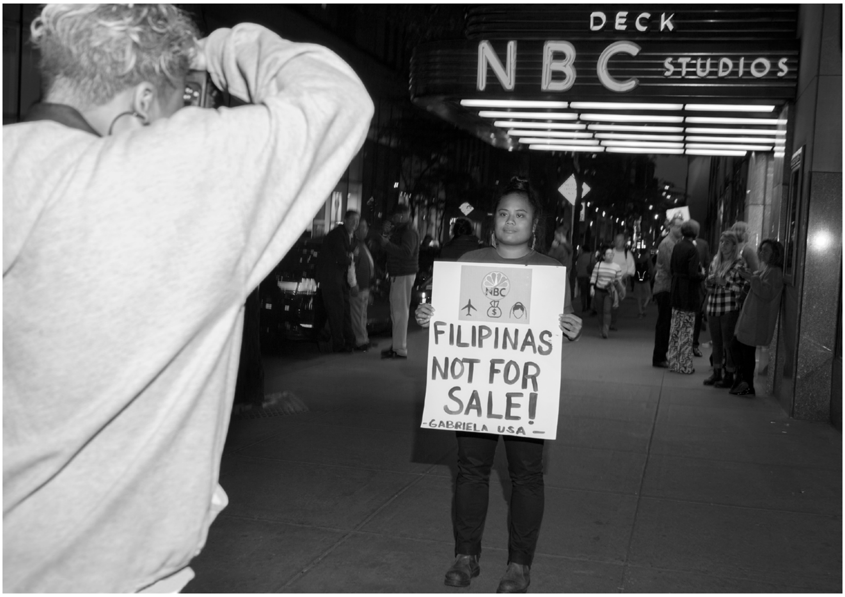

DECK
NBC
STUDIOS
NBC
FILIPINAS NOT FOR SALE!
-GABRIELA USA-

Fig. 18.9 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. NBC Headquarters, New York City, 6 October 2016. © Editha Mesina.

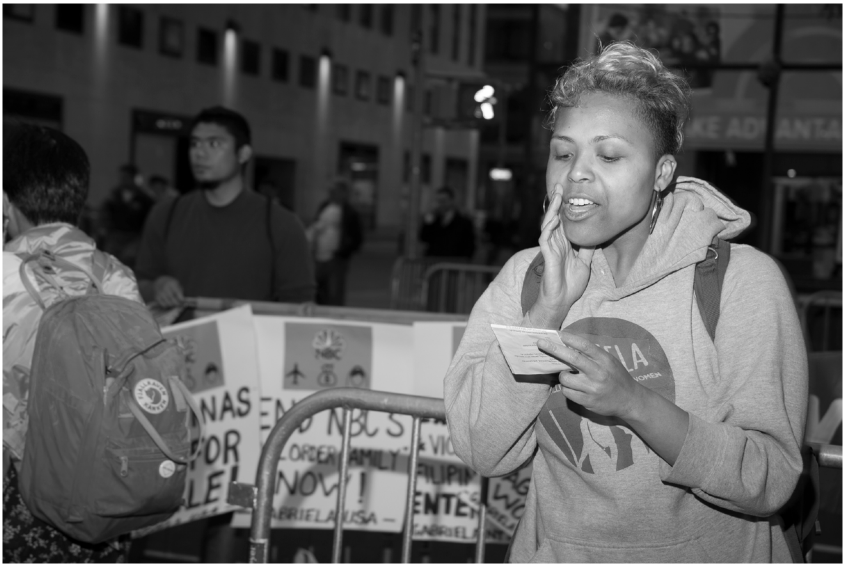

NBC
NAS
FOR
LE!
END NBC'S
L ORDER FAMILY
NOW!
GABRIELA USA
FILIPIN
ENTER
GABRIELA

Fig. 18.10 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. NBC Headquarters, New York City, 6 October 2016. © Editha Mesina.

## Filipina Stories: Gabriela NY

Gabriela is an activist organization named after Gabriela Silang, an eighteenth-century Filipino revolutionary heroine who struggled against Spanish colonization in the Philippines. Her name has become synonymous with any individual fighting for human rights; each member of the organization is commonly known as a 'Gabriela'. Gabriela New York has worked to create a community for women of Philippine descent, educating the Filipino diaspora on the struggles of women in the Philippines. The Gabriela New York women I have met are unique individuals, dedicated to equality and action. Together they illustrate the complexity of the modern Filipino-American experience.

My video piece, Filipina Stories, includes narratives by several Gabrielas that speak of migration and the dislocation of a people and their culture. This is a project in which I ask Filipinas, both recent immigrants and US-born citizens, to tell the story of their and their families' immigration to the US. The stark realization of difference, the struggle to assimilate and succeed in the United States, these are their shared and common stories. These are portraits that ask, and perhaps even answer, questions about these women's worlds, serving as an entry point into their lives, sensibilities and history. In witnessing these Filipinas' stories, I encourage my audience to engage in an honest conversation about race, gender and immigration, hopefully revealing common ground for understanding and an appreciation of diversity.

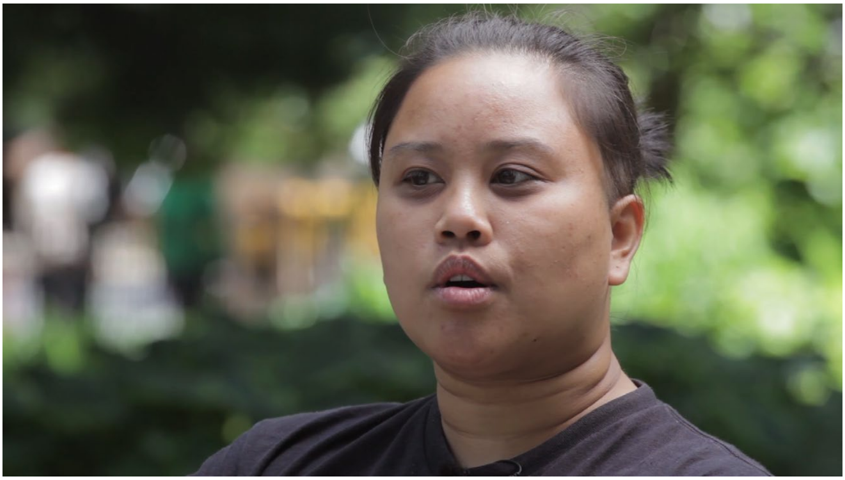


Fig. 18.11 Editha Mesina, Azreal. Still from Filipina Stories, 2017. © Editha Mesina.

Fig. 18.12 Editha Mesina, Joelle. Still from Filipina Stories, 2018. © Editha Mesina.

Fig. 18.13 Editha Mesina, May. Still from Filipina Stories, 2017. © Editha Mesina.

# 19. Women & Migrations: African Fashion's Global Takeover

*Allana Finley*

Fashion, as a global enterprise, has the magical ability to weave people together and to whisk them on a journey, migrating across cultures, lifestyles and ideas. Our journeys shape our identity and, very often, this manifests in our personal style — even if we don't realize it.

Style has always played an important part in my own development. The women in my family have unfailingly used their appearances to communicate strength and resilience, independence and femininity as they shifted through different spheres of life.

I am myself a product of migration. From a young girl born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I've always had a stirring in my spirit. I was not one to just sit around. My mother and grandmother instilled that drive in me from early on as the child of a single parent.

I got my working papers at thirteen, and by the age of fifteen I was tossing burgers in McDonald's while folding jeans at The Gap. Not long after graduating from the University of Virginia I moved to New York, where I continued my early fashion career working as a showroom assistant at DKNY, before moving on to Eileen Fisher's first flagship store on 53rd & Madison.

Moving again, this time to Los Angeles, I worked my way up the fashion ladder from Rodeo Drive for Tiffany & Co and Gucci America to

© 2019 Allana Finley, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.19

be hired as a wardrobe supervisor for Jessica Simpson and 98 Degrees' first US/Canadian tour. I then went on to become Head of Costume during Oxygen Media's inaugural year.

In 2000, I decided to move to Johannesburg, South Africa where, while raising my two sons, I discovered my life's mission: African fashion.

There is no clear-cut way to define African fashion — its offerings are as varied as the multitude of cultures that inhabit the continent from which it is born.

Often, when many outside the continent think of African fashion, their minds might conjure up images of women wrapped in animal skins or wax print fabrics, draped in what have now become curious accessories found in airport gift shops.

Today, in this moment, there are international fashion houses pinning those very images on their inspiration boards, while magazine publications have appropriated that aesthetic for financial gain.

However, the African aesthetic that is popping up on runways and in international luxury retail stores is fast becoming harder to appropriate without giving credit to the origin of the inspiration.

This phenomenon has been in existence for years, since before Yves Saint Laurent showed his iconic 1967 'African' collection. But now the world is asking, 'are global brands appropriating to the benefit or detriment of the African design industry?' The global industry treats the design spirit of the continent as a trend, reducing it to the whimsy of a fad and deeming that African fashion amounts simply to traditional techniques and fabrics.

Furthermore, there is the realisation that African creativity is itself excluded from the conversation and commercial exchange. An op-ed in *The Business of Fashion*, one of the global fashion industry's most influential publications, addresses the benefits of cultural appropriation, stating that: 'without the freedom to embrace fantasy, curiosity and interpretation, borders remain closed and the codes of stereotypes remain intact.'[1]

A rebuttal, published shortly after, argued back: 'calling out cultural appropriation does not kill creative license; it simply holds those in power accountable to cite their sources. The world is vast and information is free, but *appropriation without citation by those in power* erases *the culture being referenced*.'[2]

---

[1] Osman Ahmed, 'Why Fashion Needs Cultural Appropriation', *Business of Fashion*, 1 June 2017, https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/why-fashion-needs-cultural-appropriation

In 2015, Jenni Avins wrote in an article entitled 'Something borrowed', 'We must stop guarding cultures and subcultures in efforts to preserve them. It's naïve, paternalistic, and counterproductive. Plus, it's just not how culture or creativity work.'[3]

My own views on the matter have migrated somewhat since the conference Black Portraiture III on 18 November 2016, when I moderated a panel called 'Preservation of African Fashion from Global Mis-appropriation' at the Turbine Hall in Johannesburg. My view now is that the industry must continue to be more collaborative, less competitive and focus on how their diversity is complimentary. This is Africa's time, Africa's century, and I feel moved to make it my mission to ensure that as an industry, fashion in Africa catches the wave.

Returning to my own personal journey, when I got to South Africa after an extended period without work, I knew I had to find something to throw myself into. I was completely taken by the nascent yet bubbling industry, where designers like Stoned Cherrie and Marianne Fassler were not just dictating trends, but helping the public navigate their own identities.

I attended Fashion Weeks in South Africa and asked myself why there wasn't more media coverage, and where the international buyers were. So that became my role. As Global Brand and Marketing Manager for African Fashion International, the owner of Mercedes-Benz Fashion Weeks on the continent, it was my job to foster relationships and ensure that the conversation kept growing.

During this time, I had the privilege of discovering and working with some of the most incredibly talented designers. My role was to support them in reaping commercial benefits from the international fashion companies that come like thieves in the night and migrate the African aesthetic off to high street shops.

---

[2] My emphasis. Darío Calmese, 'Business of Fashion: Fashion Does Not Need Cultural Appropriation', 28 June 2017, dario. the storyteller blog, http://www.dariocalmese.com/writing/2017/6/28/fashion-does-not-need-cultural-appropriation

[3] Jenni Avins, 'In Fashion, Cultural Appropriation is Either Very Wrong or Very Right', *Quartz*, 19 October 2015, https://qz.com/520363/borrowing-from-other-cultures-is-not-inherently-racist/

Mozambican designer Taibo Bacar, who was taught his craft by his seamstress mother, is working to build a global brand that stretches from Maputo to Lisbon

South African Laduma Ngxokolo was also taught by his mother, and his brand MaXhosa has taken the international scene by storm. His knitwear label answers the appropriation debate with its own authenticity and pride in its uniquely personal cultural roots. His brand has grown from apparel to interiors that inhabit homes around the world and recently the design of his popular range of socks was appropriated by Zara. 'We appreciate that Africa's rich culture is now "en vogue" but not at all costs. But our protected intellectual property rights should be respected as much as we respect that of other global brands', stated Thebe Ikalafeng of Brand Leadership.[4]

The globally relevant nature of these and other brands' stories are documented visually in an incredible coffee table book celebrated by the *New York Times*, called African Catwalk. In the book, photographer Pers-Anders Pettersson documents the continent's growth in fashion and shows a new side of African design. I was very humbled to write a foreword for the book, along with Alessia Glavino, Photo Editor of *Vogue Italia*, and Stella Jean, a Haitian-Italian designer who has long since taken the world by storm with her designs.

For me, what this really emphasizes is fashion's ability to connect the dots; to create these migratory links between generations, between geographical places; between cultures. Edward Enninful, Editor-in-Chief of *British Vogue*, has a similar story of being inspired by an African mother. His well-documented break, as a model scouted on the tube, hides the true story of what inspired his love for fashion: his Ghanaian mother, who would whip up dresses for all her friends. Many in the industry now call him 'the most powerful man in fashion'. It is clear from his body of work that Enninful has a passion for inclusivity and diversity — his attitude and the fact that he holds a powerful seat in the global industry is an exciting prospect for 'Africa Rising'.

Since moving on from Fashion Week, I have consulted for various brands and retailers both on and off the continent. OXOSI, for example, was started by two young Nigerians and has been called 'the African Moda Operandi' by *Vogue*.[5] Brands like OXOSI and Chulaap, whose creator interprets the African aesthetic in his unique Thai way, are a route to the market platform based in North America.

---

[4] 'Spot the Difference: Zara Accused of Stealing Local Brand MaXhosa's Design', *Sunday Times*, 24 April 2018, https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/fashion-and-beauty/2018-04-24-spot-the-difference-zara-accused-of-stealing-local-brand-maxhosas-design/

As a shareholder in KISUA, a contemporary brand inspired by the continent, which retails globally and has been worn by the likes of Beyoncé. KISUA has done collaborative capsule collections with Italian e-tailor giant, YOOX, which exposed it to a whole new market. Europe now contributes to 40% of its online sales.

If I think about where I am migrating to next, I've developed a keen interest in sustainable textile recycling, and can see a huge opportunity for it on the continent.

Did you know that cotton fiber that is farmed in Mali and Burkina Faso is sent abroad to be processed in Asia, ending up in the T-shirts, skirts and jackets that hang in our high-street shops and then eventually in African second-hand clothing markets?

Across the world, landfills end up overflowing with megatons of discarded clothes. Waste from high consumption on the continent is set to increase, with the arrival of fast fashion retailers like Zara and H&M to African metropoles.

There are brands that have done some groundwork here. Shaldon Kopman, founder of the brand Naked Ape, has created one of the biggest African menswear brands inspired by the Basotho culture of wrapping, using bamboo cotton and other sustainable textiles. Moreover, Africa's first eco-luxe sustainable clothing label, Fundudzi, through its mantra 'clothing with a conscience' introduces a uniquely African voice to the green conversation — arguing that Africa has since the beginning of time been built on organic principles. The label weaves storytelling into the fabric of its designs, reflected through its name, which is inspired by Lake Fundudzi, a sacred site for the vhaVenda tribe who believe you can hear the ancestors drumming beneath its waters at night.

Having graduated as a founder of the first ever MBA programme with a focus on doing business in Africa at the African Leadership University School of Business, my final Capstone project made a business case for the commercial viability of the textile and textile recycling industries being revived in Africa through sustainable innovations. In so doing, Africa can ally its wealth of inspiration with a sustainable means of production.

---

[5] Marjon Carlos, 'Meet the Online Retailer Bringing the Best of African Fashion to the Rest of the World', *Vogue*, 18 November 2016, https://www.vogue.com/article/oxosi-african-online-retailer

I built a case to show that the continent is open for business and fighting for its place at the table. I believe Africa should no longer be defensive about appropriation, or about the origins of inspiration — that this only puts us on the back foot.

With so much interest in African design codes and energy, it is up to the continent's design leaders, artisans, entrepreneurs and consumers to take a proud and proactive approach. Our offering to the global discourse shouldn't be calling out appropriation or being overly protective but rather to add our own voice.

A shining example of this is the South African contingent that annually attends Pitti Uomo, the most important international event for menswear and men's accessories.

Trevor Stuurman, for instance, began as a street style photographer and is now a recognised authority on preserving the African aesthetic for the modern age. Stuurman — along with Laduma of the MaXhosa knitwear brand, Siya Beyile, a menswear blogger and Kwena Baloyi, a stylist — proudly peacock among the rest of the fashionistas. What sets them apart is their authentic celebration of Pan- African culture through their style.

The international community laps it up and they fill the sought-after feature pages of top global fashion magazines all the way up to *Vogue*.

So where does this leave us? The appropriation of African fashion must be treated like any other cultural exchange or creative collaboration — give credit, and consider royalties, as is currently happening with Ma Esther Mahlangu and the commercialization of the Ndebele artistic aesthetic.[6]

This for me *is* the new approach, where African fashion proudly and publicly owns its identity, and doesn't leave any space for the rest of the world to 'steal', interpret, or appropriate Africa's conversation, African identity, innovation and inspiration and the conversation becomes more one of equals.

---

[6] For more information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esther_Mahlangu

# 20. What Would It Mean to Sing A Black Girl’s Song?: A Brief Statement on the Reality of Anti-Black Girl Terror

*Treva B. Lindsey*

In March 2017, many Black social media users turned their collective outrage to what appeared to be an epidemic of missing girls of color in Washington, D.C., America’s capital city. One of the alarming messages retweeted and widely circulated stated that over twenty Black and Latina girls had gone missing in twenty-four hours. The mainstream media remained silent. An intense and impassioned town-hall meeting in D.C. attended only by Black and Latinx residents occurred. A new police task force formed in response to a growing outcry to #BringBackOurGirls. For a brief a moment, it appeared that someone cared deeply about these missing Black and Brown girls.

The reality, however, was that there was no *new* epidemic.[1] Despite there being at least a dozen Black and Latinx youth missing, the fear of mass kidnappings proved false. The number of youth of color missing in Washington in the first three months of 2017 resembled the number from

---

[1] Maya Rhodan, ‘Social Media Spread the Story of Washington’s Missing Girls: It Also Got it Wrong’, *Time*, 28 March 2017, http://time.com/4715136/dc-missing-girls-social-media/

© 2019 Treva B. Lindsey, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.20

that same period in 2016. It became clear that a disastrous combination had caused the outcry: the poorly rolled out police notification system together with the longstanding neglect and invisibility of missing people of color. Together, these fueled the spread of misinformation about missing Black and Latina girls. The urgency to find these missing girls quickly dissipated. Nearly a dozen Black and Brown girls missing was not enough to sustain the initial outrage, nor garner mainstream media coverage.

With the majority of these missing Black and Brown girls classified as runaways, there were no Amber Alerts. Reserved for abductions, Amber Alerts convey a sense of imminent and possibly fatal danger. The designation of a runaway connotes choice and deviance. Few people pushing back against the mis-reported 'epidemic' stopped to ask that if in fact these girls of color were running away at alarming rates, what were they running from and to what or to whom were they running? What would compel a thirteen-year-old Black girl to run away from her home? What happens to that same girl when she runs away into a world that offers very little to those struggling to survive? What does it mean that it took exaggerated misinformation to draw attention to the reality that over 64,000 Black girls and women were missing in the United States?[2] Black girls too often go missing from their homes, from our media, from policies and initiatives, and even from our activism. We rarely hear, see, or feel them. The system is working — it was made to fail Black girls.

Each era of this nation's history boasts its own particular iterations of anti-Blackness. From enslavement to mass incarceration to the heinous murders of Black people by police, the epidemic of anti-Black state-sanctioned and state-sponsored violence is a fundamental truth of the US empire. A new phase in the nation's racial climate emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century. The problem of the color line remains unresolved — it manifests in familiar and in new ways. The technologies of anti-Blackness are deadly in their sophistication and execution. The brutality of anti-Blackness runs on incessant loops on our smartphones, tablets, and laptops.

---

[2] '64,000 Black Women Currently Missing in the US', *NewsOne*, 31 July 2014, https://newsone.com/3041792/64000-black-women-currently-missing-in-the-u-s/

This 'new' era of anti-Blackness has particular effects on Black women, girls, and femmes.[3] It compels examination of the relationship between Black women and state violence, and more specifically Black women, girls, and femmes surviving in spite of, dying as a result of, and resisting state violence. This exploration necessarily moves between the realities of state violence as experienced by Black women and girls, and the range of resistance mounted by Black femmes, girls, and women to anti-Black racial terror in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, it is important to understand anti-Black racism as mediated and structured through gendered violence. Although attacks on Black womanhood and girlhood and the activism addressing these attacks never ceased, the twenty-first century marks a distinct turning point in both the lived experiences of Black women and in Black women's resistance to state and state-sanctioned violence. Black women in the United States organize and mobilize around injustices, and build upon a legacy of activism.

What would it mean to chronicle the lived experiences of Black girls through the lenses of state and state-sanctioned violence? This question is part of a growing body of scholarship on how Black women, girls, trans, and queer-identified people experience anti-Black state violence. This focus pushes back against the regular erasure of Black girls and Black queer and trans* people from historical records both as victims and as activists. The framing of contemporary anti-Black racial violence as a pervasive injustice primarily experienced by Black cisgender men and boys fails to capture the deeply entrenched reality of Black violability. In earlier work, I previously defined Black violability as a construct that attempts to encapsulate both the lived and historical experiences of Black people with state-initiated and state-sanctioned violence. Understanding this contemporary era of anti-Black racial terror and subjugation requires excavating the gender-specific and gendered dynamics of anti-Black racial violence, and necessitates a more inclusive conceptualization of the Black violable subject.

Taking seriously the violability of Black people, other than Black non-cisgender men, is of particular exigency because of contemporary generational realities such as rampant sexual and intimate partner violence, rising incarceration rates for Black women, state-sanctioned violations such as forced sterilization and police brutality, and the criminalization of Black girls in disciplinary matters in public education. We often cite a painful lineage of anti-Black violence against Black men and boys from Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin, Jonathan Ferrell, Jordan Davis, Oscar Grant, Ezell Ford, John Crawford, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and Alton Sterling, while forgetting or not fully acknowledging the painful lineage of anti-Black violence against Black women and girls from Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair (more commonly identified as the Four Little Girls killed in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963) to Latasha Harlins, Rekia Boyd, Renisha McBride, Aiyana Jones, Pearlie Golden, Tarika Wilson, Shereese Francis, Mya Hall, Sandra Bland, and Tanisha Anderson. Putting these two lineages in conversation with one another paints a broader and more accurate picture of Black violability and anti-Black violence. It also allows for us to have more nuanced and useful conversations about the gendered dynamics of racial injustice. Women, girls, and trans* people have got stories to tell too, and their experiences of racial violence articulate very clearly the necessity of building a gender-inclusive framework to understand anti-Black racial violence.

---

[3] Femmes refers to individuals who identify as both being feminine and falling somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum. Not all Black femmes identify as Black girls or women.

The murders of Tyre King in Columbus and of Tamir Rice in Cleveland sit firmly within a legacy of violence against Black cisgender male-identified bodies. They are the strange fruits of a new generation of Black masculine carnage. They become the terrifyingly familiar points of departure for understanding contemporary racial violence. Consequently, a distinct genealogy of anti-Black racial violence emerges that pivots around America's unrelenting violence against Black male flesh. From the Middle Passage to a sidewalk in Staten Island, the linkages and comparative frameworks often deployed signal a history of violence against Black male bodies, which then become synonymous with the Black violable experience.

In *If We Must Die: From Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls,* Aime Ellis demarcates three distinct periods of racial terror: antebellum slavery, Jim Crow, and the mass incarceration of Black people in the prison-industrial complex.[4] Ellis's book tackles the effects of racial terror on Black men by examining cultural texts about death and violence produced by and about Black men. Arguably, an updated periodization of racial terror could include police violence as a distinct, historically specific manifestation of domestic terror. Building on Ellis's periodization using a 'herstorical' framework, I think about the legacies of brutality against Black girls during antebellum slavery. I think about the gendered and sexualized afterlives of chattel slavery and Jim Crow. These temporal linkages help to demarcate anti-Black racial violence into distinct, although overlapping and referential eras. Amie Ellis's work on the Black deathly subject as understood through the Black male body is useful here, and allows me to utilize his historical framing to center Black girl as deathly subjects.

The state is preoccupied with Black femme bodies, and particularly young Black girls' bodies (cis, trans, and gender fluid) as a site for violation. From deaths in police custody to the numerous unsolved murders of Black trans women and femmes, the deathly and violable Black subject is rendered anew. The violable subject also includes Black girls thrown across classrooms or pushed to the ground in their swimsuits, and the little Black girl running away from violence in her home. To think of Black girls as in-flux bodies, bodies moving away from present dangers into differing structures of anti-Black, anti-girl, anti-poor, and anti-queer dangers means to understand the movements of Black women and girls in new ways. It pushes towards a figuration of Black girlhood as a moving state inscribed by terror.

The bodies of Black girls often read as loud — unruly, uncontrollable, aggressive and excessive. They read as a problem, as something to be controlled, surveilled, policed, incarcerated, assault, or killed. Hip-hop feminist scholar Ruth Nicole Brown also speaks to these harmful renderings of Black girlhood, unveiling an archive of expressivity rooted in world-making,[5] while Bettina Love's writing is attuned to how Black girls engage sound in their world-making.[6] The recent work by Monique Morris on Black girls in schools is also useful here in thinking about the ways in which stereotypes about Black girls lead to discriminatory and disparate outcomes in the classrooms.[7] Simply stated, the school-to-prison pipeline includes Black and Brown girls. And even within that framing it is important to remember, the framing of the 'school-to-prison pipeline' establishes the school as a safe or desirable place for Black girls. Far too often, classrooms, as well as the homes, churches, mosques, or community centers, are not safe places in which Black girls can live and thrive.

---

[4] Aime Ellis, *If We Must Die*: *From Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).

[5] Ruth Nicole Brown, *Hear Our Truths*: *The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

[6] Bettina Love, *Hip Hop's Lil' Sistas Speak*: *Negotiating Hip Hop Identities and Politics in the New South* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

The cry to #SayHerName is made within the movement for Black Lives as well as to a broader world. Those calling out to be heard, to be seen, and to be felt are crafting, remixing, and conjuring a radical Black feminist vision of life after the afterlives of the failed project of US empire. This call-out is experienced both at the sites of violation and of resistance. Black girls are central to this call-out, or rather, calling-in of our unrelenting addiction to brutalizing, making invisible, and killing (both slowly and quickly) Black girls. These 'safe' or 'sacred' spaces can be sites of racial and gender terror. Where then can Black girls be safe, cared for, handled warmly, and loved fiercely?

Theorizing Black violability from the unique standpoint of Black girls provides a distinct space for wrestling with what happened to Bresha Meadows.[8] Although granted a plea deal, she still had to plead guilty to the 'crime' of being a Black girl who fought for her life and those of her loved ones. Black violability gives voice to Black trans girls hoping and fighting to defy the horrifying statistic of Black trans women having an average life expectancy of thirty-five.[9] Black trans girls and women have been fighting for Black cisgender women and girls, and yet Black cisgendered women have been moving at a glacial pace, if at all, to rally around their lives. Black violability reminds us that violence occurring in our institutions is deliberate and reckless. Suspensions and expulsions diminish Black girls' chances for social mobility within a system that already views them as disposable. Black violability creates an opportunity to think about the ways in which race, sex, gender, class, religion, ability, sexuality, and citizenship status affect how Black girls experience state and state-sanctioned violence. It grapples with how the state works against Black girls surviving, living, and thriving.

---

[7] Monique Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: New Press, 2016).

[8] Stassa Edwards, 'After Plea Deal, Bresha Meadows Will Be Released from Juvenile Detention in 60 Days', *Jezebel*, 24 May 2017, https://jezebel.com/after-plea-deal-bresha-meadows-will-be-released-from-j-1795510171

[9] Addison Rose Vincent, 'State of Emergency for Trans Women of Color', *Huffington Post*, 13 August 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/addison-rose-vincent/the-state-of-emergency-co_b_7981580.html

We cannot merely insert Black girls, women, and femmes into hearts and minds as survivors, victims, and/or tireless activists. We must push towards recognizing the complex realities they face and the movements they mount to seek justice on behalf of themselves and their communities. In defense of Black girls, femmes and women, Black girls, women and femmes take to the streets, classrooms, studios, stages, and spaces of worship demanding that you say their names, recognize the justice work that they do and have done for centuries across the diaspora, and hear their/our screams. They/We are indeed magic.

# Bibliography

‘64,000 Black Women Currently Missing in the US’, *NewsOne*, 31 July 2014, https://newsone.com/3041792/64000-black-women-currently-missing-in-the-u-s/

Brown, Ruth Nicole, *Hear Our Truths*: *The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Edwards, Stassa, ‘After Plea Deal, Bresha Meadows Will Be Released from Juvenile Detention in 60 Days’, *Jezebel*, 24 May 2017, https://jezebel.com/after-plea-deal-bresha-meadows-will-be-released-from-j-1795510171

Ellis, Aime, *If We Must Die*: *From Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).

Love, Bettina, *Hip Hop’s Lil’ Sistas Speak*: *Negotiating Hip Hop Identities and Politics in the New South* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

Morris, Monique, *Pushout*: *The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: New Press, 2016).

Rhodan, Maya, ‘Social Media Spread the Story of Washington’s Missing Girls: It Also Got it Wrong’, *Time*, 28 March 2017, http://time.com/4715136/dc-missing-girls-social-media/

Vincent, Addison Rose, ‘State of Emergency for Trans Women of Color’, *Huffington Post*, 13 August 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/addison-rose-vincent/the-state-of-emergency-co_b_7981580.html

# PART FIVE

# SITUATED AT THE EDGE

# 21. Fredi's Migration: Washington's Forgotten War on Hollywood

*Pamela Newkirk*

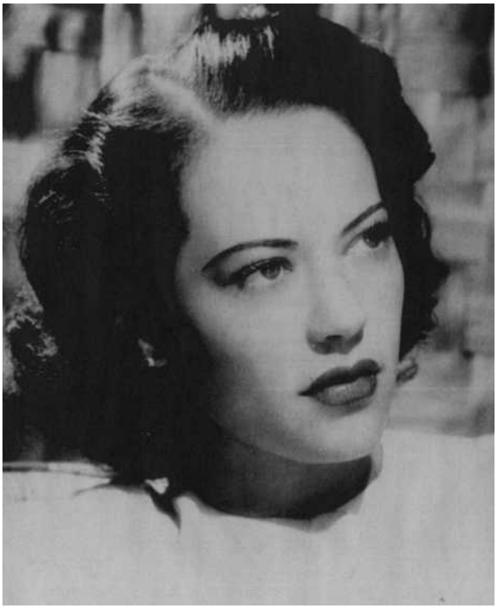


Fig. 21.1 Portrait of Fredi Washington. Courtesy of Schomburg Center, New York Public Library.

© 2019 Pamela Newkirk, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.21

Nearly eight decades before #OscarsSoWhite focused attention on the dearth of roles for Blacks and other people of color in Hollywood, actress Fredi Washington became one of the most vocal critics of the industry's racial bias. But despite her trailblazing work on stage and screen beginning in the 1920s, Washington has largely been forgotten as one of the pioneering African-American leading ladies, and for her noteworthy civil rights activism.

The eldest of five children, Washington was born in Savannah, Georgia in 1903 and relocated to Philadelphia aged eleven following the death of her mother, a former dancer. In 1919 Washington launched her own career as a chorus girl in Harlem's Alabam Club, and, in 1926, landed a coveted role in the landmark Broadway play *Shuffle Along*. When the show closed she sailed to Europe to tour with her dance partner Al Moiret. Two years later she returned to the United States and starred in a string of successful films and plays including the short film *Black and Tan Fantasy* with Duke Ellington (1929); *Black Boy* starring Paul Robeson (1930); *Emperor Jones* with Robeson again (1933); and *Drum in the Night* (1933); with an equal number of plays, including *Singing the Blues* (1930), *Sweet Chariot* (1930) and *Run Lil' Chillun* (1933).

Washington's stardom was secured with her performance as Peola, the tortured bi-racial daughter who passes for white in *Imitation of Life*, the 1934 feature film starring Claudette Corbert and Louise Beavers. However, after achieving critical acclaim for her performance Washington was routinely passed over for lead roles. This was in part due to Hollywood's Hays Codes, which, beginning that year, explicitly prohibited the depiction of miscegenation in film. The Hays Codes made life especially challenging for Washington, whose green eyes and pale complexion rendered her too light to be cast in films with all-Black casts. In 1937 her skin was darkened for her co-starring role in *One Mile from Heaven* with Bill Robinson.

Early in her career Washington was counseled by studio heads to pass as white to achieve greater stardom. She'd later write: 'Frankly, I do not ascribe to the stupid theory of white supremacy and try to hide the fact that I am a Negro for economic or any other reasons. If I do I would be agreeing [that being a Negro makes me inferior].'[1]

---

[1] 'Race Prejudice too Strong, She Tells Reporter', from an unidentified newspaper in the Fredi Washington Papers, Schomburg Center For Research in Black Culture.

Instead she continued to openly challenge Hollywood's color line. After co-starring with Robinson in *One Mile From Heaven* she immersed herself in civil rights and in 1938 became one of the founding members and later the executive director of the Negro Actors Guild. Other officers included Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ethel Waters, Robeson and Adam Clayton Powell Jr.

In 1939 Washington appeared with Waters in the play *Mamba's Daughter* and in 1946 had a lead role in an all-Black Broadway production of *Lysistrata*, which would mark the end of her stage and film career. However, she continued to speak out against discrimination in the industry. In 1949 she publicly condemned Academy-Award-winning producer Louis de Rochemont and director Alfred Werker for casting white actors to play Black characters in the film *Lost Boundaries*, based on the true story of an African-American physician. The film won the Cannes Film Festival award for best screenplay.

In a letter to *Los Angeles Daily News* dated 2 August 1949, she challenged Werker, who, in a previous article, claimed he didn't cast African-American actors in the film because 'the majority of Negro actors are of the Uncle Tom, Minstreal show, shuffling dancer type of performer.'

Washington said she was 'appalled and not a little fighting mad' over his remarks, noting that neither Werker nor Rochemont had ever considered African-American actors to portray the Johnson family.[2] 'There are many Negro actors and actresses who are consistently turned down for plays and screen fare on the excuse that they are too fair, too intelligent, too modern looking, etc. I know, because I am one who falls into this category,' she wrote. Washington noted that in *Imitation of Life* she had played the role of a 'neurotic, sensitive, fair Negro girl', adding 'But did Alfred Werker give me an interview for either of the two female roles in *Boundaries*? He did not. He simply was not interested in learning what he evidently did not know; that there are many legitimate Negro actors and actresses who are far more intelligent than Werker proves himself to be.'

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s she actively participated in the Cultural Division of the National Negro Congress and the Committee for the Negro in the Arts, which both promoted racial equality and the eradication of racial stereotypes in all forms of American culture. She also wrote regular columns, 'Fredi Speaks' and 'Headlines and Footlights' for *The People's Voice*, a weekly paper founded in 1938 by Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who was for a time married to her sister, Isabel.

---

[2] Letter in Fredi Washington Papers, [microform], 1922–1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Washington's activism was not limited to the entertainment industry. She actively participated in boycott campaigns and picket lines organized by Powell on 125th Street to pressure Harlem stores, utility companies and bus lines to hire African Americans. Washington also worked behind the scenes in the entertainment industry, serving as a casting consultant for the 1954 film *Carmen Jones* starring Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte, and later for George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* performed on Broadway in 1952, and released as a film in 1959.

Washington's first marriage to Lawrence Brown, a trombonist in Duke Ellington's orchestra, ended in divorce, but she remarried Anthony Bell, a Connecticut dentist, in 1952. From 1954 to 1980 Washington worked at the Stamford, Connecticut branch of Bloomingdale's. The stage and screen legend died in 1994 at the age of 90. In 2008 *Time* magazine listed *Imitation of Life* among Hollywood's twenty-five all-time greatest films about race. *Time* critic Richard Corliss said Washington 'had a face, figure and natural elegance made for movies' but added, 'Washington's dusky gorgeousness in "Imitation of Life" must have scared Hollywood bosses even as it tempted them.'[3]

---

[3] Richard Corliss, 'Top 25 Movies on Race,' *Time*, 4 February 2008, http://entertainment.time.com/2008/02/04/the-25-most-important-films-on-race/slide/gods-step-children-1938/

# 22. Julia de Burgos: Cultural Crossing and Iconicity

## *Vanessa Pérez-Rosario*

In the early-morning hours of 5 July 1953, two New York City police officers spotted a figure on the ground near the corner of Fifth Avenue and 106th Street in East Harlem. As they approached, they saw the body of a woman with bronze-colored skin. Once a towering woman, she now lay in the street unconscious. They rushed her to Harlem Hospital, where she died shortly thereafter. The woman carried no handbag and had no identification on her. No one came to the morgue to claim her body. No missing person's case fit her description. She was buried in the city's potter's field on Hart Island. One month later, the woman was identified as award-winning Puerto-Rican poet Julia de Burgos. Her family and friends exhumed and repatriated her body.[1] Burgos's death in anonymity on an East Harlem street opens up a space for the creation of the Burgos myth. One of the principle reasons that Burgos as a figure elicits veneration in the followers who are committed to the endurance of her work and legacy is precisely because of how blurry, murky, and ambiguous her image is, because of the belief that at any moment she might disappear. The desire to rescue her for our collective memory is rooted in her death in anonymity and her burial in the potter's field: we want to save her, give her a name, and reconstruct her nebulous personality and life.

---

[1] See *La Prensa*, 2 August 1953; *El Mundo*, 4 August 1953.

© 2019 Vanessa Pérez-Rosario, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.22

When I began writing about Julia de Burgos, I hesitated to mention her notorious death, seeking to move away from the narratives of victimhood that have shrouded her life for more than half a century. I wanted to focus on her poetry, her activism, and her legacy. While many Puerto Ricans already know her life story, and many both on the island and in New York have been captivated by her life, I soon realized the importance of recounting even the most difficult details as I introduced her to new audiences. Her migration experience and her death on the streets of New York capture the imaginations of readers everywhere. This essay centers on images of movement, flow and migration in Burgos's work, life, legacy, and iconicity, focusing on the escape routes she created to transcend the rigid confines of gender and 1930s Puerto-Rican nationalism. Because Burgos always situates herself in her work at the edge, at the border, we can read her today as a border icon, inhabiting that space between Puerto Rico and New York. Since her death, the Burgos icon has been mobilized in debates around gender, race, and nationhood, across generations and in multiple contexts, making her a figure through which the cultural tensions of the border between Puerto Rico and New York are negotiated and contested. Icons are defined as a person or thing that is regarded as a representative symbol, that carries a certain fixed meaning, and that is often considered to be worthy of veneration. Constructed by communities, these symbols rely on the presence of an interpretive community that is able to recognize and read them as iconic.[2] A careful analysis of the history of the treatment of these figures and their reception can offer insight into the cultural epics and melodramas of the nation, since these objects are used to channel strong emotions in large groups of people. Icons require shared cultural knowledge and act as signifiers of collective aspiration. While icons are often deployed in the service of the nation, the Burgos figure is claimed by Puerto Ricans in both Puerto Rico and New York. Rather than symbolizing a certain fixed meaning, Burgos absorbs a range of contradictory meanings, as symbols often do. As such, Burgos is a border icon, one that inhabits the contact zone, that third space between Puerto Rico and the United States.[3] The tensions between gender, language, race, and nation are negotiated, contested, disputed, and mediated through her figure and through interpretations of her life and work, as later generations of scholars, artists, writers, musicians, performers, and playwrights, on both sides of the border, collaborate in the maintenance of Burgos's afterlives.

---

[2] See Dianna C. Niebylski and Patrick O'Connor, 'Reflections on Iconicity, Celebrity, and Cultural Crossings,' in Dianna C. Niebylski and Patrick O'Connor (eds.), *Latin American Icons: Fame across Borders* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014), pp. 1–18.

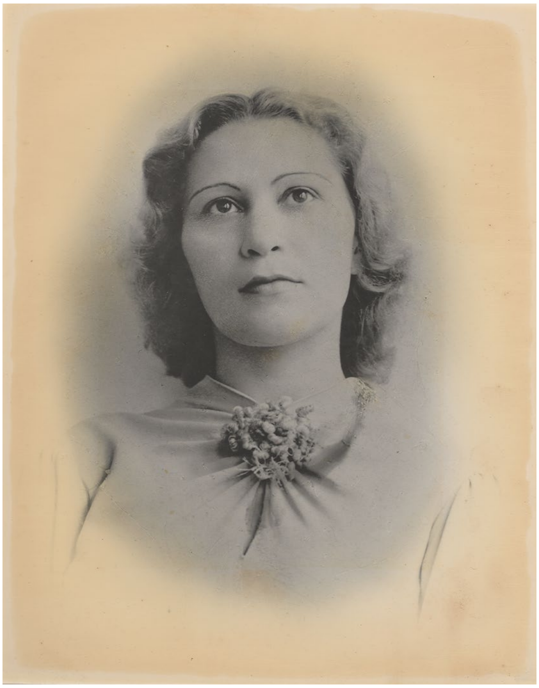
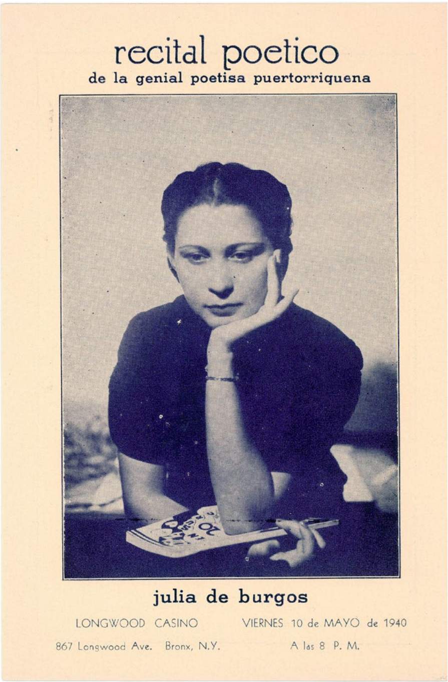


Fig. 22.1 Julia de Burgos, ca. 1938. Miriam Román Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

Julia Constanza Burgos García was born on 17 February 1914 in the town of Carolina, Puerto Rico, the eldest of Paula García de Burgos and Francisco Burgos Hans's thirteen children. Julia was intimately familiar with struggle, hardship, and death. She watched six of her younger siblings die of malnutrition and other illnesses associated with

---

[3] For more on border icons, see Robert McKee Irwin, 'Joaquín Murrieta and Lola Casanova: Shapeshifting Icons of the Contact Zone,' in Niebylski and O'Connor, *Latin American Icons*, pp. 61–72.



recital poetico
de la genial poetisa puertorriquena

julia de burgos
LONGWOOD CASINO VIERNES 10 de MAYO de 1940
867 Longwood Ave. Bronx, N.Y. A las 8 P. M.

Fig. 22.2 Flyer for poetry reading by Julia de Burgos, 10 May 1940. Pura Belpré Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

poverty. Burgos is the author of four collections of poetry, although only two were published during her lifetime. Her first, *Poemas exactos a mí misma* [Poems to Myself], she later considered juvenilia and never published. In her first published collection, *Poem en veinte surcos* [Poem in Twenty Furrows, 1938], written during the height of the Puerto-Rican nationalist movement, Burgos creates a nomadic feminist subject. While committed to the idea of political nationalism throughout her life, Burgos nonetheless aligned this nomadic poetic subject with the Puerto-Rican literary vanguard, with whom she found points of departure from the phallocentric and patriarchal Puerto-Rican cultural nationalist project of the 1930s. This subject subverts conventions and anticipates her later departure from the island.

As developed in her poetry, nomadism refers to a 'critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior.'[4] Burgos's writing moves away from modernist theories of impersonality and takes up the self, authenticity, and intimacy as topics. Her second collection of poetry *Canción de la verdad sencilla* [Song of the Simple Truth, 1939] develops images of flight, travel and bodily transformations as a way to escape containment. Many of the poems explore the theme of love: the speaker must leave the world behind and undertake imaginative journeys through which she becomes one with nature and her lover. The collection highlights the desire to break down barriers, remove limitations, and transgress boundaries. Although the canonical literature of the time was concerned with nation building and perpetuating the myth of the *jíbaro* [peasant] and the nation as the great Puerto-Rican family, Burgos's nomadic subject finds a way to escape that world.

On 13 January 1940 she left Puerto Rico for New York, and six months later she moved to Cuba where she lived until November 1942. Her third collection of poetry, *El mar y tú* [The Sea and You] was published posthumously in 1954 by her sister Consuelo, who added a final section, *Otros poemas* [Other Poems], that included works Burgos had sent to family members while she was in Cuba and New York. *El mar y tú* marks the climax of the development of Burgos's nomadic subject. Images of water figure prominently in these poems, creating avenues for escape from the rigid social norms that should have contained her and again demonstrate that the female speaker cannot be restricted. In Burgos's final book, the only one written from exile, the sea becomes an open space without borders where the speaker is freed from all restrictions. Either the sea or death offer a final escape. Many of the poems follow a pattern of loss and abjection followed by renewal and transformation. The sea is a primeval chaos offering the possibility of emergence out of the void, depicted in her poetry as a creative and dynamic open space.

From late 1942 until her death Burgos lived in various neighborhoods in Harlem and the Bronx where she struggled to make a living as a writer. She wrote for the Spanish-language weekly *Pueblos Hispanos* from 1943–44, further developing her political voice. Many view Burgos's move to New York without family and friends as a self-destructive and suicidal impulse. However, her journalism shows her political commitment to radical democracy and the struggle for immigrant and Puerto-Rican rights, as well as her advocacy for solidarity with Harlem's African American community. In addition, these writings as well as her poetry and letters reveal her understanding of cultural identity as fluid and unbound by national territory. From 1947 on, she had difficulty finding steady work and held a series of unsatisfying jobs. Her physical state deteriorated as she battled depression and alcoholism. She spent her last years in and out of Harlem Hospital and Goldwater Memorial Hospital on Welfare Island (now Roosevelt Island) in the East River. She was ultimately diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver and upper respiratory disease, both consistent with chronic alcoholism. Aware of her deteriorated physical and emotional state, her family and friends in Puerto Rico begged her to return. With her life spinning out of control because of her financial instability, her alcoholism, and her precarious living situation, Burgos regularly mailed her poetry to her sister and other relatives for safekeeping. In the end, her health problems, poverty, loneliness, and alcoholism led to her decline and death.

---

[4] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*: *Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 26.

Burgos privileges water imagery in her poetry as a way to emphasize travel, movements, and routes to escape the narrowly defined nation-island. These images pre-figure Burgos's migratory routes from Puerto Rico to Havana and New York. Her life and work leave an opening for ambiguity, the imagination, and the contradictions that lure scholars, writers, artists, and activists to attempt to reconstruct her. They do so not only because of the assertions that she made in her poetry and her prose, nor in the way she lived her life, but because of the many contradictions we find in her. Her lacunae, her scattered archive, her penchant always to inscribe herself at the border, on the verge of and in between categories — space and time, life and death, vanishing and beckoning to us — compel us to try to recuperate her. Her poem 'Entre mi voz y el tiempo' [Between My Voice and Time] is a powerful example of Burgos situating herself at the frontier, in the liminal space between life and death, in mid-ocean, between her voice and time.

En la ribera de la muerte,
hay algo,
alguna voz,
alguna vela a punto de partir,
alguna tumba libre
que me enamora el alma.
¡Si hasta tengo rubor de parecerme a mí!
¡Debe ser tan profunda la lealtad de la muerte!

En la ribera de la muerte,
¡tan cerca!, en la ribera
(que es como contemplarme llegando hasta un espejo)
me reconocen la canción,
y hasta el color del nombre.

¿Seré yo el puente errante entre el sueño y la muerte?
        ¡Presente…!
¿De qué lado del mundo me llaman, de qué frente?
Estoy en altamar…
En la mitad del tiempo…
¿Estoy viva?
¿Estoy muerta?
        ¡Presente! ¡Aquí! ¡Presente…![5]

[On the banks of death,
there is something, some voice, some sail about to depart,
some vacant tomb/that courts my soul.
Why, I even blush at looking like myself!
The loyalty of death must be so profound!

On the banks of death,
so close!, on the bank
(which is like contemplating myself arriving at a mirror)
the song recognizes me,
and even the color of my name.
Am I the errant bridge that between the dream and death?
Present…!
From what side of the world do they call me, from what front?
I am at high sea…
In the middle of time…
Who will win?
Present!
Am I alive?
Am I dead?
Present! Here! Present…!]

---

[5] Julia de Burgos, *Song of the Simple Truth*: *The Complete Poems of Julia de Burgos*, trans. and ed. by Jack Agüeros (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1997), pp. 192–93.

In this poem we see Burgos positioning herself in that space in-between. Her place on the margins of official history entices and invites readers to secure her in our collective memory. Inhabiting that space in-between allows her to take on a range of identifications, associations, and interpretations. The Burgos icon is able to assimilate a spectrum of inevitably contradictory ideas, including the unresolved tensions around race and gender and the national questions that are debated, negotiated, and contested through her in Puerto Rico and the United States. Burgos's status as an icon goes unquestioned even though what she stands for has long been contested.

Their exists a range of stories, at times conflicting and contradictory, told about her in multiple cultural contexts, primarily in Puerto Rico and New York. I am interested here in exploring and interrogating the Burgos icon. How did she become an icon? How has this icon become so powerful? How has it evolved as a national, transnational, and border icon? What does its popularity say about those who created it? What do the stories we tell about her say about us? In the end, it is her death in anonymity that opens the path for the creation of both the Burgos myth and the Burgos icon. This icon is the site of contested and politicized ideas; it incorporates and reflects the great variety of the stories, rumors, gossip, and tidbits told both on the island and in New York.

There are two distinct historical moments that have provided fertile ground for reading Burgos as a cultural icon. The first moment was during the civil rights movement of the 1960s when women of color sought to correct the elisions and omissions of writers, artists, and intellectuals of color in the historical records and the literary canon. Latina writers reclaimed Burgos and struggled to have her recognized in literary history. These women set out to dispel the generalized portrayal of Burgos as a woman victimized by love and failed relationships, consumed by the self-destructive alcohol addiction that left her destitute and caused her to develop cirrhosis of the liver, depression, and other physical ailments that brought her to an early death.[6] However, second-wave feminist writers, such as Rosario Ferré, grappled with Burgos's legacy and struggled to make her into an icon of feminist empowerment.[7] They wrestled with how to reconcile the fiercely independent subject created in some of Burgos's most iconic poems — such as 'Pentacromia', and 'A Julia de Burgos' in which the speakers reject traditional family values — with the woman herself.

---

[6] For a summary of these debates, see Rubén Ríos Ávila, 'Víctima de luz,' in *La raza cómica del sujeto en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Ediciones Cajellón, 2002), pp. 211–21.

[7] Rosario Ferré, *Sitio a eros*: *Quince ensayos literarios* (Mexico City: Moritz, 1986).

As a border icon, the Burgos figure is utilized to debate the politics of gender and sexuality in Puerto Rico and Puerto-Rican diasporic communities. A range of differing meanings are attributed to Burgos's life. Puerto-Rican writer Mayra Santos Febres calls Burgos Puerto Rico's first modern woman, who had been a champion javelin thrower at university, and by 1932 was divorced, had had abortions, smoked, and drank — and goes on to explain that Burgos's tragic end highlights how challenging it was for women to be modern.[8] One need only recall the well-known polemics in the celebrated 'María Cristina' poetic exchange between two women writers who both closely identify with Burgos: Sandra María Esteves, often referred to as the *madrina* [godmother] of Nuyorican poetry, and Luz María Umpierre, a queer Puerto-Rican poet, writer, and scholar. Their debate over appropriate gender roles for Puerto-Rican women took place over a decade (1985–95), across different cultural contexts and positionalities, in the form of published poetic exchanges. Esteves published a poem, 'A la mujer borrinqueña' [To the Puerto-Rican Woman], espousing traditional family values imposed by a dominant patriarchal culture through a narrator named 'María Christina'; Umpierre countered with a poem titled 'In Response,' which opens with the lines, 'My name is not María Christina. / I am a Puerto-Rican woman born in another Barrio,' and continues with a challenge to patriarchal authority and a refusal to adhere to traditional roles for women.[9] Although second-wave feminist writers and scholars sought to rescue Burgos from victimhood and narratives of migration as tragedy, some also desired to distance themselves from her alcoholism and other characteristics they viewed as weaknesses. They recognized her brilliance as a writer, but some also saw her as a cautionary tale.

---

[8] Mayra Santos Febres, 'Julia de Burgos, vida corta e intensa,' *El Nuevo Día*, 3 July 2011, www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/juliadeburgosvidacortaeintensa-1006858.

[9] Luz María Umpierre, … *Y otras desgracias/ And Other Misfortunes…* (Bloomington: Third Woman Press, 1985), p. 1. Sandra María Esteves, 'A la mujer borinqueña' in her *Yerba Buena* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1980). For a summary of the debate, see Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans*: *Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 73–75. For more on their deployment of Burgos in their work, see Vanessa Pérez Rosario, *Becoming Julia de Burgos*, pp. 94–116.

As a border icon, the Burgos figure is a site where the conflicts around Puerto-Rican gender norms are contested and negotiated.

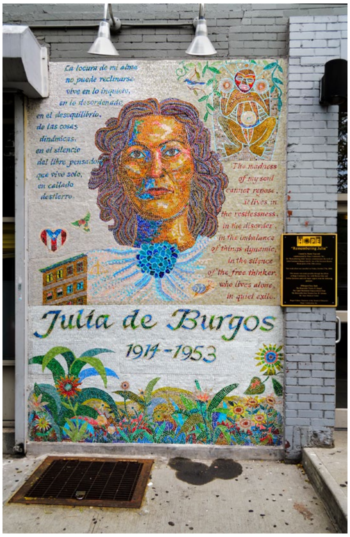

La locura de mi alma
no puede reclinarse.
vive en lo inquieto,
en lo desordenado,
en el desequilibrio
de las cosas
dinámicas,
en el silencio
del libro pensador
que vive solo,
en callado
destierro.
The madness
of my soul
cannot repose.
It lives in
the restlessness,
in the disorder,
in the imbalance
of things dynamic,
in the silence
of the free thinker,
who lives alone,
in quiet exile.
Julia de Burgos
1914-1953

Fig. 22.3 Many Vega, *Remembering Julia*, 2006. Mosaic by Manny Vega. Photo by Francisco Molina Reyes II. Courtesy of Mambóso Nuyotópia Archives. All rights reserved.

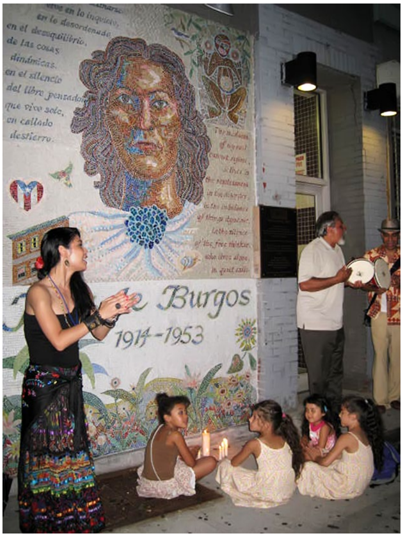

Burgos
1914-1953

Fig. 22.4 Commemorating Julia de Burgos's death. La Bruja, 2011. Photo taken by author, CC BY 4.0.

In the contested terrain around Puerto Ricans, US Latinxs, and race, the Burgos icon becomes one of the sites where these tensions surface and are debated, contested, and negotiated from various points of view by people who have different investments and attachments.[10] I will share briefly two examples of how the Burgos icon is deployed to debate the questions around Puerto Rico and Blackness by Nuyorican artist Manny Vega and poet Mariposa. In 2006, Vega created the mosaic mural *Remembering Julia*, one of the more popular murals in El Barrio (Fig. 3). 'I purposely made her more mulatto,' Vega says, 'because that's who she was, you know? Beautiful, tall, elegant.'[11] In other words, in the mural he gave her a darker complexion because, in his words, 'that's who she was.' That is who she is to *him*. Vega is aware that he is contributing to the mythmaking of the icon when he reinvents her to be a symbol of Blackness. That is not to say that there is nothing in her life or writing that would allow for such an interpretation. The poem often used as the basis for Burgos's identification with Blackness is 'Ay ay ay de la grifa negra', published in 1938 in her first collection of poetry, *Poema en veinte surcos*: the speaker in the poem, a descendant of an enslaved woman, is a Black Puerto-Rican woman who takes the position that she would prefer to align herself with the enslaved rather than with the colonizer.[12] Mariposa nods to this poem by Burgos in 'Poem for My Grifa-Rican Sistah, or Broken Ends Broken Promises', a poem in which she works out her own Black Puerto-Rican identity.[13] One can see how Burgos's voice mediates the affirmation of a Black political identity, although the distance between Burgos's poem and Mariposa's is great. In the end, Mariposa's poem is not really about Burgos; it is a poem about racist and oppressive standards of beauty, the imaginary of the Puerto-Rican nation, and its relationship to Blackness. These brief examples highlight the way race among Puerto Ricans, in both Puerto Rico and in New York, is brokered and debated through the icon. The island's literary establishment created a sanitized version of Burgos that was taught in schools in Puerto Rico in the 1950s and 1960s.[14] This Burgos is in contrast to the Burgos icon deployed as an affirmation of Blackness by Vega and Mariposa, highlighting the conflicts around Puerto Ricans and race that play out in multiple cultural contexts, across generations, and borders.[15] I would argue that no single group comes to own the icon, and no version of Burgos's story surpasses the other. As a border icon, Burgos is mobilized by various groups in multiple cultural contexts to debate the tensions that exist among Puerto Ricans and their unresolved relationship to Blackness.

---

[10] For more on Puerto Ricans and Blackness, see Ileana Rodriguez-Silva, *Silencing Race*: *Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism, and National Identities in Puerto Rico* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Isar Godreau, *Scripts of Blackness*: *Race, Cultural Nationalism, and US Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015). For more on Latinos and Blackness, see Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez-Román (eds.), *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*: *History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

---

[11] Pérez-Rosario, *Becoming Julia de Burgos*, p. 143.

[12] Julia de Burgos, 'Ay ay ay de la grifa negra,' in *Poema en veinte surcos* (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1938), p. 52. For further analysis of this poem and reactions to its publication in Puerto Rico in 1938, see Pérez Rosario, *Becoming Julia de Burgos*, pp. 33–37.

[13] Mariposa [María Teresa Fernández], 'Poem for My Grifa-Rican Sistah, or Broken Ends Broken Promises,' in Jiménez Román and Flores, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 280–81. For a more complete reading of this poem and the way Mariposa inherits and extends Burgos's legacy, see Vanessa Pérez Rosario, 'Affirming an Afro-Latin@ Identity: An Interview with Poet María Teresa (Mariposa) Fernández,' *Latino Studies*, 12 (2014), 468–75; and *Becoming Julia de Burgos*, pp. 94–122.

[14] Edna Acosta-Belén, 'Rediscovering Julia de Burgos: The People's Rebel Soul Poet', *Small Axe*, 54 (2017), 188–202.

If icons signify a certain era, perhaps it is among the turn-of-the-century generation of writers, poets, artists, activists, and scholars that the Burgos icon gains its greatest salience. Beyond a figure through which conflicting views of gender and race are disputed, Burgos's prominence as an icon today is due to her transformation into a site where the national question — the political status of Puerto Rico and its future — is contested and debated. The intensity and urgency over the political status of the island has surged since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. Puerto Rico became a nation on the move in 1917, when the Jones Act passed and Puerto Ricans became US citizens.[16] The current financial crisis has led to a migration crisis, and since 2013, more Puerto Ricans live in the continental United States than in the island.[17] This reality makes defining the nation by its geopolitical territory an act of erasure that effectively renders millions of Puerto Ricans landless, if not nationless. While there have been five referendums to determine the political status of the island, four of them have taken place since 1993.[18] The recent referendum votes suggest that current political forms are exhausted, as voters reject the options available on the plebiscite that include statehood, independence, and maintaining the status quo. In the 1998 referendum, which marked one hundred years of the US occupation of Puerto Rico, the majority of voters rejected the options on the ballot by writing in, 'ninguna de las anteriores' [none of the above].[19] In 2012, half a million ballots were left blank. And in the most recent referendum at the time of writing, held on 11 June 2017, the Popular Democratic Party organized a boycott, resulting in only 23 percent of the population voting.[20] Faced with no suitable options for a political future that would ensure human dignity and self-determination, Puerto Ricans have expressed their disenchantment with official politics and their dissatisfaction with limited political options as solutions to Puerto Rico's problems, creating an opening to imagine alternative forms of belonging and solidarity and to find a creative response to enduring problems. It is in this moment of crisis and conflict that the Burgos icon has grown in prominence.

---

[15] In fact, census data indicates that a higher percentage of Puerto Ricans on the island identify as white compared to those who live in the United States. Carlos Vargas-Ramos, *Some Social Differences on the Basis of Race Among Puerto Ricans*, December 2016, https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/data_briefs/RB2016-10_RACE.pdf

[16] Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*: *Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[17] Jens Manuel Krogstad, 'Puerto Ricans Leave in Record Numbers for Mainland US,' Pew Research Center, 14 October 2015, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/14/puerto-ricans-leave-in-record-numbers-for-mainland-u-s.

[18] The first referendum vote took place in 1967, and there was not another referendum until 1993.

[19] For more on the debates on the political status of Puerto Rico, see Frances Negrón-Muntaner (ed.), *None of the Above*: *Puerto Ricans in the Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

I would like to briefly highlight here Puerto-Rican muralist Alexis Díaz's 2012 work titled 'Dejarse vencer por la vida es peor que dejarse vencer por la muerte' [To Allow Oneself to Be Conquered by Life Is Worse than to Be Conquered by Death]. The title and inscription on the mural is taken from a letter that Burgos wrote to her sister in 1942. The mural powerfully conveys the effects of the current debt crisis in Puerto Rico that has devastated the people and brought the island nation to its knees.

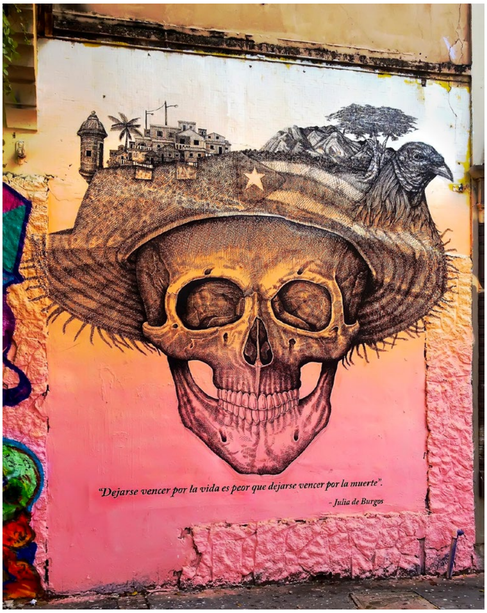

"Dejarse vencer por la vida es peor que dejarse vencer por la muerte".
- Julia de Burgos

Fig. 22.5 Alexis Díaz, 'Dejarse vencer por la vida es por que dejarse vencer por la muerte', Santurce, Puerto Rico, 2013. © Hunter College. All rights reserved.

---

[20] Puerto Rico faces a national debt of $74 billion, with another $49 billion in pension obligations that it cannot pay. Public schools and hospitals have closed amid a mass exodus of the population.

As an anti-colonial writer in the 1930s and 1940s, Burgos was preoccupied with decolonial struggles in the Caribbean and the liberation of the peoples of Latin America. In her poetry, essays, and letters she expressed her visions of freedom, human dignity, social justice, and self-determination for Puerto Rico. The economic crisis of the 1930s led to widespread strikes and boycotts on the island. Migration to the United States became a way to offer relief to Puerto Ricans who could not find work. In response to the Puerto Rican political situation, Burgos wrote the essay 'Ser o no ser es la divisa' [To Be or Not to Be Is the Motto], which appeared in 1945 in *Semanario Hispano*, a short-lived Spanish-language newspaper published in New York, in which she elaborated her sociopolitical ideology as it related to Puerto Rico and Latin America. The following year, the essay garnered her the *Instituto de Literatura Puertorriqueña's Premio de Periodismo* [Institute of Puerto-Rican Letters Journalism Prize]. In the essay she frames the debate regarding Puerto-Rican independence in the language of human rights — the right of a people to govern themselves rather than to be merely pawns in capitalist and imperialist designs. In several letters to her sister Consuelo that same year, Burgos wrote of the right of the people of Puerto Rico to 'vivir decentemente en este planeta' [To live with decency on this planet].[21] She connected the question of Puerto Rico's status to the global struggles of the Second World War, as well as to the despotic governments in power in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Honduras:

> A esta hora de encrucijada a que ha llegado la humanidad, podemos llamar la hora de las definiciones. No de las definiciones de carácter lingüístico, sino de las definiciones de carácter humano que tienen su tronco en el hombre, y se esparcen sobre las colectividades en una dinámica social que rige el destino de los pueblos por el bien o por el mal. Estamos en la era de la definición del hombre.[22]
>
> [Today, humanity finds itself at a crossroads. We might call this the era of the definitions. Not definitions of a linguistic character, but definitions of a human character, with its roots found in man, and it spread to collectivities in a social dynamic that governs the fate of the people for good or bad. This is the age of the definition of man.]

---

[21] Julia de Burgos, *Cartas a Consuelo*, ed. by Eugenio Ballou (San Juan: Editorial Folium, 2014), p. 189.

[22] Pérez-Rosario, *Becoming Julia de Burgos*, p. 79.

Burgos argued that the colonial situation in Puerto Rico could be resolved only through a complete break with the United States, through independence: 'En Puerto Rico hay solo dos caminos. O exigir el reconocimiento incondicional de nuestra independencia, o ser traidores a la libertad, en cualquiera otra forma de solución a nuestro problema que se nos ofrezca' [In Puerto Rico there are only two paths. Either we demand the unconditional recognition of our independence, or we become traitors to freedom by accepting any other solution to our problem that is offered].[23] The renewed engagement with Burgos's life, work, and iconicity since the 1990s is telling of the cultural and political concerns of the contemporary moment. Burgos's voice, her image, and her status as an icon are mobilized to debate Puerto-Rican sovereignty, humanity, freedom, and human dignity.

At a time when current political forms appear to be exhausted, artists, writers, and scholars turn to Burgos. There are, as mentioned, some parallels that can be drawn between the two historical moments — the economic and migration crises, for example. However, Burgos lived at a moment when she believed that there *were* options, that there *was* a choice to be made. In many ways Burgos was a woman ahead of her time, but in other ways she was very much a woman of her moment. She believed in revolution, in self-determination, in independence. The turn to Burgos at this present moment is not necessarily to advocate for the independence of Puerto Rico. With each passing year the statehood movement grows on the island. The turn to this icon, rather, is a call for Burgos's radical imagination, her visions of freedom that could dream up a world that was more just, more humane, and more liberated.

---

[23] Pérez-Rosario, *Becoming Julia de Burgos*, p. 79.

# Bibliography

Acosta-Belén, Edna, 'Rediscovering Julia de Burgos: The People's Rebel Soul Poet', *Small Axe*, 54 (2017), 188–202.

Ávila, Rubén Ríos, 'Víctima de luz,' in *La raza cómica del sujeto en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Ediciones Cajellón, 2002), pp. 211–21.

Braidotti, Rosi, *Nomadic Subjects*: *Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Burgos, Julia de, 'Ay ay ay de la grifa negra,' in *Poema en veinte surcos* (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1938).

Burgos, Julia de, *Cartas a Consuelo*, ed. by Eugenio Ballou (San Juan: Editorial Folium, 2014).

Burgos, Julia de, *Song of the Simple Truth*: *The Complete Poems of Julia de Burgos*, trans. and ed. by Jack Agüeros (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1997).

Duany, Jorge, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*: *Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Esteves, Sandra María, 'A la mujer borinqueña' in her *Yerba Buena* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1980).

Febres, Mayra Santos, 'Julia de Burgos, vida corta e intensa,' *El Nuevo Día*, 3 July 2011, www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/juliadeburgosvidacortaeintensa-1006858.

Ferré, Rosario, *Sitio a eros*: *Quince ensayos literarios* (Mexico City: Moritz, 1986).

Flores, Juan and Miriam Jiménez-Román (eds.), *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*: *History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Godreau, Isar, *Scripts of Blackness*: *Race*, *Cultural Nationalism*, *and US Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

Irwin, Robert McKee, 'Joaquín Murrieta and Lola Casanova: Shapeshifting Icons of the Contact Zone,' in Dianna C. Niebylski and Patrick O'Connor (eds.), *Latin American Icons*: *Fame Across Borders* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014), pp. 61–72.

Krogstad, Jens Manuel, 'Puerto Ricans Leave in Record Numbers for Mainland US,' Pew Research Center, 14 October 2015, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/14/puerto-ricans-leave-in-record-numbers-for-mainland-u-s.

La Fountain-Stokes, Lawrence, *Queer Ricans*: *Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

Mariposa [María Teresa Fernández], 'Poem for My Grifa-Rican Sistah, or Broken Ends Broken Promises,' in Jiménez Román and Flores, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*: *History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 280–81.

Negrón-Muntaner, Frances (ed.), *None of the Above*: *Puerto Ricans in the Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Niebylski, Dianna C. and Patrick O'Connor, 'Reflections on Iconicity, Celebrity, and Cultural Crossings,' in Dianna C. Niebylski and Patrick O'Connor (eds.), *Latin American Icons*: *Fame across Borders* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014), pp. 1–18.

Rodriguez-Silva, Ileana, *Silencing Race*: *Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism, and National Identities in Puerto Rico* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Rosario, Vanessa Pérez, 'Affirming an Afro-Latin@ Identity: An Interview with Poet María Teresa (Mariposa) Fernández,' *Latino Studies*, 12 (2014), 468–75.

Rosario, Vanessa Pérez, *Becoming Julia de Burgos*: *The Making of a Puerto Rican Icon* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

Umpierre, Luz María, *… Y otras desgracias/ And Other Misfortunes …* (Bloomington: Third Woman Press, 1985).

Vargas-Ramos, Carlos, *Some Social Differences on the Basis of Race Among Puerto Ricans*, December 2016, https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/data_briefs/RB2016-10_RACE.pdf

# 23. Sarah Parker Remond's Black American Grand Tour

## *Sirpa Salenius*

Black women struggle with the problem of defining their identities in positive terms because the dominating stereotypes that contribute to Black women's oppression conceptualize their identities through a variety of negative images, ranging from asexual mammies and smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, to the hypersexual jezebels, breeder women of slavery and the stereotypes of welfare mothers that pervade contemporary popular culture. In addition, as bell hooks points out, 'the absence of recognition is a strategy that facilitates making a group of the Other'.[1] Similarly, one form of oppression, as feminist critic Patricia Hill Collins notes, is that of omission.[2] Rendering successful women invisible and eradicating their achievements from historical narratives are acts of omission that distort reality. Hence, recovering positive images of Black women challenges the controlling power of the negative stereotypes that have been constructed; such positive images contribute to a counter-narrative and become a form of resistance to racist and sexist ideologies. Sarah Parker Remond, who was a Black proto-feminist and a doctor, serves in this rewriting of history if we recuperate her among the protagonists of nineteenth-century activism. By including Remond in national and transnational narratives, as well as other prominent

---

[1] bell hooks, *Killing Rage*: *Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), p. 34.

[2] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*: *Knowledge*, *Consciousness*, *and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 8.

© 2019 Sirpa Salenius, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.23

Black women, we contribute to the process of 'recognizing the range and complexity of the Black experience in slavery and freedom'.[3]

Remond, who participated in transatlantic struggles for social justice, moved beyond the boundaries of her nationality, race, and gender.[4] She traveled from the United States to Europe where she lectured against slavery, touring in England, Scotland, and Ireland before permanently establishing herself in Florence, Italy. 'African-American mobility', historians Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish suggest, 'is often connected to the impulse for increased opportunities and the desire to find a home or homeland as well as for the purposes of pilgrimage, exile, and pleasure'. [5] In Europe, Remond found a home as well as an intellectually and culturally nourishing environment that allowed her the freedom to reinvent her Black womanhood. Her travels can be connected to the American Grand Tour tradition commonly associated with white intellectuals who, like Remond, headed for Europe in search of increased educational and professional opportunities. 'My strongest desire through life', wrote Remond in her autobiographical essay published in London in 1861, 'has been to be educated'.[6] For her, as for other travelers, even before the development of any infrastructure for international Black travel, mobility was intertwined with subjectivity.[7] In the United States, segregation limited her self-expression and hindered the conceptualization of powerful Black womanhood. Geographical mobility was therefore a necessary requisite for Remond's social and cultural ascent. Her expatriation triggered a change in her self-definition that was fundamental for the progress of Remond personally, and Black women collectively.

---

[3] Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation*: *Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), p. 24.

[4] See also chapter 17 in this volume, Bettina Love, 'Black Women's Work: Undoing Character Education', for more information about the places and ways in which Black women have mattered and have been striving to thrive.

[5] Cheryl J. Fish and Farah J. Griffin, 'Introduction', in Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish (eds.), *A Stranger in the Village*: *Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), pp. xiii–xvii (p. xiii).

[6] Sarah P. Remond, 'Sarah P. Remond', in Matthew Davenport Hill (ed.), *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich*; *Biographical Sketches of Men and Women Who Have, by an Extraordinary Use of Their Opportunities, Benefited Their Fellow-Creatures* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1861), pp. 276–86 (p. 277).

[7] See Tiffany Gill, '"The World is Ours, Too": Millennial Women and the New Black Travel Movement' in this volume.

Remond's background was instrumental in her struggle for independence and her journey toward success. She was born free in Salem (Massachusetts) in 1826 into a rather prosperous family. Her father, John Remond, was Salem's famous caterer who, among many other events, was in charge of the dinner organized in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette's visit to the United States in 1824. Remond's mother, Nancy Lenox, was a Boston baker and one of the founding members of Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society, established in 1834. She, as Remond wrote in her autobiographical essay, prepared her children 'to meet the terrible pressure which prejudice against colour would force upon them'.[8] Also Remond's siblings were all professionals — bakers, hairdressers, manufacturers of wigs — and active in anti-slavery societies. They were educated mainly in segregated schools but to a great extent also at home. The Remond family thus defied the oppression and segregation that was deeply entrenched in the areas of housing, schooling, and employment by obtaining education and creating their own businesses that were housed in Salem's prime locations.

In 1856, Remond started her career as an abolitionist lecturer, touring with Abby Kelley Foster and Susan B. Anthony, and in 1858 she left the United States for England in search of international support for the cause of abolition. She traveled alone, which is quite remarkable, and she had not secured any support from abolitionist societies. She soon connected with British activists as a member of the London Emancipation Committee, then by becoming an active delegate in the Executive Committee of the Ladies' London Emancipation Society. She excelled in her career as a lecturer while continuing her studies, first at the Bedford Ladies College, where she studied humanities, followed by her training to become a nurse.

In August 1866, Remond traveled from London to Florence, again alone, to study at one of the most prestigious medical schools of Europe, the Santa Maria Nuova hospital school. She carried letters of introduction from one of the protagonists of Italian Risorgimento, Giuseppe Mazzini, whom she had met in London where she had assisted him with fundraising efforts that contributed to achieving his cherished goal of creating one unified Italian nation.

---

[8] Remond, 'Sarah P. Remond', p. 277.

In Florence, Remond passed the entrance examination to the medical school with excellent marks, then conducted her studies in Italian, graduating as an obstetrician in 1868. Her work prospects as a doctor were good, even though she was Black and a woman. She was well connected to the high society in Italy where she attended cosmopolitan gatherings of artists, writers, and intellectuals. Her social life included Italians and Anglo-Americans as well as representatives of other nationalities. For instance, she attended the intellectual salon hosted by the Greek author Margherita Mignaty and participated in soirées at the poet Francesco dell'Ongaro's, where she met the American poet and scholar Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

After her graduation she traveled to Rome together with the American art collector James Jackson Jarves to attend a gathering at the American sculptor Anne Whitney's residence. 'Her handsome dark person', Whitney wrote to her sister, was 'set off by a broad gold chain wound round and round her head and a white shawl'.[9] Remond was sophisticated, stylish, successful. Her clothing, like that of other Black Americans, many of whom appeared in the period's photographs, 'highlighted their sense of racial pride'. [10] The long, broad gold chain she wore around her head testified to her class-based upward mobility and success. The image she affirmed of herself resembled portraits commissioned by free Black Americans from the mid nineteenth century in which they represented themselves as empowering models for others to emulate, conveying, as historians Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer note, 'self-worth, dignity, beauty, intellectual achievement, and leadership'. [11]

At another reception, organized in Rome in March 1878, Remond, now married to an Italian, Lazzaro Pintor, appeared again elegantly dressed: 'She was a bride, [...] and wore her bridal dress of grey silk [...] It appears that she is very clever, and a female doctor', wrote Matilda

---

[9] Qtd. in Sibyl Ventress Brownlee, *Out of the Abundance of the Heart*: *Sarah Ann Parker Remond's Quest for Freedom* (doctoral thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1997), p. 154 and in Angelita Reyes, 'Elusive Autobiographical Performativity', in John Cullen Gruesser and Hanna Wallinger (eds.), *Loopholes and Retreats*: *African American Writers and the Nineteenth Century*, Forecaast 17 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009), pp. 141–68 (p. 160).

[10] Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation*, p. 23.

[11] Ibid., p. 14.

Lucas in her travel journal.[12] A month later, Remond attended another reception, this time organized by her nephew and his wife who were running a hotel in Rome, 'elegantly dressed in lavender silk'.[13] It was at the nephew Edmund Putnam and his wife Gertie's hotel Palazzo Moroni, next to St. Peter's, where Frederick Douglass had lunch with them in January 1887. Two days later, Douglass visited the sculptor Edmonia Lewis, another talented and successful Black woman living and working in Italy. Upon his return from Egypt, Douglass again met Remond and her sisters in Rome: 'It was very pleasant to meet so far away from home these dear people. Like [their brother] Charles they detest prejudice of color and say they would not live in the U. States, if you could or would give them America!'.[14] Despite such distancing from her roots, Remond always considered herself American; her prolonged expatriation, however, can be seen as a rejection of the white supremacist society of the United States.

Although she never returned to her native America, Remond continued to protest against discrimination during her expatriation. In 1866, while living in Florence, she addressed the failure of Reconstruction, arguing that 'the Southerners and their Northern allies are determined that the Black race shall not be recognized, shall not receive justice […]. No one who has kept pace with the history of the coloured race can hope to re-educate a nation at once: therefore the only remedy is to check this hatred, made up of fashion, prejudice, and intense ignorance'.[15] To end white supremacy, hooks suggests, 'is a struggle to change a system, a structure'.[16] Remond raised awareness on both shores of the Atlantic about the continuing discrimination and racist injustice that permeated Black experience in the United States. Moreover, with the example of her own success she created a counter-narrative to this prejudiced discourse, contesting persistent stereotypes of Black inferiority. Her experience contributes to rewriting American narratives of Black experience that need to be uncovered and deconstructed, as hooks suggests, ‘so that new paths, different journeys, are possible’.[17] The process of telling Black history, hooks continues, ‘enables political self-recovery’.[18]

---

[12] Matilda Lucas, *Two Englishwomen in Rome, 1871–1900* (London: Methuen, 1938), p. 99.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Frederick Douglass to Amy Post, 10 June 1887, D.93, Post Family Papers, University of Rochester Frederick Douglass Project.

[15] Sarah Parker Remond, 'The Negro Race in America', *London Daily News*, 22 September 1866, dated Florence, Italy, 19 September 1866.

[16] hooks, *Killing Rage*, p. 195.

Not much is known about Remond’s last years in Italy, but according to her death certificate, she passed away in December 1894, at the mature age of sixty-eight, at the Hospital of Sant’Antonio in Rome. At the time of her death, she was still married to Pintor and her residence was Florence; her profession as indicated in the death certificate was surgeon (‘medico chirurgo’).

Remond thus became actively engaged in social and political change and history-writing, both as an activist and through the example of her own life. Her journey was geographical and ideological: in cosmopolitan Europe she constructed a progressive model of Black womanhood, one of independence, intellectuality, and success. She troubled dominant notions of Blackness, working against patriarchy and white supremacy. Remond showed how empowerment and positive images of Black womanhood emerge in the context of lived experience.

---

[17] Ibid., p. 41.

[18] Ibid., p. 47.

# Bibliography

Brownlee, Sibyl Ventress, *Out of the Abundance of the Heart*: *Sarah Ann Parker Remond's Quest for Freedom* (doctoral thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1997).

Douglass, Frederick to Amy Post, 10 June 1887, D.93, Post Family Papers, University of Rochester Frederick Douglass Project.

Fish, Cheryl J. and Farah J. Griffin, 'Introduction', in Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish (eds.), *A Stranger in the Village*: *Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), pp. xiii–xvii.

Hill Collins, Patricia, *Black Feminist Thought*: *Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

hooks, bell, *Killing Rage*: *Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).

Lucas, Matilda, *Two Englishwomen in Rome, 1871–1900* (London: Methuen, 1938).

Remond, Sarah P., 'Sarah P. Remond', in Matthew Davenport Hill (ed.), *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich*; *Biographical Sketches of Men and Women Who Have, by an Extraordinary Use of Their Opportunities, Benefited Their Fellow-Creatures* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1861), pp. 276–86.

Remond, Sarah Parker, 'The Negro Race in America', *London Daily News*, 22 September 1866, dated Florence, Italy, 19 September 1866.

Reyes, Angelita, 'Elusive Autobiographical Performativity', in John Cullen Gruesser and Hanna Wallinger (eds.), *Loopholes and Retreats*: *African American Writers and the Nineteenth Century*, Forecaast 17 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009), pp. 141–68.

Willis, Deborah and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation*: *Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

# 24. Making Latinx Art: Juana Valdes at the Crossroads of Latinx and Latin American Art

### *Arlene Dávila*

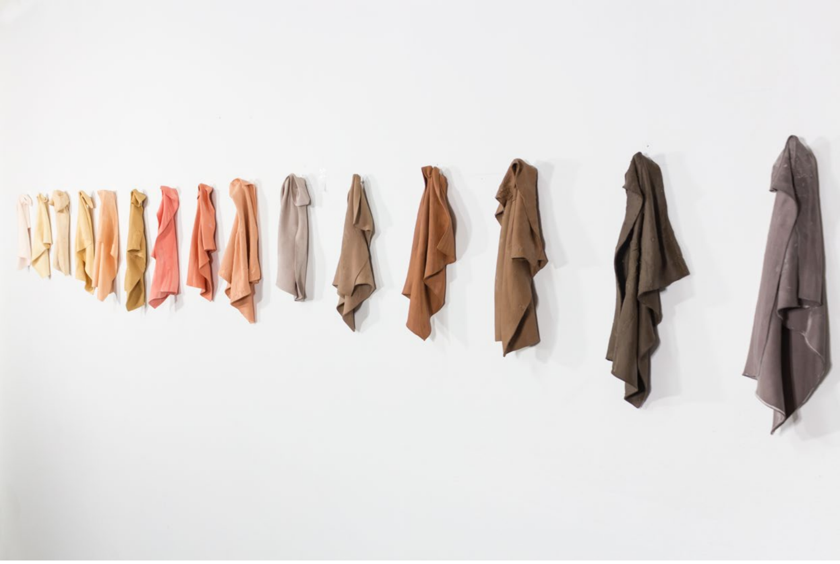


Fig. 24.1 Juana Valdes, 'Redbone Colored China Rags', 2017, CC BY 4.0.

Latinx and Latin American art have been historically contingent on globalization, particularly on the US empire and its involvement in Latin America. The relevant question today is how current globalization

© 2019 Arlene Dávila, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.24

trends impact on our theorization of Latinx and Latin American art in relation to each other, and what are the particular challenges, openings and concerns for artists maneuvering through contemporary art world trends. In what follows I consider these issues not to reify differences between Latinx and Latin American art but to account for and appreciate the different projects and politics that are involved in their promotion. Additionally, through the work of Afro-Latinx artist Juana Valdes I discuss the importance of confronting the differential valorization of Latinx and Latin American art whenever we teach, study and exhibit these artists, and why it is so important to carve a space for the study and evaluation of Latinx art. My argument is that efforts by curators, scholars and artists in defining a space for intervention for Latinx artists need to be analyzed in relation to a global contemporary art market that increasingly exacerbates distinctions between Latinx and Latin American art and artists, at the very same time that it situationally elides the resulting hierarchies and distinctions in order to profit more ably from these categories.[1]

The last decade has seen a growing consensus about the need to specify, define and promote Latinx art as a space of scholarly, curatorial concern and as a market category. Some of the key agents and spaces include the UCLA's Chicano Center's Aver Revision Art History Project (2002–present), and the Latino Art Now Conference launched as part of the Inter-University Program for Latino/a Studies (2005). More recently we have seen the foundation of the US Latinx Art Forum, by a younger generation of Latinx art historian's challenging the College Art Association's lack of panels and spaces devoted to Latinx art, and the US Latinx Art Futures Ford Foundation conference organized by artist Teresita Fernandez (2016) was also pivotal to the current Latinx art movement.

These spaces have been central to teasing out the relationship between Latinx and Latin American art, and to ensuring Latino/a artists are not easily ignored and bypassed. Rather they must be recognized as an integral component of American art, and also an important group constitutive of Latin American art. In particular, it is important to focus on artists of Latin American background in the US, whether they are first generation or have a longer history in the country and who work primarily in the United States, as differentiated from Latin American artists who work primarily in Latin America and who are not immersed in the US Latino/a experience. This provides a means of addressing the misrecognition of generations of US Latinx artists who are ignored both by the United States' canon and by the nation-centric biases that dominate Latin American art. There is a growing concern to recognize Latinx art as a project, not a fixed identity, a blueprint for the acknowledgment and identification of the work of artists who have been consistently bypassed by American and Latin American art history.

---

[1] This paper draws from ongoing research on Latinx art worlds, involving interviews and participation with arsis, and stakeholders of the Latinx art movement and dealers, curators, gallerists and other participants of Latinx and Latin American art worlds in the United States and Latin America from 2016–18. See my forthcoming book *Latinx Art*: *Artists*, *Markets and Politics* for a larger discussion of these issues.

Advocates for Latinx art follow similar paths to those who helped to launch Latin American art, and any other specialized category. These paths also stem from institutional spaces and interests that create these categories as differentiated spheres of production, study, collection and consumption. For instance, since the late 1970s major auctions houses like Sotheby (1979) and Christie's (1977) and most recently Phillips (2009) have held regular Latin American art auctions, feeding interest in the category. Meanwhile major survey exhibitions helped to consolidate Latin American art as a fashionable subject for collectors, institutional spaces, and scholars devoted to its study, and it was marketed as such across the United States and beyond. Consequently, while still relegated below a dominant Anglo- and Eurocentric canon, Latin American art now carries weight with important institutions that create and sustain what Arjun Appadurai has termed 'regimes of value' for the evaluation and valuation of Latin American art.[2]

Most interestingly, the value of Latin American art is increasingly fueled by a number of global stakeholders across the world, spanning the US, Latin America and Europe. Examples of how Latin American stakeholders are intervening in the international collection practices of major museums, and hence in the overall valuation of Latin American art, include the sponsorship of a Latin American and Caribbean acquisition fund at MOMA by art collector Patricia Cisneros (2006–), the creation of a Curator of Latin American art endowed position at MOMA by Estrellita Brodsky, and the rise in regional Latin American art fairs, such as ArteBA (1991), ArtRio (2010), ArtBo (2005) and Park ArtLima (2013), all modeled after international mega fairs like ArtBasel.[3]

---

[2] See Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*: *Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

In sum, the growing popularity of Latin American art shows how useful categories can be to carve out spaces in the art world; as well as their uselessness if a movement lacks the necessary capital to fund sustainable infrastructure. Such is the case with Latinx art, which grew out of the Nuyorican and Chicano art movement, as part of a demand for fair recognition and to expose, challenge and transform the whiteness and Eurocentrism of mainstream museums, which have marginalized the artistic creations and input of people of color in the art world and society at large. This arts-culture-based social movement was all about forging and validating alternative aesthetics as well as alternative spaces such as institutions like the Taller Boricua and El Museo del Barrio. As scholars and art historians of this period note, this campaign resulted in art that was connected to communities; that was informed by larger social movements around equity, anti-racism and social justice; and that was not defined by market prerogatives but by the impulse to expand Nuyoricans' symbolic and aesthetic repertoires.

This history has shaped debates over the recognition of Latinx art from the beginning, both its racialization and its connection with a racial minoritarian status, and the 'assumptions that it is monolithically concerned with identity politics and/or is lacking in aesthetic and conceptual experimentation.'[4] Similarly Latinx art and artists have historically lacked patrons, while their typical omission from the market means that their work is rarely assigned economic value, making it impossible to be prized. This represents a circular and self-perpetuating problem: lack of access to the market hinders the evaluation of work by Latinx artists, and hence their future ability to enter the market.

The result is that even within Latino/Latin American art spaces there's a lot of reluctance to identify as a Latino/Latin American artist, — in itself the greatest indication of the whiteness of the art market, and the immediate devaluation of any artist that cannot come across as 'unmarked' and hence white. Most Latin American artists don't want to be identified as such because it compromises their ability to enter the 'white world' of contemporary art markets, even when most Latin American art dealers recognize that the label, together with the institutional structures in place to promote Latin American art, have formed the platform to build these artists in the first place. If any identity is to be claimed, it is demonstrably better to select the more appreciated category of 'Latin American art', never that of a 'Latino/a'. The representation of Carmen Herrera is a good example: even though she's lived in the States for over fifty years, she is always described as Cuban-born, never as a Latina. Yes, some artists have roots and connections with home countries, yet at the root of Latinx identity is the 'Neither here or nor there effect' that distinguishes Latinxs from Latin Americans, who are most often also shunned from their heritage countries.

---

[3] See Giuliana Borea, 'Fuelling Museums and Art Fairs in Peru's Capital: The Work of the Market and Multi-scale Assemblages' *World Art*, 6:2 (2017), 315–37.

[4] Adriana Zavala, '2015 Latin@ Art at the Intersection', *Aztlan*, 40:1 (2015), 125–40 (p. 125).

In sum, when grappling with Latinx artists we must confront the lack of institutional structures and market interests invested in this category, and the fact that they lack the nation-centric references and connections that have provided value for Latin American art, among other issues. Ultimately we have to grapple with racism in the art world, and how it affects artists of color and the lack of institutional spaces promoting, and ultimately valuing their work.[5] The recognition and evaluation of Latinx art therefore depends on US-based curators, scholars, museum professionals and art stakeholders finally turning their eyes to these artists, and understanding the multiplicity of experiences that shape and enrich Latinx art, and all types of 'contemporary American art'.

Take for example multidisciplinary artist Juana Valdes, an afro-Cuban artist who came to Miami as a young child, and who, like most Latinx artists I spoke to, has had a lot of experience navigating the cultural politics of Latinx art. Valdes was one of the speakers during the 2016 Ford Foundation US Latinx Art Futures symposium, after which I asked her more about her experiences in the contemporary art world. In particular, Valdes has long been confronted with the need to navigate her experiences as an immigrant, a Cuban artist, a Latinx and Caribbean artist, a woman and foremost a Black woman, which is what people immediately see in the white spaces of the art world where she's often the only Black person in the room.

---

[5] See James Case-Leal, 'Art Statistics 2016–2017', produced for Arts in NYC course taught at CUNY Guttman College by James Case-Leal, Spring 2017, http://www.havenforthedispossessed.org/; Maximiliano Duron, 'Latino Art Underrepresented at College Art Association's Annual Conference', *Art News*, 20 September 2016, http://www.artnews.com/2016/09/20/study-latino-art-underrepresented-at-college-art-associations-annual-conference/

Valdes's work is geared to ensuring the totality of her experience is not compromised and that her Caribbean, Cuban and Hispanic immigrant experience and her Blackness are recognized in simultaneity, fully aware that often these categories (Caribbean, Cuban, Black and Hispanic) are often considered in isolation or even held to be total opposites of each other. Her work is all about addressing this complexity head on, although there are some categories that are easier for her to navigate than others. I was not surprised that, for her, the most challenging category is Latin American art: As she tells; 'my work does not fit the visual demands. It's not colorful, it's not dealing with history of Latin America […] or does not scream to you Latin America.' In fact, Valdes has purposefully reduced the amount of color in her work, seeking to distance herself from what she saw as the stereotypical colorful aesthetic associated with Latin American art in survey shows, similar to the dominant aesthetic of Hispanic art in the United States in the 1980s. Most of her works, from sculpture and ceramics to prints, are created in shades of white, beige and black, playing with neutrality and translucency. This is especially the case in her use of bone china, a material she works with in *Colored China Rags* (2012) and as the basis of some of the decorative objects in *An Inherent View of the World* (2015) to evoke questions of value, race, commodity and trade. One of the first commodities to be globalized, bone china was brought in from China through Europe, and then exported as a highly sought commodity in the Americas and the Caribbean, where it is still a sign of prestige that conveys an aesthetic of middle class respectability. Valdes recalls it adorning living rooms in Cuba, where it was displayed as a prized object and a marker of dignified status. With this material she foregrounds colorism and questions of value, and its creation in the Americas invokes the commodity fetishism that is at the root of both the Caribbean slave trade, and the making of luxury items. *Colored China Rags* depicts cloth rags commonly used for housework and domestic work, but made in bone china, which involved coloring and altering a material known for its whiteness and pureness with shades that evoked human skin.

Valdes foregrounds race, color and empire in most of her pieces as the formative experiences that are central to her Cuban identity off the island, and the reality of what it is to live as a Black person in America. In her view these topics find little room within the category of Latin American art, which tends to embrace a whiter South American version of identity and does not highlight Latin America's African roots; she has therefore found it less welcoming to her work. In particular, Valdes has identified the lack of conversations about color and race to be most oppressive for her and other Latinx artists. They can experience and talk about racism more openly than in Latin America, where these topics are still largely considered taboo and are often drowned out by nationalist ideologies that disavow the very existence of racism. In fact, it was not a Latin American art museum or collector who first acquired Valdes' work, but the Perez Museum in Miami through its African-American and African Diaspora Acquisitions fund. The museum purchased *An Inherent View of the World* (2014–15). This installation of decorative objects made of porcelain, bone china, glass, and wood, set atop a large wooden table, builds on her desire to tease out a relationship between identities and objects against the backdrop of a long history of colonialism, trade and capitalism.

One would think that, as a Cuban American, Valdes would have benefitted from the growing popularity of Cuban art among collectors of Latin American art. Cuban art has been given more attention than most other Latin American countries and the rest of the Caribbean, due to the state funding and infrastructure that Cuba provides for artists particularly through the celebration of Havana's Biennial (1984) and the consistent patronage of wealthy Cuban collectors in exile, together with Cuban arts and humanities foundations such as CINTAS (1957–). Boundaries between Cuba and the US are always shifting, although the fetishizing of a reified isolation and the exoticism of a socialist country remains a source of validation and value. Yet Valdes' engagement with the booming category of Cuban art is highly complex.

One of the ironies of the growing economic relationships between the US and Cuba is the budding fetish for Cuban art 'discovered' and purchased on the island. A gallerist representing Cuban artists described this trend as voyeuristic: 'They think it's very sexy to go to Cuba, and they want to be seen as ahead of the curve.'[6] He described how young

---

[6] Conversation with the author.

Cuban artists have become a brand, whereas Cuban artists in the US are seemingly more accessible and known; they have trajectories that can be read in terms of 'quality' recognized by the art market, signs that are lacking or less marked among younger unknown artists. This Cuban art fetish has been reinforced by the increased ease of travel to Cuba, which has launched a whole subsector of art tours, such as 'Cubanartours' to expose participants to 'one of the most exciting and thriving are scenes of the world.'[7] Cuba's 'thriving Contemporary art scene.' More than one Cuban gallerist in the US or abroad described bringing work to Cuba to sell, either through the biennial or through local art entrepreneurs, because collectors prefer to buy in Cuba rather than in the US or Europe. As he tells me: 'It's the same work, the same artists, but collectors won't buy it in the States, but they'll gobble it in Cuba.' Valdes is fully aware of this trend. In her words: 'they want to buy that story, they don't want to buy the American story. It's part of the exoticness to say I saw the studio and the artists, and we had this amazing experience in Cuba […] and that's part of the value and the script and what gives it value.' In this way, the popularity of Cuban art has also helped to reinforce national boundaries, or as Valdes put it: 'If you're in Cuba, you're IT. If you're in Miami, then you're one of the many.'[8] This phenomenon also affects other US Latino/as, who are similarly unrecognized or at risk of losing any recognition within their countries after they have migrated. However, these tensions affect Cuban artists in particular, given that Cuba's political situation has placed greater constraints on artists' movement, migration and return, and hence their ability to maintain links to Cuba once they leave.

In particular, Valdes regrets this trend because the popularity of Cuban art has neither helped Caribbeanize Latin American art, nor raised awareness of the African diaspora in Latin America. This is yet another reason why the category of Latinx art seems to be a space where all that she values as central to her identity is at least recognized, and not seen as contradictory. 'I don't think the art world knows what Latinx art is, they just figure out what Latin American art is and what Mexican art is. They're catching up […] It brought something that is happening out in the street and in practice, out there into the institution […] and said to the people, you need to look at this.'[9]

---

[7] https://www.cubartours.com

[8] Conversation with the author.

[9] Ibid.

In sum, artists like Juana Valdes are producing rich work that transcends categories. It is a possibility both poignant and revealing that it might require the promotion and elevation of yet another category — one that confronts and challenges the art world to see Latinx artists — that helps us finally to take note of their work.

# Bibliography

Appadurai, Arjun, *The Social Life of Things*: *Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Borea, Giuliana, 'Fuelling Museums and Art Fairs in Peru's Capital: The Work of the Market and Multi-scale Assemblages' *World Art*, 6:2 (2017), 315–37.

Case-Leal, James, 'Art Statistics 2016–2017', produced for Arts in NYC course taught at CUNY Guttman College by James Case-Leal, Spring 2017, http://www.havenforthedispossessed.org/

Dávila, Arlene, *Latinx Art*: *Artists*, *Markets and Politics* (Duke University Press, forthcoming).

Duron, Maximiliano, 'Latino Art Underrepresented at College Art Association's Annual Conference', *Art News*, 20 September 2016, http://www.artnews.com/2016/09/20/study-latino-art-underrepresented-at-college-art-associations-annual-conference/

Ford Foundation, *US Latinx Arts Futures Symposium*, 16 September 2016, New York: Ford Foundation, https://latinx-art.tumblr.com/

Valdes, Juana, artist's biography, http://www.juanamvaldes.com/blog/

Zavala, Adriana, '2015 Latin@ Art at the Intersection', *Aztlan*, 40:1 (2015), 125–40.

# 25. Moving Mountains: Harriet Hosmer's Nineteenth-Century Italian Migration to Become the First Professional Woman Sculptor

### *Patricia Cronin*

I first became interested in American neoclassical art when I was researching my monumental three-ton Carrara marble statue, *Memorial To A Marriage* (2002), which addressed marriage equality before gay marriage was legal anywhere in the United States. I used a 'nationalist' form, American neoclassical sculpture, to address a federal failure, the prohibition of same sex marriage.

Because the only legal protections available to homosexual couples were wills, healthcare proxies and power of attorney documents (depressing papers about our deterioration, incapacitation and death instead of a celebration our life together) I designed a mortuary double portrait sepulcher and permanently installed it on our burial plot in the place the Garden and Rural Cemetery Movement designed as America's Père Lachaise Cemetery, Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx. Our tomb will be on view through eternity. Or as I tell my female artist friends — if you want permanent public art, you've got to buy the land.

© 2019 Patricia Cronin, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.25

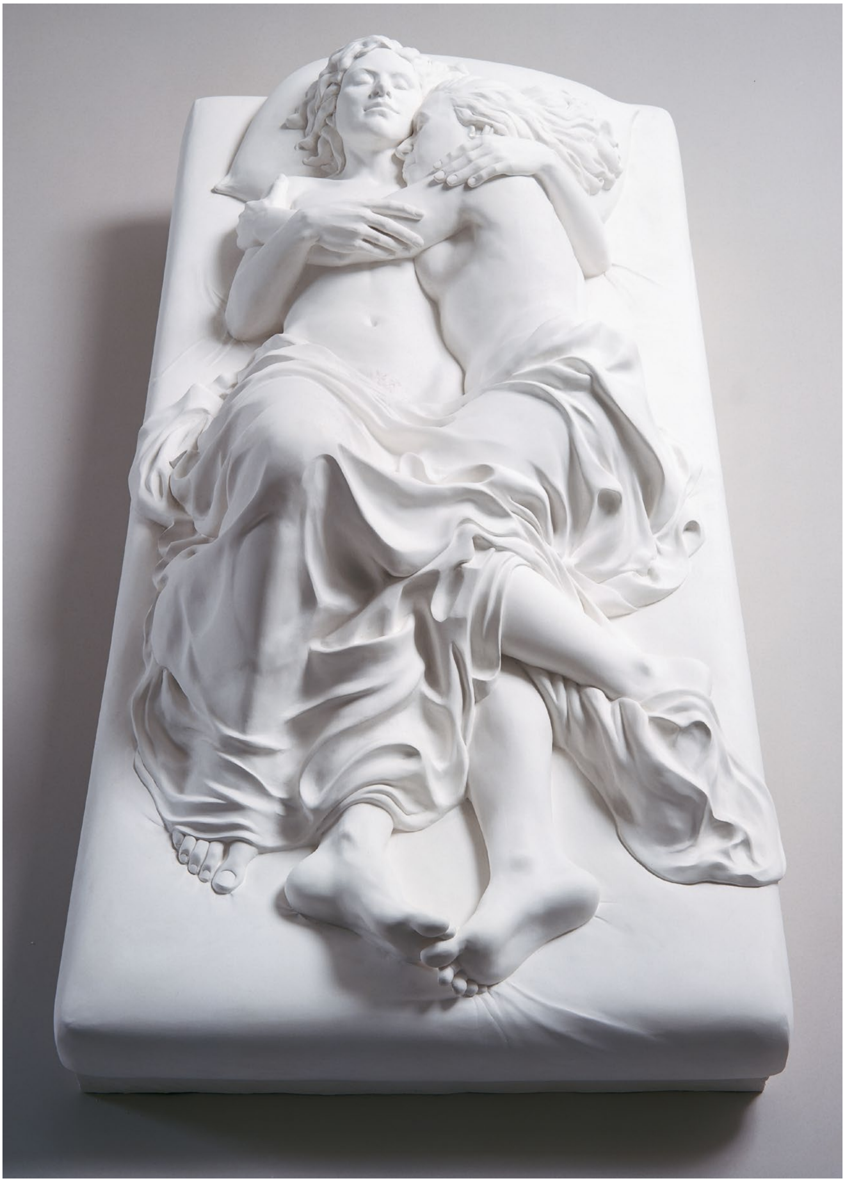


Fig. 25.1 Patricia Cronin, *Memorial To A Marriage*, 2002. Carrara marble, over life size, photographed by Steven Bates. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

To make my first marble statue, I had to study the entire history of sculpture and, while combing through every tome, I stumbled across an extraordinary nineteenth-century marble sculpture of *Beatrice Cenci* (Fig. 25.2). I thought, 'that's strange, I don't know this one.' I looked at the bottom of the page and read the name, 'Harriet Hosmer.' I thought, 'hmmm, I've never heard of her.' I looked at it again and then wondered, 'WHY have I never heard of her?' I knew then and there she would be my next project. So, while I was thinking about my own death I discovered someone else's life.

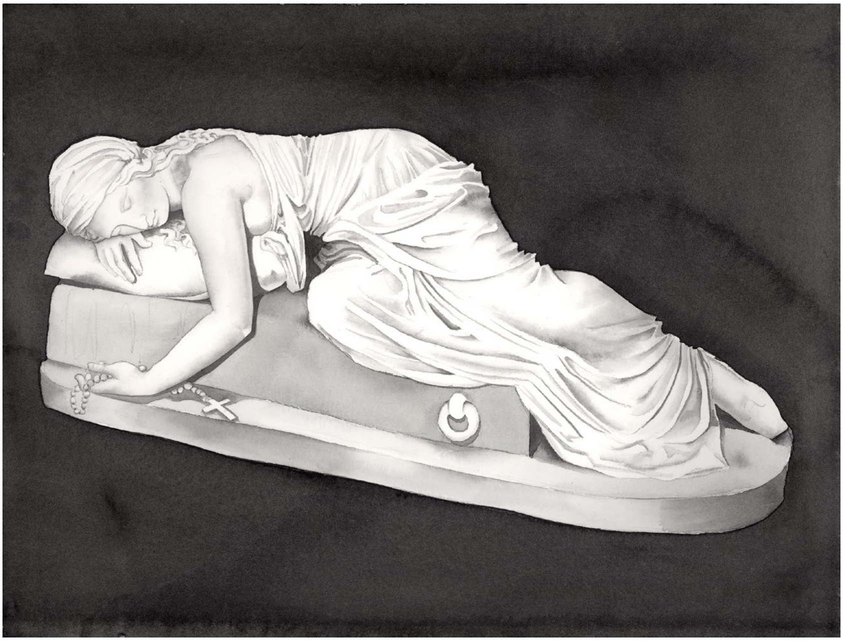


Fig. 25.2 Patricia Cronin, *Beatrice Cenci*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 15 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Beatrice Cenci*, 1856. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

Harriet Hosmer was born in 1830 in Watertown, Massachusetts and lost her mother, two brothers and her sister to consumption before she was twelve years old. Her father Dr Hosmer, not wanting to risk losing his sole remaining family member, bought her a dog, a canoe, a gun and horse to inspire a strong, physically active outdoor lifestyle and then sent her to Miss Sedgwick's school in Lenox, Massachusetts for a progressive education. These strategies worked well and Hosmer began to exhibit many of the vibrant personality traits she would become known for: a precocious prankster with a lively sense of humor, intense curiosity and boundless confidence. At that time all women were barred from attending college in the US so she was denied the anatomy courses necessary to carve realistic figurative neoclassical sculptures, which defined American art in the mid-nineteenth century. As a result, any woman who wanted to be a professional artist and practice her profession was forced to leave her birth country, and Hosmer migrated to Rome in 1852 when she was twenty-two years old. She apprenticed with the leading neoclassical sculptor at the time, British artist John Gibson, and within a few years struck out on her own and became known as the first professional woman sculptor.

Hosmer lived within a lively Anglo-American expatriate community of famous writers and artists, as well as a circle of 'independent women', internationally renowned actresses, artists and writers, who were never romantically involved with men. In her time, she had a prominent career, was critically acclaimed, financially successful, and exhibited in all the international exhibitions. She was infamous. Nathaniel Hawthorne even based the character of Hilda, from his 1860 novel *The Marble Faun*, on Hosmer. And yet she is largely unknown today.

This essay will consider how she created and maintained a critically acclaimed career, pushed the boundaries of acceptable female propriety to a degree that was inconceivable in the United States, including: owning a large studio workshop that employed over two dozen Italian workmen, adeptly handling jealous male competitors, and being involved in several long-term same-sex relationships. How was her work received then and now? Are there any lessons we can learn from her experiences that shed light on the plight of women artists today, 150 years later? As a contemporary artist, I wanted to create a series to reveal the complexities of Hosmer's career, reputation, and legacy.

In 1852 in Italy, it was scandalous for a woman to walk down the street unaccompanied by a male relative. Nonetheless, it was a liberating environment for women who were part of the English and American expatriate communities based in Rome and Florence, because they were freed from the restrictive behavioral norms of their birth countries and nor were they Italian, so they did not generally have to follow Italian social rules for women either. They were 'stranieri,' strangers. For example, Hosmer famously irritated the Italian police corps, the *carabinieri*, by galloping her horse alone through the Villa Borghese Gardens.[1]

Hosmer owned and ran an extensive artist's studio at Via Margutta 5 near the other male sculptors with a workshop full of assistants, as was usual practice to speed up production to satisfy a growing clientele. In a famous 1867 photograph, Hosmer is shown at the center surrounded by assistants who seem to fade away around her, while her arms are confidently folded as she directly engages the viewer's gaze. She is the only person without facial hair and you can see her *Fountain of the Siren* (1861) in the courtyard behind her. The photograph is astonishing because it documents the fact that this woman's creative production generated enough money to employ these two dozen men. This is particularly notable given that the role of Italian women was almost exclusively domestic, so the men's salaries had to support their entire families including wives and multiple children. Hosmer used photography to carefully craft her professional image, the size of the studio's production and the scale of her work. In an illustration, *Memorable Women of America*: *Harriet Hosmer in her Studio* from an unknown periodical, a wealthy American family visiting her studio as part of the Grand Tour is portrayed clandestinely peering from behind a curtain at the rare novelty of an American sculptress hard at work. Hosmer deftly used the proliferation of publishing at this time to publicize herself and her work. Usually it worked very well, increasing her fame, but it caused a backlash, which I shall discuss further.

She was infamous in her time; even today, her works are in some of the best museum collections in the world and yet she is largely unknown.

Who is written into history? Who is forgotten? Why, how and what are the conditions in which eradication can occur? How is value determined? These elements coalesce at the intersection of the ivory tower (scholarship) and the art market (sales) in the catalogue raisonné.

A catalogue raisonné is a critical scholarly archive of the complete artistic production of a single artist. It is the most prestigious book that can be written about an artist because it documents their every artwork, its exhibition, publication, and provenance (the succession of ownership and location) as well as art-historical research. When I started this project I could count on two hands the number of catalogues raisonné on women artists, of any nationality, in any language. Since a legitimate publisher wasn't going to hire a qualified art historian and pay them a salary for five to ten years, which is usually how long it takes to research and write a catalogue raisonné, I decided to make one for Hosmer.

---

[1] Kate Culkin, *Harriet Hosmer*: *A Cultural Bibliography* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), pp. 31–32.

I'm not an art historian; I just play one in my studio. In my *Harriet Hosmer*: *Lost and Found, A Catalogue Raisonné* (2009), each of Hosmer's neoclassical marble statues is represented by a monochromatic watercolor painted by hand, unlike the photographs an art historian would have requested from museums, to make visible that it is an artist who has taken on this enormous job. Otherwise the critiques of doctoral programs in art history, academic publishing and the art market, which are central to the project, are lost. Catalogue raisonnés usually read like phone books or dictionaries, but they don't have to. In addition to the usual catalogue raisonné texts, I've included my version of social art history at the end of each catalogue entry to form a fuller, more complete representation of the artist, the work and the context in which she created it.

*The Clasped Hands of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1853), with whom Hosmer was close friends, is one of the few bronzes she made, and is on view in a period room in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They actually used to sell plaster copies in the Metropolitan Museum of Art gift shop next to the fake Degas horses. I haven't gone back in time and found a random female artist, liked her work, and think you should too. I'm saying I found the most famous female sculptor of the nineteenth century and frankly she was hidden in plain sight — in the Met gift shop! Why was it there when Hosmer was a largely forgotten nineteenth-century woman artist? Was it because of the well-known literary subjects, the romantic symbolism of marital fidelity in the clasped right hands, or the enclosed printed quote from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous love poem, 'How Do I Love They, Let Me Count The Ways'? This exemplifies the particular fragility of fame and fortune experienced by less powerful individuals.

The subjects of neoclassical sculpture were generally taken from the Bible, Greek myths, history and literature. Hosmer's popular 'fancy piece' for parlor rooms, *Puck on a Toad Stool* (1856) (Fig. 25.3) was inspired by William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the 1850s Hosmer was selling these for \$800–\$1200 each. There are more than thirty known versions. But Dr. William H. Gerdts said, 'if Hosmer said she made thirty, she made sixty!'[2] Well-to-do English and Americans in Rome on the Grand Tour would visit their compatriots abroad and purchase these marble sculptures as high-end souvenirs to be sent back home to show their sophistication, refinement and worldliness.

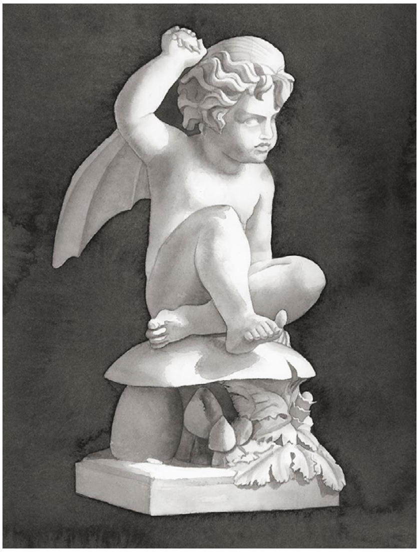


Fig. 25.3 Patricia Cronin, *Puck*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 15 x 12 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Puck*, 1855. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

Moreover, as we know, the subject position of the creator of a work of art makes a huge difference to the work itself, as exemplified by Hosmer's resistance to the dominant male narrative in art. An early example is Hosmer's *Beatrice Cenci* (1856) (see Fig. 25.2), the work that first caught my eye. Hosmer depicted Cenci during a moment of peace in her Castel Sant'Angelo prison cell the night before Pope Clement VII ordered her execution for murdering her incestuous father, Count Francesco Cenci, in 1599. This establishes Hosmer's interest in the subject of a woman seeking justice for herself while maintaining her dignity, even in the face of death.

---

[2] Conversation with the author, 25 September 2007.

Another milestone in Hosmer's rising success was her winning the commission of the *Tomb of Judith Falconnet* (1857–58) (Fig. 25.4) sculpture in the Church of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte near the Spanish Steps where the expatriate community worshiped. It is the first work of art by an American artist, male or female, permanently installed in a Roman church. Death wasn't an abstraction for Hosmer. Her sister Helen died at fourteen years old and within a decade Hosmer was sculpting the sixteen-year old Judith's body on the tomb with solemn sensitivity. Her 'brethren sculptors',[3] as she called them, weren't threatened by the ladies 'patting their clay,'[4] as the men called it, until she started winning prestigious and lucrative mortuary commissions like the *Tomb of Judith Falconnet* instead of them.

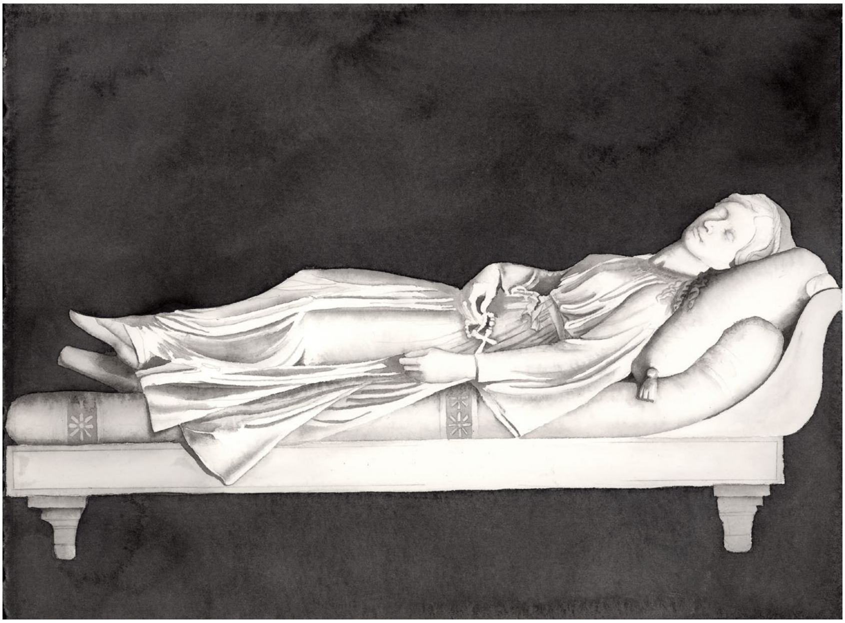


Fig. 25.4 Patricia Cronin, *Tomb of Judith Falconnet*, 2006. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 15 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Tomb of Judith Falconnet*, 1857–58. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

---

[3] Harriet Hosmer, 'The Process of Sculpture', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 14:86 (1864), 734–37.

[4] Harriet Hosmer, 'The Doleful Ditty of the Roman Caffe Greco', *Evening Transcript* (Boston), 17 November 1864, p. 1.

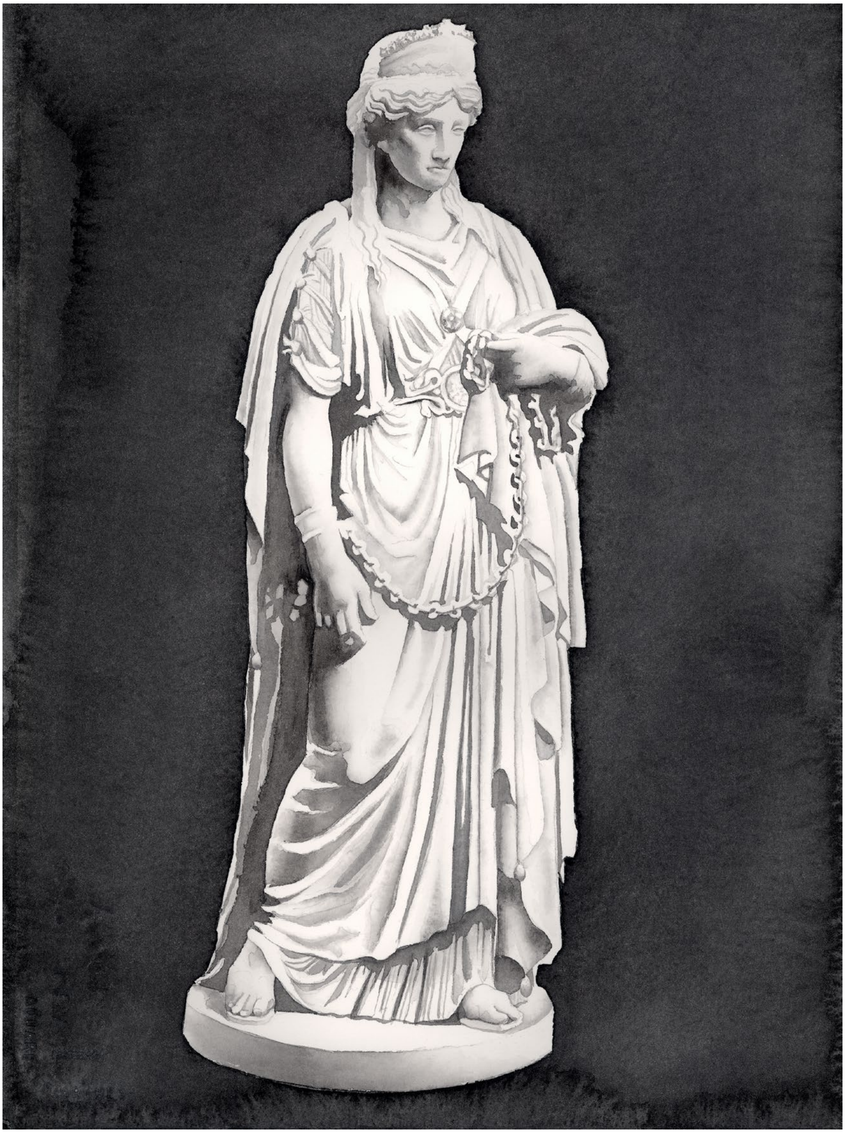


Fig. 25.5 Patricia Cronin, *Zenobia*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 15 x 12 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Zenobia*, 1859. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

Hosmer's *Zenobia* (1859) (Fig. 25.5) depicting the third-century-CE ruler of Palmyra is another example of Hosmer choosing different subjects than her male counterparts. The tragic story of Cleopatra, who committed suicide when conquered by Octavian, the future Roman Emperor Augustus, was a popular theme with them. Hosmer chose a different queen. Zenobia co-ruled present-day Syria with her husband, King Odaenathus, until his assassination in 267 CE. She then ruled alone for seven years in proxy for her four-year-old son, conquering Egypt and much of Asia Minor. In 274 CE she was finally defeated by the Roman Emperor Aurelian, taken to Rome as a war trophy, and marched through the streets in chains. Hosmer depicts a regal woman, a queen in crisis, but still dignified; the heavy gold chains appear like weightless jewelry as opposed to an unbearable burden. Zenobia appealed to Hosmer as a subject because she was a well-educated, experienced military leader and a diplomat. Emperor Aurelian planned to execute her, but she used her diplomatic skills, talked him out of it, married a Roman nobleman, had several more children and lived out the rest of her life in Tivoli. This is in stark contrast to the male artists' representations of Cleopatra's eroticized final act of killing herself.

Word of Hosmer's monumental *Zenobia* quickly attracted admirers, as evidenced in an 1859 *Harper's Weekly* article 'Miss Hosmer's Studio at Rome' with an illustration of the Prince of Wales visiting her studio. John Gibson is depicted explaining the merits of Hosmer's work to the prince and Hosmer is drawn diminutively and silently to the side. A senior male mentor and sculptor was needed to vouch for a woman's work — no matter how obviously skillfully executed, ambitiously scaled and thoughtfully composed. And it worked: the prince became an enthusiastic supporter and purchased several sculptures, including a *Puck* marble that he installed in his room at Oxford. Nathaniel Hawthorne was the first to compare *Zenobia* to the *Athena Giustiniani*, a Roman copy of the late-fifth/early-fourth-century BCE Greek statue (the goddess of wisdom and war), and the Barberini *Juno*, a sixteenth-century copy of a Greek statue (the queen of the Olympian gods) that Hosmer would have known and that was on view in the Vatican Museums.

Then Hosmer, still the most well-known and renowned female sculptor of the period, made a grave 'mistake'. She entered her *Zenobia* sculpture along with *Puck* and *Medusa* in the 1862 London Exhibition, attended by over six million people. It was an instantaneous critical success and a scandal immediately ensued. Hosmer's less celebrated male rivals were furious a woman was overshadowing them and they spread a rumor that she hadn't made *Zenobia* herself, but that it was the work of one of her Italian assistants. They widely circulated the rumor and published it in *The Queen* newspaper and then reprinted it in the *Art Journal* (London).[5] Hosmer had long heard the disparaging gossip of her jealous male competitors, but this was different. The accusation was intended to halt her growing reputation and ruin her career.

Hosmer fought back swiftly at a time when most women couldn't raise their voices and in a way nobody imagined: first, she filed a lawsuit claiming damages of 1000 pounds and then, publicly, in print, spoke the truth. She adeptly rallied her successful male allies from Hiram Powers to Nathaniel Hawthorne to write publicly on her behalf; the paper that had printed the lies published a retraction and a lukewarm apology.[6] She wrote an article, 'The Process of Sculpture,' published in 1864 in *The Atlantic Monthly*,[7] which infuriated her male counterparts because it lifted the veil on the fact that all sculptors used assistants as keeping with the historic traditions and necessities of sculpture. Then *The New York Evening Post* published her riotous poem, 'The Doleful Ditty of the Roman Caffe Greco,'[8] depicting male artists at a popular watering hole and gathering place for the expatriate Roman art community bemoaning their competition with the lady sculptors; the poem ridiculed their fragile male egos. Hosmer assured herself of the last laugh when *Zenobia* went on to an extremely successful American tour to sellout crowds in New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

This particular story resonates with many women artists, including myself.

At the same time that I was asking how Hosmer could be erased from art history, an unsuccessful older heterosexual male artist perpetrated an academic vendetta against me that provoked me to stand up for myself using legal action, and sparked a creative writing project of my own. Since all the characters in Hosmer's scandal are so historically significant, I wrote *The Zenobia Scandal*: *A Meditation on Male Jealousy* (2013) to tell an amazing story of female resilience not in my words but by sequencing the exact words of Hosmer's colleagues, critics, friends and foes alike — and most importantly, Hosmer's own words. I was dumbfounded by the degree to which it mirrored what I was going through 150 years later. Fear not! I got the last laugh too!

---

[5] 'Obituary: Mr. Albert Gatley', *Art Journal*, 1 September 1863, p. 181.

[6] Culkin, *Harriet Hosmer*, pp. 76–77.

[7] Hosmer, 'The Process of Sculpture'.

[8] Idem, 'The Doleful Ditty of the Roman Caffe Greco'.

Hosmer bravely continued stepping outside culturally acceptable behavior for women, as seen with *The Sleeping Faun* (1864–65) (Fig. 25.6). She cleverly counterbalanced the sensuality of the languorous, virtually nude male faun (sculpted when it was truly scandalous for women to be exposed to any nude models, male or female) with the humor of the devilishly busy hands of the baby satyr playing a prank by tying the lion skin around the unsuspecting, drunk or sleeping faun. It is also rumored to be a self-portrait. This gender-blurring in 1865 is nothing short of astonishing. According to her own writing and that of her lovers, Hosmer was only romantically linked to women and had a relationship with every noble woman she could get her hands on, including a twenty-five-year relationship with Lady Louisa Ashburton that took place after a lengthy affair with Lady Marian Alford and non-royals like Matilda Hays and Emma Stebbins, among others.

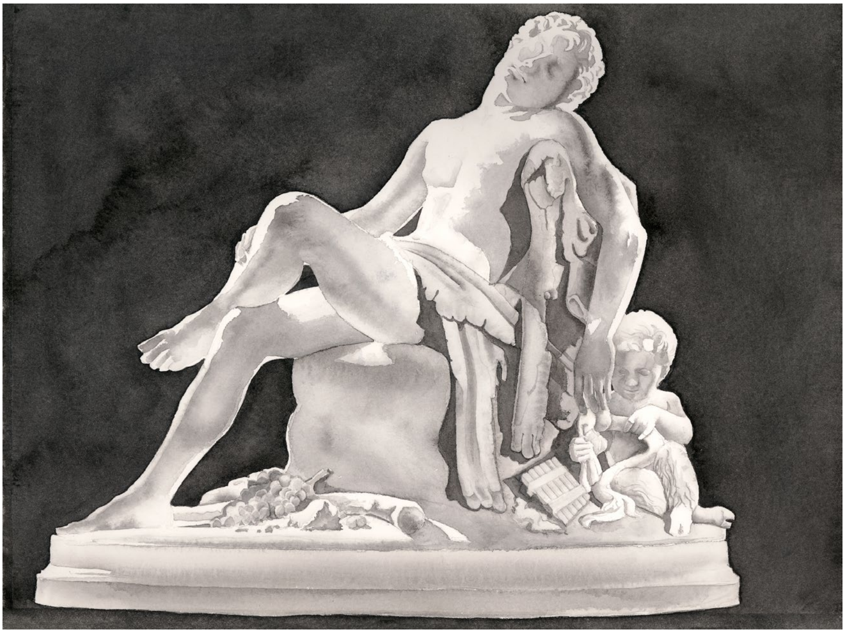


Fig. 25.6 Patricia Cronin, *The Sleeping Faun*, 2006. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 15 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *The Sleeping Faun*, 1865. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

Hosmer's archive is in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College at Harvard. Many of her handwritten letters have significant portions cut out of them. If you hold them up to the light they look like Swiss cheese. Hosmer entrusted her letters and archive to her lifelong childhood friend from Mrs Sedgwick's school, Cornelia Crow Carr, who censored Hosmer's lesbian life to 'protect' her reputation. But Hosmer's British friends weren't concerned about their romantic relationships. Lady Ashburton's archive is located in the National Library of Scotland and the letters are all intact; many of them feature erotic overtones like this one: 'I do hope you will make your figure agreeable to me again as promised!'[9]

To interpret another artist's work is a huge responsibility, but the biggest challenge was to visually represent an object I couldn't see in the catalogue raisonné. One Hosmer statue, which the *Art Journal* called her crowning achievement, is now lost: the life-size marble statue of the last *Queen of Naples* (1868). Hosmer liked female subjects, sovereigns in particular. Maria Sophia, the last queen of Naples, was a Bourbon royal who had just lost the war against Italian Unification led by Garibaldi. The queen posed for a year and a half in Hosmer's Roman studio and several scholars believe they had a love affair during this time. The location of the sculpture is unknown and there is no visual documentation of it; however, there are many written descriptions published in the *Art Journal* and unpublished letters written by people on the Grand Tour, all contradictory. For the catalogue raisonné I wanted to give presence to Hosmer's absence, not reinscribe her absence. And having made a three-ton marble statue, I still don't understand how you could lose something that big.

I moved to Rome in 2006 for the Rome Prize fellowship at the American Academy in Rome to work on my Hosmer project. I traced her footsteps, visited her old studio on Via Margutta and her former residences where she lived with many like-minded women, friends and lovers, at 28 Via del Corso and then at 38 Via Georgiana. I studied her Falconnet tomb and did research at the Vatican. Being surrounded by Catholicism, majestic opulent churches, mysticism, stories of miracles and saints' lives, and shards of light streaming into the churches, helped me shape the answer: an apparition, a ghost image for a phantom sculpture, a missing statue. I then realized it wasn't just one lost sculpture; it was a whole lost career. So I started making watercolors of ghost images (Fig. 25.7) and interspersed them with the statue watercolors. Ghost, statue, ghost, statue, ghost. And then she disappeared.

---

[9] Harriet Hosmer, 'Lady Ashburton', Ashburton Papers, undated (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1996), Acc.11388-153.

I love art history but I want to rewrite it to include people who are more like me, and also to create a space larger than my reality. There are many lessons we can learn from Harriet Hosmer's life and career including aesthetic skill, bold subject choices, determination and courage to practice our profession. As a contemporary artist, I sought to have my *Harriet Hosmer*: *Lost and Found, A Catalogue Raisonné* series to act as a future form of nostalgia that addresses the failures of seeing the feminist lesbian body in real time.

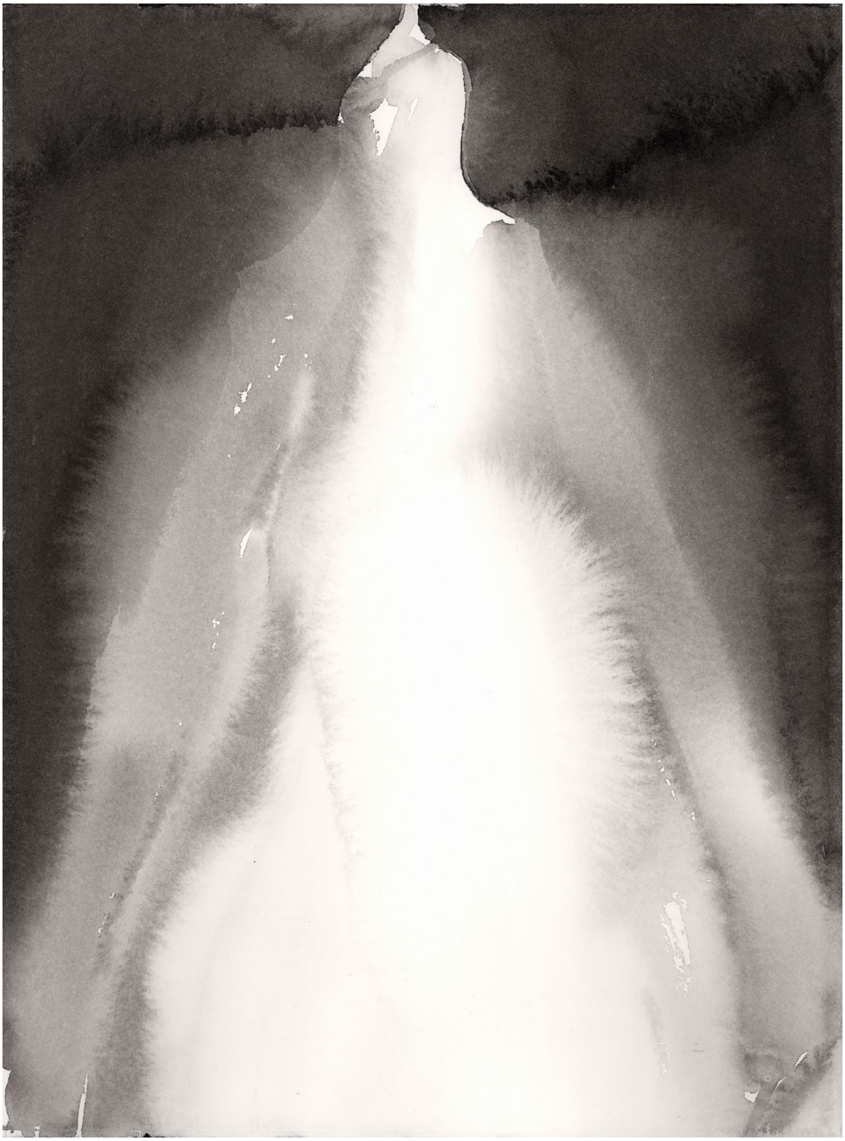


Fig. 25.7 Patricia Cronin, *Queen of Naples*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

# Bibliography

Culkin, Kate, *Harriet Hosmer*: *A Cultural Bibliography* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

Hosmer, Harriet, 'Lady Ashburton', Ashburton Papers, undated (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1996), Acc.11388-153.

—, 'The Process of Sculpture', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 14:86 (1864), 734–37.

—, 'The Doleful Ditty of the Roman Caffe Greco', *Evening Transcript* (Boston), 17 November 1864, p. 1.

'Obituary: Mr. Albert Gatley', *Art Journal*, 1 September 1863, p. 181.

# PART SIX

# TRANSIT, TRANSITING, AND TRANSITION

# 26. Urban Candy: Screens, Selfies and Imaginings

## *Roshini Kempadoo*

> As I stepped off the 436 bus that was heading to New Cross, a young Black man was being refused entry.
>
> Even though it was stationary and at the bus stop.
>
> Very few of us knew why.
>
> In protest, he stood in front of the bus, challenging the bus driver to pull out and drive. The bus driver revved the engine and inched forward. The man, the driver, bus passengers and I were watching the impasse wondering what would happen next.
>
> Smartphones were out videoing the scene, recording the shouts, arms outstretched across the bus windscreen, recording the engine revs — ready to post and share with others elsewhere what was to happen next.
>
> *Author's note, 24 November 2011, Lewisham, London*

I have a keen sense of being, listening and observing, watching out for other folk, and generally 'minding myself', and this tunes me — or should I say fine-tunes me — into the city as I journey through it in a state of transit, transiting, transition. A heightened sense of being in the physical space, whilst on my smartphone networked to others and with a *screen* sense of elsewhere, feeds the soul and the imagination, which is readily alert, mindful, enriched. Two conditions of the self

© 2019 Roshini Kempadoo, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.26

co-exist and contest each other — being on the phone and being on the move. As I travel in the urban space, smartphone ready, mobile-screen-obsessed, I physically move through a network of urban sites from one place to another and back again — coffee bar, train, bus, work, pub, home — within temporal, perpetual, transitory and relational spaces of the 'now.' Meanwhile the attraction and use of the smartphone proposes a utopic mirror-like site deemed to be a 'placeless place'[1] that is virtual, connected and extended. Our bodies, Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, '[…] are now in the network and in the world at the same time.'[2]

This is to introduce the idea of *Urban Candy*, as given in the title, as a state of becoming: identities are in formation and in motion, in an ongoing relationship to the smartphone screen. As a cornucopia for the eyes, *Urban Candy* is considered a seductive, hypervisualised space of self and screen associated with the city, a perpetual line of sight, an excessive physical and virtual urban experience and environment. This became my impetus for creating the screen-based artwork *Face Up* in 2015. Central to this is the racialised and diasporised networked body on the move, precarious in her condition and affective in the performative encounter with herself and others. The artwork is constituted as six silent stop-animations that combine still images, graphics and fictional texts as vertical-format screen projections in the gallery space.[3] They are conceived as *alternative idents*, a term originally (and ironically) associated with the promotional video sequences created by television companies as identification videos. These short animations of no more than two minutes each are created as a shared self-branding exercise, popular practice that deploys the look and feel of the smartphone interface. They are all fictional repertoires. The mobile screen, the smartphone reimagined in *Face Up* corresponds to the popular space of Black feminist art and performance that Uri McMillan sees as being 'highly charged, mixed, and clashing spaces where cultural identities are imagined, stylized, theatricalized, and rendered "mythic."'[4] McMillan's allusion to the 'mythic' qualities of Black feminist art is in reference to the late Stuart Hall's use of the term. Hall perceives mythic as being a hybridized space of being and 'a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented…'[5]

---

[1] Michel Foucault, 'Des Espaces Autres' [Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias], Jay Miskowiec (trans.) in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5 (1984), 46–49.

[2] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* (London: Pelican Books, 2015).

[3] I commissioned writer Erica Masserano for the fictional texts for *Face Up*.

[4] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars*: *Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), p. 207.

*Face Up* was first shown in the Lethaby Gallery, London in 2015, curated by Paul Goodwin. The artwork was subsequently included in the exhibition 'Unfixed Homeland' at the Aljira Gallery, New Jersey in 2016, curated by Grace Ali. In the following sections of this visual essay, I explore two of the animations from *Face Up* entitled *Nana* and *Deirdre*. I offer three provocations as commentaries to the itinerant imagery and visual experience of the artwork. I consider *Face Up* to be a critical artwork created in response to current extreme rightwing tendencies apparent in popular media. It is a contribution to feminist practices, questioning difference and exposing racism that is currently being directed at the physical and symbolic Black woman's body.

## First Provocation

### Her Body is Political: The Smartphone as a Creative Knowledge-Making Device

The artwork considers the smartphone as a visualizing object and extension to her being. It is a technological prosthetic with the ability to transform, amongst other things, our contact with each other, as a socializing device. Equally, the phone's expanded functionality allows for extending an intimate knowledge about each other and ourselves, our sexual relationships, about our bodies, or our emotional state of being. As a haptic sensory device it allows us to share and develop and reconfigure knowledge about ourselves and our behavior, it becomes hyper-familiar with gestures, desires, appearances and countenance.

Each ident in *Face Up* is associated with imagined characters who are occasionally visualized on the screen using stop-frame animation of persons in performance. The action sequences were staged by actors for the camera and taken in continuous shooting mode. They were shot in the green screen studio to edit with different backgrounds, making use of post-production software to edit the footage sequence. Each ident reflects both the immediacy of the person's smartphone screen, providing a glimpse of the imagined conversations via instant messaging or the visual content of what she might be viewing, whilst evoking a sense of the character as she navigates the city. In other words, the ident at times reflects her screen content and at other times provides distance through the visualized sense of the character herself. The creation of a mise-en-scène for each character is established. Photographs of her possible urban surroundings are construed in order to imagine the character on the bus, on a pavement, on a train platform, in a coffee bar or pub/bar as Fig. 26.1 illustrates.

---

[5] Stuart Hall, 'What Is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', in Gina Dent and Michelle Wallace (eds.), *Black Popular Culture: Discussions in Contemporary Culture #8* (Seattle: The New Press and the Dia Center for the Arts, 1992), pp. 21–33 (p. 32).

The ident entitled *Nana* (see Figs. 26.1–6) is written as an internal monologue of personal reflection. Nana is evoked as someone in reflexive refashioning mode, in a persistent performance of self-affirmation, or what Deborah Willis describes as a process of continuously creating a 'revised self-image.'[6] A visual rendering of Nana in an animated sequence gives a sense of her, as well as instant text messaging to friends, glimpses of her viewing preferences for shopping, beauty tips, and online dating interests. The narrative appears on the screen as if the screen itself is an active smartphone in which material is being continuously shot, shared, posted and reflected upon. Emphasis is placed on the relationship between the visual content of interest to her, and herself imagined. In other words, Nana's ident actively reflects, as Tina Campt suggests, 'how black people image and how they imagine themselves.'[7]

---

[6] Deborah Willis, 'The Sociologist's Eye: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Paris Exposition', in David Levering Lewis and Deborah Lewis (eds.), *A Small Nation of People*: *W.E.B. Du Bois & African American Portraits of Progress* (New York: The Library of Congress, Amistad, HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), pp. 51–78.

[7] Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters*: *Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 5.

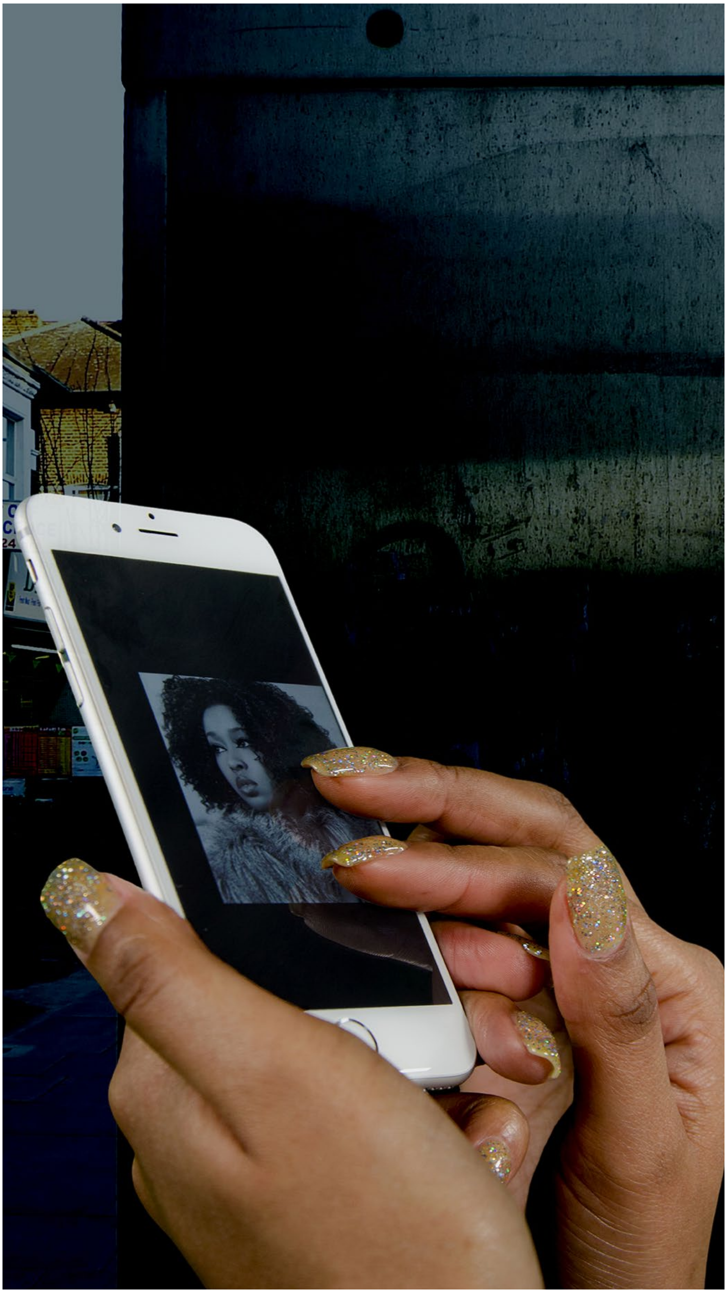
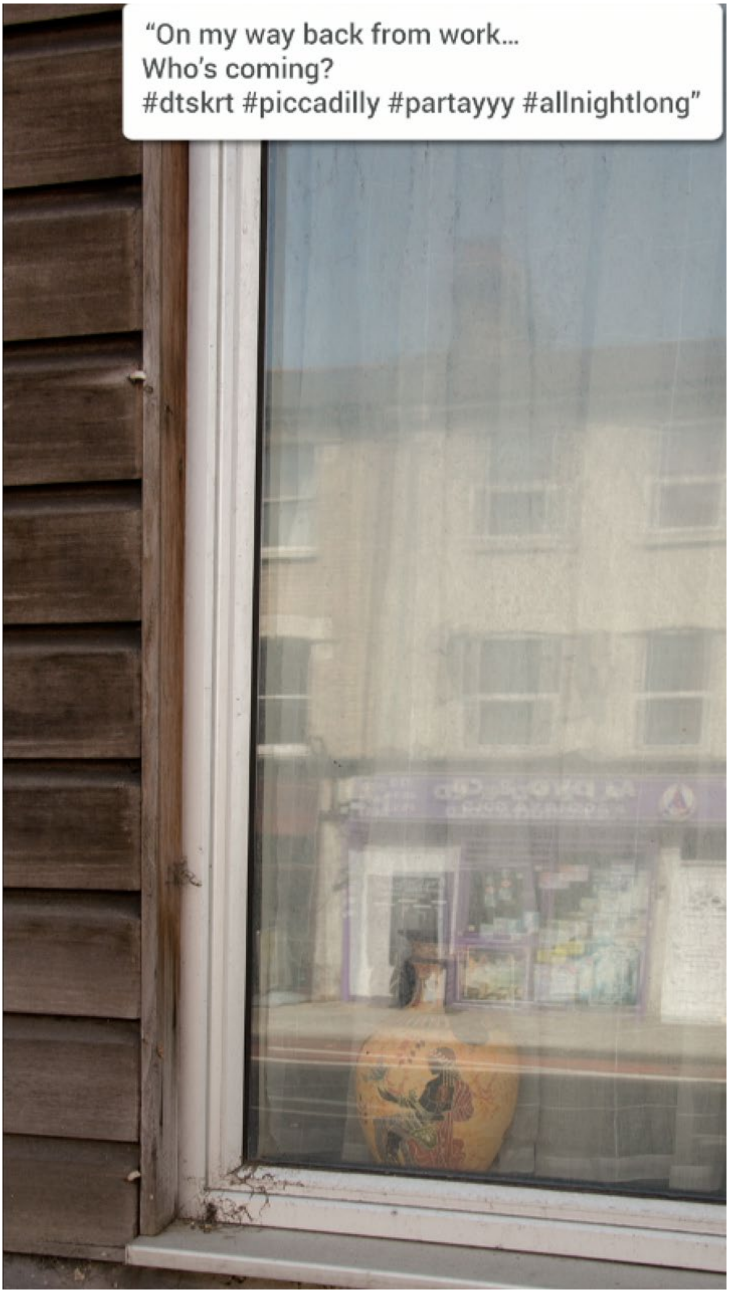


Fig. 26.1 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana. © Roshini Kempadoo.



“On my way back from work...
Who’s coming?
#dtskrt #piccadilly #partayyy #allnightlong”

Fig. 26.2 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 01. © Roshini Kempadoo.

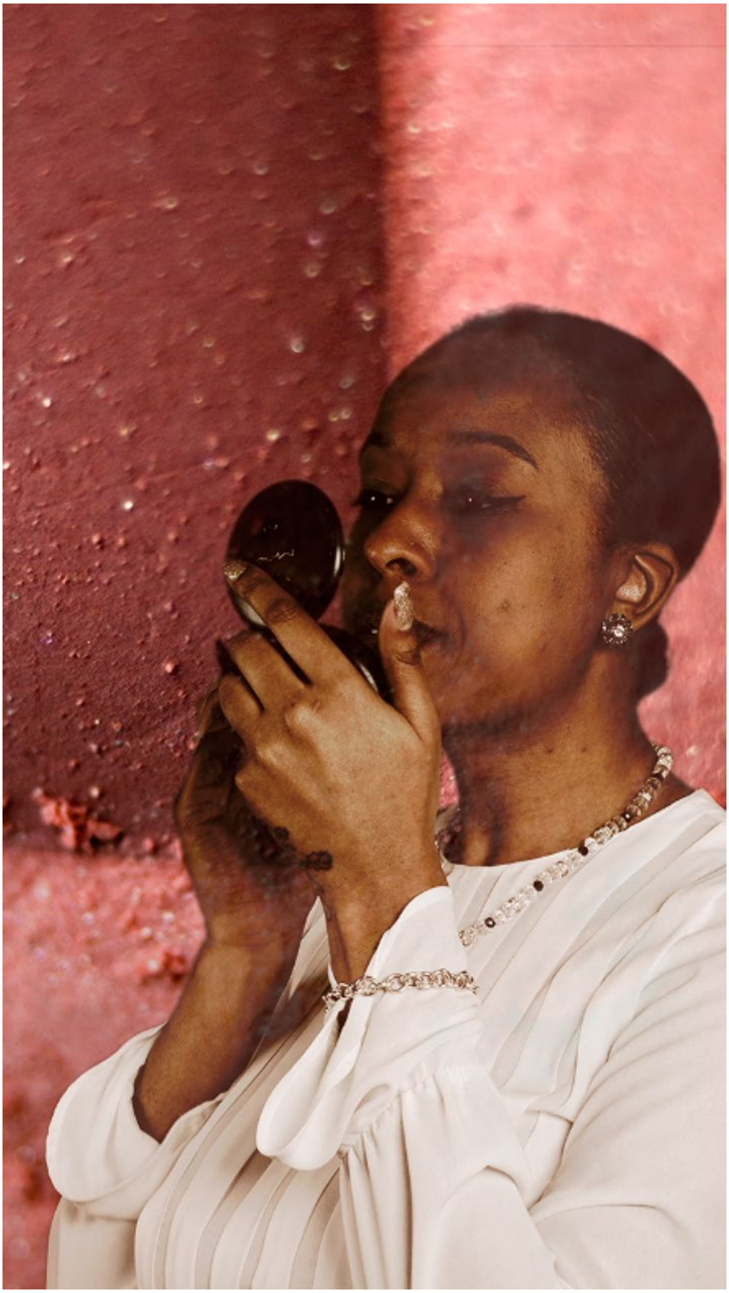
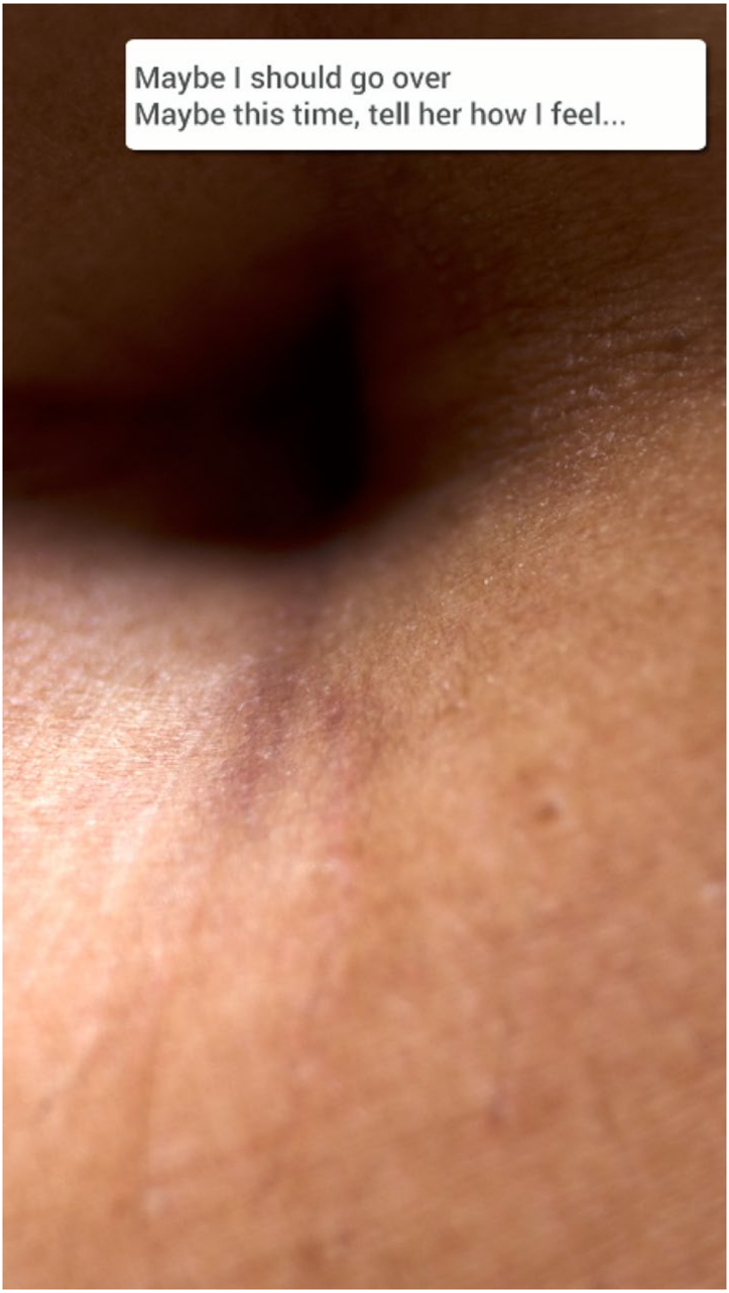


Fig. 26.3 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 05. © Roshini Kempadoo.



Maybe I should go over
Maybe this time, tell her how I feel...

Fig. 26.4 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 11. © Roshini Kempadoo.

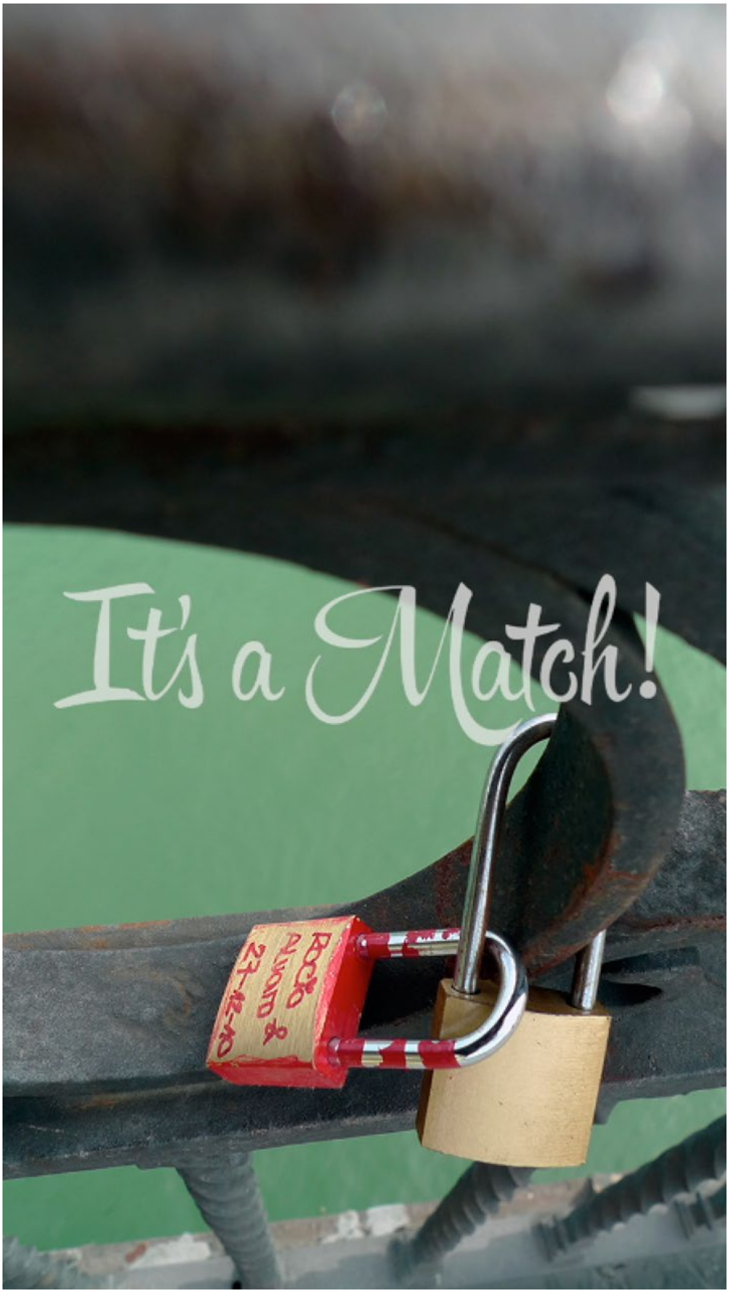
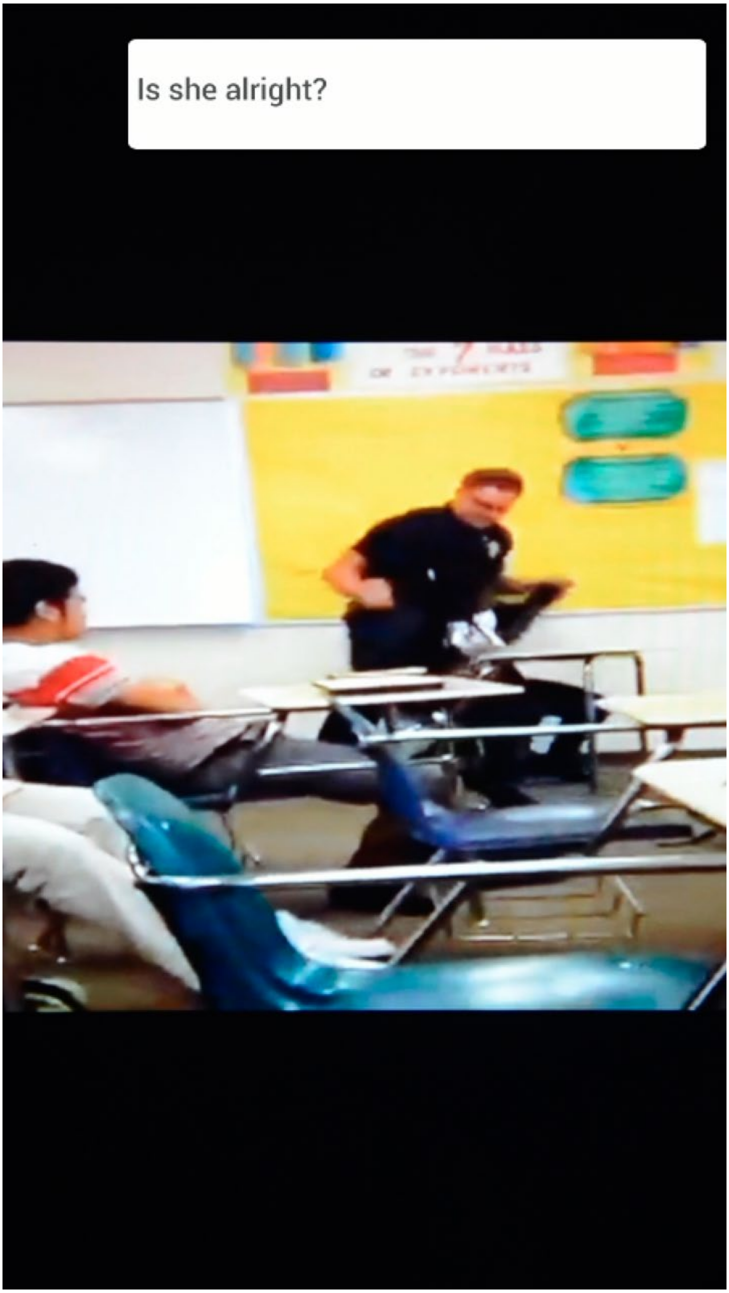

It's a Match!
27-12-10

Fig. 26.5 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 09. © Roshini Kempadoo.



Is she alright?

Fig. 26.6 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 07. © Roshini Kempadoo.

The ident is concerned with the visual/textual language of the first person that allows the 'resonances to reverberate between the I and the we' as Alisa Lebow notes.[8] A more complex subject position and perspective is construed in order to create and be:

> 'I see myself seeing myself,' I/i am […] alluding to […] the play of mirrors that defers to infinity the real subject and subverts the notion of an original 'I.' A writing *for* the people, *by* the people, and *from* the people is, literally, a multipolar reflecting reflection that remains free from the conditions of subjectivity and objectivity and yet reveals them both.[9]

## Second Provocation

### Her State of Emergency: Visual Registers of Violence

The ident projections created as *Face Up* are imagined senses of everyday urban spaces as networked and complex evocations of both embodied and symbolic identities. Set within the present, they register the scenescapes of London, the US and elsewhere, to engage with ways in which people of color make sense of, and are subjected to, the extreme and tragic narratives of violence, war, and the effects of migration. Necessarily then, the work is concerned with the state of emergency,[10] that is, ways in which state and individual violence and racism are enacted on Black bodies as militarization, national counter-terrorist conditions and war-technology capabilities shape our daily lived experiences. Events and circumstances such as: the Grenfell Tower fire in London, June 2017 with an estimated 80 deaths and over 70 persons injured, with a total of 151 homes destroyed; the 22 refugee camps in Turkey, home to at least 217,000 displaced persons in 2014 (UNHCR); or the crossing by boat of trafficked persons (mostly travelling from North Africa and the Middle East) across the Mediterranean to Europe, having reached unprecedented levels (112,018 persons between 1 January to the end of July 2017) are examples of the violent conditions forced on Black folk.[11]

---

[8] Alisa Lebow (ed.), *The Cinema of Me*: *The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary* (London and New York: Wall Flower Press and Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 2.

[9] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Other*: *Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 22.

[10] Awam Amkpa, 'Introductions: Welcome — Black Portraiture{s}II', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Black Portraiture{s}II: Imaging the Black Body and Re-Staging Histories', Florence, 28–31 May 2015.

Smartphone editing techniques are adopted and developed in the artwork *Face Up* to create the idents, transitioning from one photograph to another, one narration to another or a video to another. These are techniques we are very familiar with and they have been normalized as we engage with media and communicate using smartphones; they include swiping in order to view the next piece of media, sharing emoticons, expanding images, contracting and closing webpages, and seeing other functions and media on the screen, whether pulling up from the bottom or pulling down from the top. The active practice of viewing and engaging with material constitutes the artwork's aesthetic, format and movement. Smartphone technologies and social media are inextricably linked to the way in which newsworthy events — whether created as authenticated news items, half-truths on personal blogs, or evidence collected as personal data — are circulated and go viral immediately. Viral video footage already published and in circulation that has been posted and shared is also used to create the artwork. Central to this project, then, is the reappropriation and reuse of found and published imagery. Material that is already sourced, already in circulation, things that go viral are all at work here. I am reminded of Hito Steyerl's commentary about the ideological value of the 'poor image,' or Sean Cubitt noting the fascination with the spectacular, the bejewelled, finished, seamless post-produced high quality image.[12] In *Face Up*, I was drawn to create what I describe as unreconstructed imagery, appropriated from the familiar, the badly edited, the over-compressed, the poor quality. Fig. 26.3 for example, is a screenshot taken from the ident Nana as familiar found video footage, reappropriated and reused, of the brutal violence towards Shakara Murphy in 2015, the teenage student at Spring Valley High School, South Carolina, USA who was body-slammed by Ben Fields, the schools resource officer.[13]

---

[11] The UN Migration Agency: International Organisation for Migration, 'Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals Reach 112,018 in 2017; 2,361 Deaths', International Organisation for Migration, 2017, https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-reach-112018-2017-2361-deaths

[12] See Hito Steyerl, 'In Defense of the Poor Image,' *e-flux*, 10 (November 2009), [n.p.]; Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2004).

## Third Provocation

### Her Narratives: Migration, Memory, and History

Making use of domestic photography including portraiture, self-portraits and family snapshots allows a focus on the photographic representation of women, which, as Gillian Rose and Campt point out, contain representations of gendered postures, visual displays of intimacy and power and an acknowledgement of the mobility of photographs.[14] The smartphone then becomes a way of envisioning knowledge and a kind of sensory apparatus in which, as Donna Haraway proposes, the 'topography of subjectivities is assumed to be "multidimensional."'[15] The starting point for the artworks is rooted in the city, reflecting my own experience as I travel across London, or else influenced by eavesdropping on other peoples' partial conversations. Ear-wigging, overhearing other peoples partial conversations, is the urban norm; so too is the daily routine of peering at your screen and that of others whilst moving through the city. These imagined narratives are based on overhearing, participating and overseeing on the move. This is a partial, situated, envisioned point of view of the lived experience of hearing and viewing the lives of others occurs through extended networked technology. I view and read between the lines, gleaning a minimal understanding of what has happened in a distant situation, or what the circumstances might be. The stories are based on a whim or hunch, imagining fictitious endings to narratives that continue without your presence and knowledge. Stories are started and in a sense neverending; they are fluid and nearly always contain what-if scenarios or what-happens-next potential endings.

---

[13] Video detail: October 2015. There was an altercation at Spring Valley High School, South Carolina, in which Richland County Sheriff's Deputy Ben Fields was caught on camera body-slamming a young female student. Shakara Murphy was placed in a chokehold, flipped over in her seat, then dragged and thrown across her classroom before being handcuffed by a South Carolina school officer. Niya Kenny and Shakara both faced misdemeanour charges at the time, which were later dropped. See newspaper article: Charlie Atkin, 'Spring Valley High Assault: Sheriff Claims Video Shows Student "Punched" Officer', *Independent*, 28 October 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/spring-valley-high-assault-sheriff-claims-video-shows-student-punched-officer-a6711676.html

[14] Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

[15] Donna Haraway, 'The Persistence of Vision', in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader: Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 678–84 (p. 681).

Particularly pertinent to the ident video entitled *Deirdre* (Figs. 26.7–26.9) is the way in which the narrative is conceived as if we may be overhearing part of a conversation between London and elsewhere — Guyana, as it turns out.

> Deirdre checks her hair using the laptop screen and switches her earplugs from the phone to the laptop. She is in her regular coffee bar near Regent Street around the corner from work, waiting for a Skype call. It is what she suspected [...] her cousin in Georgetown has got worse and needs medical treatment. Ordering another flat white, she downloads and forwards the visa forms, looks up airline tickets and checks her bank balance. Her credit card balance has maxed, but she has managed to reserve flights for her Aunt and cousin from Cheddi Jagan International to Gatwick on the new one.[16]

The internal monologue appearing on the screen in quick succession is soon replaced by a *half-conversation*, that is, hearing or rather reading on the screen Deirdre's part of the conversation she is having with her cousin in Georgetown, Guyana on skype. The silent, visual, written narrative unfolds in the form of a conversation to reveal a deep familiarity with, and the commonality of, the diasporic experience, familial economics and the historical trajectory of Black labouring women's bodies as integral to sustaining the public health service in the UK.

---

[16] Author extract from the character description for *Face Up*.

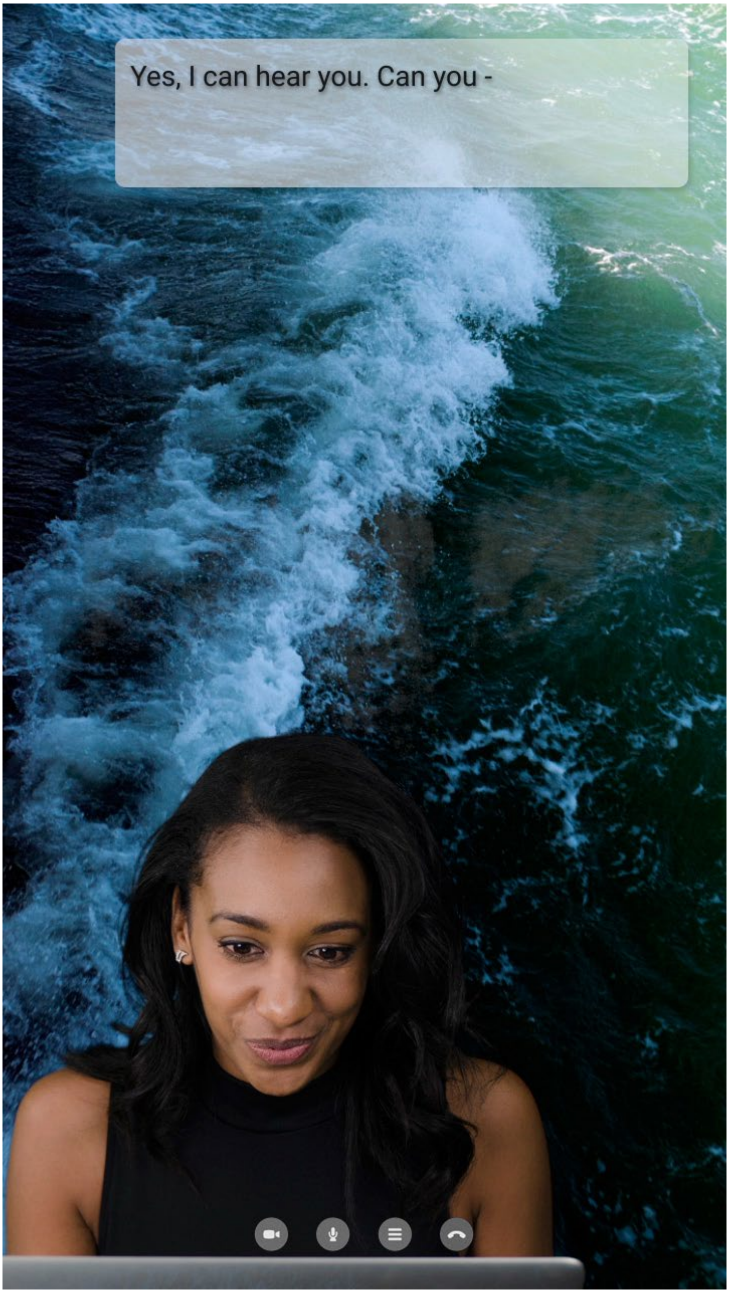
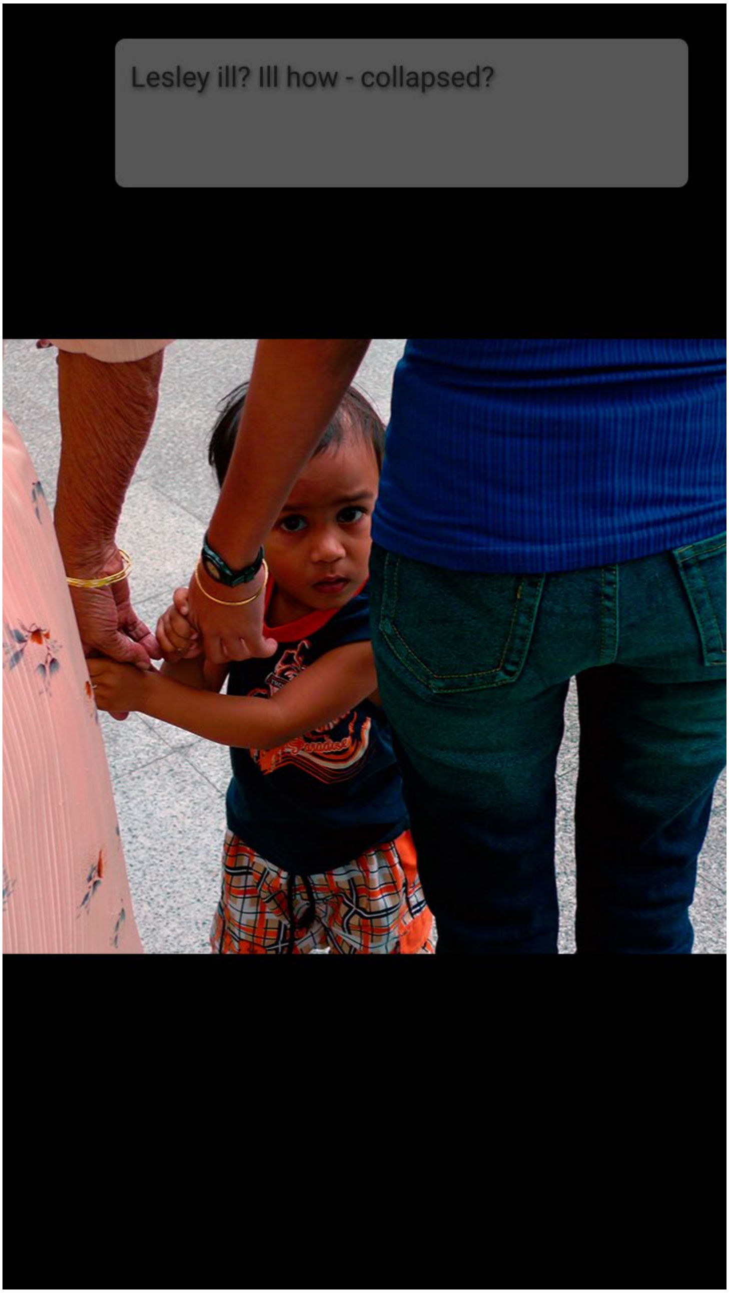
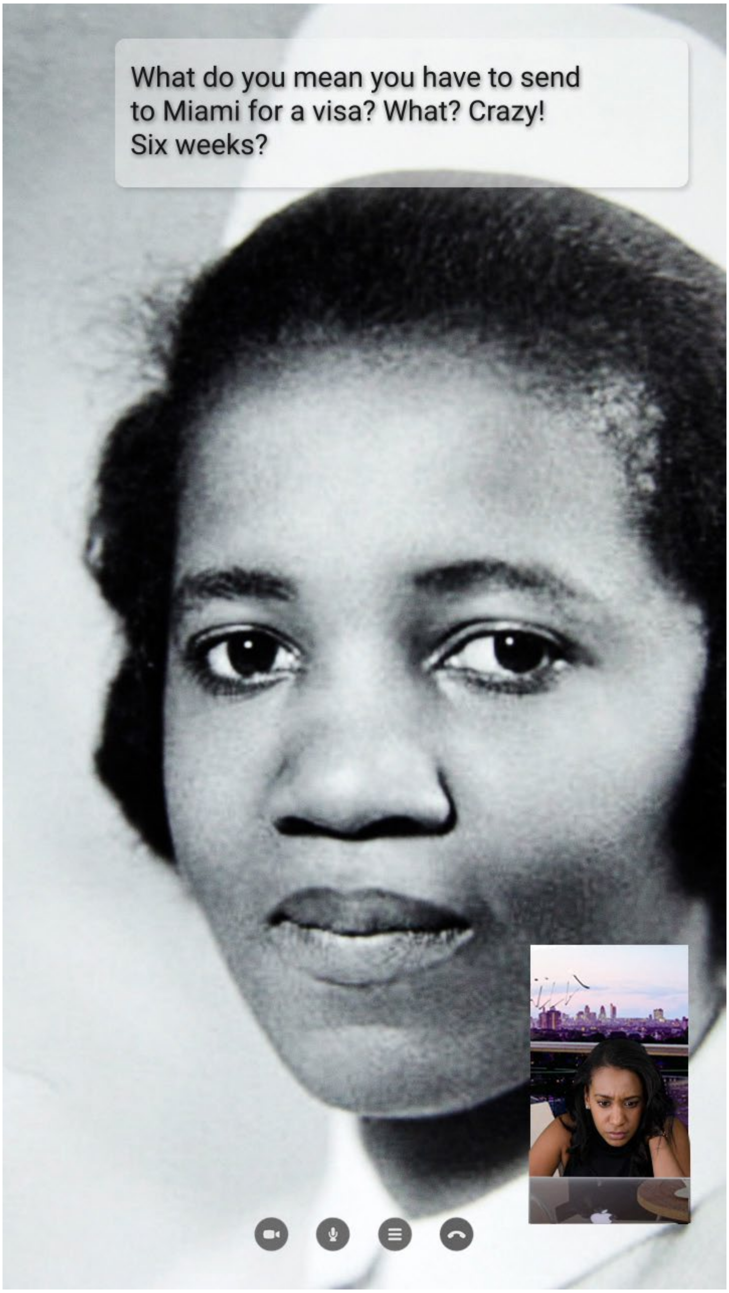

Yes, I can hear you. Can you -

Fig. 26.7 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Deirdre 04. © Roshini Kempadoo.



Lesley ill? Ill how - collapsed?

Fig. 26.8 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork ‘Face Up’, 2015. Deirdre 05 © Roshini Kempadoo.



What do you mean you have to send
to Miami for a visa? What? Crazy!
Six weeks?

Fig. 26.9 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork ‘Face Up’, 2015. Deirdre 06 © Roshini Kempadoo.

As we experience the swipe, cascade and enlargement of published photographs and news items across the screen, Deirdre's ident video references the contemporary politics of the current UK government as it sets about privatizing the health care system, subjecting it to corporate law and financial markets conceived as '[…] being merely descriptive of an ideal state of nature.'[17] The state-funded National Health Service (NHS) Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Mike Rustin note, was the biggest civil and social project associated with the postwar years, with migration at the heart of its success. Referenced too is the Windrush generation of the late 1940s and 1950s, my parents' generation (see Fig. 26.4), who formed the first significant mass-migration of Caribbean persons to Europe, encouraged and recruited to migrate to the UK to become NHS health workers and settle as British citizens.

Deirdre's narrative indicates the near and far through in-text references and photographs. These include references to time difference, UK visa restrictions (particularly onerous for persons travelling to the UK with less money and living in a British ex-colony), images of Caribbean landscapes and architecture juxtaposed with London street scenes, hospital architecture and ambulances. The ident video focuses on the contested scenario that is so central to our precarious existence in relation to health, and the welfare and safety of our families, extended friendships, or other persons we would feel compelled (and want) to help. My imperative to create *Face Up* is a '[…] reorganizing aesthetic experience, [in which] […] artworks compel us to transition from recognizing the self's fundamental social being to considering its ethico-political imperatives,' as T. J. Demos notes.[18]

---

[17] Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, 'Framing Statement — after Neoliberalism: Analysing the Present', in Stuart Hall and Michael Rustin Doreen Massey (eds.), *After Neoliberalism*? *The Kilburn Manifesto* (London: Lawrence & Wishart: Soundings Collections, 2013), pp. 9–23 (p. 10).

[18] T. J. Demos, 'Being Political/2010 (First Published in Deutsche Guggenheim Magazine, No.12 (Summer 2010) 8–13', in Ian Farr (ed.), *Memory*: *Documents of Contemporary Art* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2012), pp. 216–19 (p. 219).

## Conclusion

*Face Up* is concerned with engendering perspectives in which the self is conceived as social. Its reorganizing visual strategy is to appropriate and extend smartphone aesthetics, with their highly active and sensory networked environment, interface and normalized tendencies to encourage movement, transition and change. My idea has been to develop an aesthetic of intimacy about families and our everyday lived experience, which is concerned with pressing political perspectives. The idents are of imagined narratives and appear as glimpses of possible personal experiences as each imagined woman shares, likes, comments on, and gains knowledge about herself and others through a mediated space. They are created to develop different aesthetics and concepts that may presumed to be theories in the flesh as proposed by Cherríe Moraga.[19] That is a feminist view of the world that does not advocate turning away from, but toward, the bodies of women of colour as a project of emotional investment and support.

---

[19] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back, Fourth Edition*: *Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981; New York: Suny Press, 2015).

# Bibliography

Amkpa, Awam, 'Introductions: Welcome — Black Portraiture{s}II', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Black Portraiture{s}II: Imaging the Black Body and Re-Staging Histories', Florence, 28–31 May 2015.

Atkin, Charlie 'Spring Valley High Assault: Sheriff Claims Video Shows Student "Punched' Officer", *Independent*, 28 October 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/spring-valley-high-assault-sheriff-claims-video-shows-student-punched-officer-a6711676.html

Campt, Tina M., *Image Matters*: *Archive*, *Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

Cubitt, Sean, *The Cinema Effect* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2004).

Demos, T. J., 'Being Political/2010 (First Published in Deutsche Guggenheim Magazine, No.12 (Summer 2010) 8–13', in Ian Farr (ed.), *Memory*: *Documents of Contemporary Art* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2012), pp. 216–19.

Foucault, Michel, 'Des Espaces Autres' [Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias], Jay Miskowiec (trans.) in *Architecture*, *Mouvement*, *Continuité*, 5 (1984), 46–49.

Hall, Stuart, 'What Is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', in Gina Dent and Michelle Wallace (eds.), *Black Popular Culture*: *Discussions in Contemporary Culture #8* (Seattle: The New Press and the Dia Center for the Arts, 1992), pp. 21–33.

Hall, Stuart, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, 'Framing Statement — after Neoliberalism: Analysing the Present', in *After Neoliberalism*? *The Kilburn Manifesto*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Michael Rustin Doreen Massey (London: Lawrence & Wishart: Soundings Collections, 2013), pp. 9–23, https://doi.org/10.3898/136266213806045656

Haraway, Donna, 'The Persistence of Vision', in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*: *Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 678–84.

Lebow, Alisa (ed.), *The Cinema of Me*: *The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary* (London and New York: WallFlower Press and Columbia University Press, 2012).

McMillan, Uri, *Embodied Avatars*: *Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

The UN Migration Agency: International Organisation for Migration, 'Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals Reach 112,018 in 2017; 2,361 Deaths', International Organisation for Migration, 2017, https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-reach-112018-2017-2361-deaths

Minh-ha, Trinh T., *Women, Native, Other*: *Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Mirzoeff, Nicholas, *How to See the World* (London: Pelican Books, 2015).

Moraga, Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back, Fourth Edition*: *Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Original Publication, 1981), 4th edition (New York: Suny Press, 2015).

Rose, Gillian, *Doing Family Photography*: *The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

Steyerl, Hito, 'In Defense of the Poor Image', *e-flux*, 10 (November 2009), [n.p.].

Willis, Deborah, 'The Sociologist's Eye: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Paris Exposition', in David Levering Lewis and Deborah Lewis (eds.), *A Small Nation of People*: *W.E.B. Du Bois & African American Portraits of Progress* (New York: The Library of Congress, Amistad, and HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), pp. 51–78.

# 27. Controlled Images and Cultural Reassembly: Material Black Girls Living in an Avatar World

### *Joan Morgan*

As a Black feminist cultural critic, I've identified a methodological sluggishness in Black feminist theory (BFT) when it comes to theorizing our sexuality. As theorists, we've become overly reliant on the field's most trenchant theories — the politics of respectability or its remix: respectability politics, cultural dissemblance and controlling images.[1] We've failed to re-interrogate these venerated interventions with the temporal, cultural specificity reflected in contemporary US Black women's ethnic heterogeneity, queerness and the advent of digital technologies and social media. To put it another way: *some of us out here still talking 'bout these theories like it's 1999*.

---

[1] See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*: *The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1990* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight*: *Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); Patricia Hill Collins, 'Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images,' in her *Black Feminist Thought*: *Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 76–106 for more on the politics of respectability, the theory of cultural dissemblance and, controlling images respectively.

© 2019 Joan Morgan, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.27

My current project, 'Pleasure Politics', interrogates Black feminist theory's historical scripting of Black female sexuality as a site of ongoing racial and sexual trauma. It picks up the gauntlet Evelyn M. Hammonds threw down more than two decades ago, when she famously charged BFT with moving from a 'politics of silence' about Black women's sexuality to a 'politics of articulation' and in doing so, made a decisive demand for a Black feminist sexuality theory that is inclusive of pleasure and the erotic.[2] Pleasure politics subjects the canonical theories of Black female sexuality to a rigorous re-periodization — one that accounts for the significant impacts of the digital age, mass mid-twentieth- and twenty-first-century Black diasporic immigration and the new subjectivities created by these distinct phenomena. In particular it takes into account the impact of the internet and the dramatic restructuring of social space as one of the most significant and yet under-theorized factors impacting scholarly understandings of contemporary young Black women's identities in the digital age — specifically their engagements with pleasure and erotic expressions of their sexuality. For Black feminists, in particular, the digital age challenges previously held understandings about sexual agency and private vs. public life as expressed in the theories of cultural dissemblance and controlling images. Instead, I position contemporary Black female identity as existing in an avatar world where *fragmenting*, exhibited by both Black female cultural producers and consumers, is often deliberate, strategic and generative to pleasure and self-authored erotics.

In his brilliant book, *Embodied Avatars*: *Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*, Uri McMillan describes avatars used by Black feminist artists as '[…] alternate beings given human-like agency [that] are akin to the second selves that Black women create, inhabit and perform.' 'Through avatar production' he continues, 'black women engage in spectacular, shocking, even unlawful role-plays […] these avatars are a means of highlighting (and stretching) the subordinate roles available to black women. […] Their efficacy is their agile ability to comment back on identity itself, to subvert the taken-for-granted rules for properly embodying a black female body.'[3]

---

[2] Evelyn M. Hammonds, 'Towards a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality and the Problematic of Silence,' in Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (eds.), *Futures Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies and Democratic* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 179–80.

McMillan's theorization of avatar-play troubles the unchallenged assumption in Black feminism that 'real' is always tethered to the 'private self'. Within the logics of the canonical theories of Black female sexuality, fragmentation means broken and broken means damaged. In fact, an abiding part of Black feminism's mission as a justice project has been to restore wholeness to broken narratives and bodies. As a result, wholeness and re-integration has emerged as a widely accepted end goal. The privileging of 'wholeness' has conversely meant a deep skepticism, if not outright rejection, of anything perceived to fragment Black female subjectivity, even if that fragmenting is self-imposed.

While McMillan's work focuses primarily on cultural production, I argue that when it comes to Black female identity in 2017, there is a bit of the avatar in all of us. The preponderance of time Black women now spend in the digital realm — the composite of photos, memes, statuses, email signatures, Facebook profiles, the images we post on Instagram and Tumblr, the 140-character thought excerpts we tweet, the dating/sex profiles we monitor, are our avatars. They are part of what Beth Coleman provocatively theorizes as 'x-reality'.[4] Collectively they produce new modes of knowing that exist largely through fragmentation. The line between what is considered 'the real' self and what exists in digital space is at best blurred and more likely illusory. Instead each platform functions as another mode of expression that exposes various fragmented aspects of one's subjectivity. We are now becoming socialized to read all those fragments against each other to produce our understanding of who someone is, and we do it with the implicit understanding that the conclusion is meant to be incomplete but no *less real.*

William Shirky (who wrote the foreword for Coleman's book) refers to a generational shift that isn't dictated by age or other demographics but by the 'emergent age of mobile, pervasive networked connectivity.'[5] The introduction offers a critical piece of periodization: in 1994, for example, the 'notion of cyberspace was supported by a "social separation" — where our real lives contained the real friends we saw in person and our online friends were people we only knew online, in chat rooms or online communities making them "less real". The "…digital world was seen as an alternative to the real world, conceptualized as a place where we went online." But by the early 2000s', the book argues, '[…] the real and virtual worlds had begun to anneal.' For the cohort of under-thirty-somethings in America in the early years of the new millennium, 'digital networks were increasingly an augmentation of the real world, rather than an alternative to it.'[6]

---

[3] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars*: *Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), p. 12.

[4] B. Coleman, *Hello Avatar*: *Rise of the Networked Generation* (Boston: MIT Press, 2011).

[5] Coleman, *Hello Avatar*, p. 3.

What does this periodization mean for Black Feminist Theory? It means that in 1999 when Patricia Hill Collins published her seminal book, *Black Feminist Thought*,[7] and, gave to the world the inarguably beneficial analytic of controlling images, the rapid growth of the digital universe was already poised to undo it as a viable model for pop-culture analysis. Hill Collins has to be credited for her early understanding that pop culture would become the subject and playground of much feminist critique (arguably too much), however the internet was already beginning to position controlling images as obsolete. The unidirectional, linear flows Hill Collins claims between Black female performances, the omniscient white gaze and long-standing structures of racism, patriarchy, viewers and consumers are now splintered by multiple domains and complicated by the self-authorship deeply evident in Black women's digital play. In 2019 it's complicated.

So, what does avatar play look like? Let's consider the final show of Beyoncé's 'Formation Tour'. Throughout the performance, I was having the very 'Where's Waldo' experience of trying to find 'the real' Beyoncé on the stage. Of course Beyoncé was everywhere. Sometimes in ways that were expected and straightforward, traditionally in keeping with what audiences have come to expect of mega-wattage pop and rock deities in big stadium venues. Her flesh and blood form was particularly easy to spot when it made its way downstage and center on any one of the three mini-platforms constructed with the obvious intent on putting her closer to floor-seat audiences. Equally predictable were the two giant screens performing sentry duty, stage right and stage left, deployed by pop artists everywhere to compensate for the fact that even the larger-than-life appear ant-sized on stage. The illusion/confusion set in whenever she entered the deceptively simple but complexly utilitarian eighty-foot cube that comprised most of her set design. The device sometimes served as a canvas to project her petite 5′7″-plus-heels frame and amplify it to Goliath-esque dimensions. Then it alternately reorganized itself into multiple, tiered, open-faced 'rooms' that housed Beyoncé and her dancers — sometimes real, sometimes digital, often indistinguishable. At other times, the cube projected another image of Beyoncé, entirely separate and apart from whatever was happening on stage. Coupled with the large screens flanking the right and left sides of the stage, they provided a meta-narrative meant to enhance (and complicate) whatever 'live Beyoncé' was doing.

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

Audience members had a smorgasbord of 'Beyoncés' to choose from during every moment of the night, most of them sensual and erotically charged, all of them enthralling and arguably equally if not more compelling than the IRL version herself. Markedly, no matter where one sat, no one could claim a visual access to the 'real' Beyoncé′ the entire time, except perhaps the 'nosebleed seats', which provided the areal views necessary to procure that coveted access. Her staging and set design conveyed an uncanny understanding of how images and experiences are transmitted and disseminated through digital space. It acknowledged and accommodated the seemingly insatiable need of contemporary audiences to claim both the authenticity of 'being there' by recording in real time to post, tweet and share on digital platforms — despite the fact that the act inserts both a distance and a lens between them and the live subject.

I'm interested in the possibilities avatar play has for pleasure politics. What potential does x-reality have for Black women's pleasure engagements — erotic and otherwise — if indeed, through a process of ongoing visual migration, our digital engagements now give us the ability to confuse, blur, and dislocate, enabling Black women to express a group of selves integral to the needs of our individual subjectivities?

Performances of gender, Blackness or identity always exist in opposition to authenticity and reveal something greater than realness or wholeness. These deliberate fragmentations enable expressions of pleasure that do not crumble easily under the weight of representation politics, in part because they allow for 'grey space' and messy contradictions. In fact, they revel in such freedom. How would an avatar have helped Lady Saw to avoid the choice between the dancehall and salvation, if she had been performing sexuality? In that vein, what work do our curated selfie selves do? Are these avatars also the things we send out to thwart common narratives about the scripts of respectability, or our exclusion from mainstream beauty narratives?

As a continuous, fragmented state of being, the avatar's power lies in its ability to deploy multiple, interchangeable, ongoing expressions of self. Avatars are then, by definition, uncontrolled images. They enable a politics of pleasure in part because they demand distance. They are informed simultaneously by both the performative imperative in 'I made you look' and the implicit demand to 'back up off me'. Their silences, if any, are not a by-product of racialized sexual trauma or the gaze, nor are they about retreat. Rather, they are driven by the deliberateness of self-selection and authoring. Most important, the avatar is not limited to binary understandings of real vs. fake or performance. Rather, as Beth Coleman, writes, it's about the 'x-media' we increasingly swim in. '[It] doesn't just cross from one kind of medium to another,' she says. 'It crosses from the real to the mediated world and back all the time. Despite the idea of the avatar as a kind of alternate self, identity isn't something we put on and take off, like it or not — our roles online are all informed by our non-persistent identities.'[8]

All of this poses important questions for BFT master narratives on sexuality and its logics of violence and trauma. In fact, it troubles the hell out of it. How does it challenge the question of agency, already a hotly contested point in discourses that examine the erotic subjectivity of Black women? If avatars engender expressions of agency in ways that extend far beyond 'the animated figures moving across the screen but also the gestalt of images and multimedia that make up our identities as networked subjects' as Coleman suggests, what does that mean for pleasure politics and the politics of articulation so critical to it?[9]

The push I am making here is for Black Feminist Theory to begin to understand contemporary Black female subjectivity itself as avatar-esque. In this digital liminal space, we exercise the agency of avatars, curating and sharing pleasure engagements through visual expressions of multiple erotics — sex and the sensual, yes, but also travel, resistive bad-assery in #BadBitch, #BlackGirlMagic, #BlackGirlJoy #ProfessionalBlackGirl, #CarefreeBlackGirl and even activism: #SayHerName, #PrettyPeriod, #BeyondClassicallyBeautiful often through sophisticated navigations of selfie and hashtag play. The inclination of a preceding generation of Black feminists has been to look at all this 'play' as frivolous, or at the very least, ultimately ineffective. How, they ask, can selfies and 'all this hashtagging' possibly eradicate structural racism and a historically noxious system of patriarchy? There are two truths to be told here:

---

[8] Coleman, *Hello Avatar*, p. xiii.

[9] Ibid.

1. It doesn't.
2. We are not playing.

In fact, I argue that this 'play' is not frivolous at all. The multiple strands of pleasure it produces speak directly to another brand of erotics we too-often minimize in BFT — namely, the erotics of visibility. Specifically, making oneself visible and self-scripted in a society that repeatedly traffics in the negation of Black women from popular beauty and desirability discourses, in actions that range from the unapologetic 'we like it we steal it' of cultural appropriation to the erasure inherent in 'we just don't see you at all'. Rather than bemoan the frivolity of digital play, pleasure politics, in the parlance of Black-girl speak, positions *the regular* as a site of consistent innovation that can include the erotics of resistance and the fierceness of survival.

# Bibliography

Coleman, B., *Hello Avatar*: *Rise of the Networked Generation* (Boston: MIT Press, 2011).

Collins, Patricia Hill, 'Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images,' in her *Black Feminist Thought*: *Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 76–106.

Hammonds, Evelyn M., 'Towards a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality and the Problematic of Silence,' in Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (eds.), *Futures Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies and Democratic* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 179–80.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks, *Righteous Discontent*: *The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1990* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Hine, Darlene Clark, *Hine Sight*: *Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

McMillan, Uri, *Embodied Avatars*: *Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

# 28. Supershero Amrita Simla, Partitioned Once, Migrated Twice

*Sarah K. Khan*

## Introduction

I created an avatar, supershero, and alter-ego named Amrita Simla. Via my immigrant supershero, I retaliate against labels of exotic, submissive, or compliant women, stereotypes we encounter as South Asian Americans. As a Muslim, I combat the clichéd labels of abused and oppressed, and challenge one-dimensional readings of women and Islam. I authored the shape of Simla as a multifaceted global Pakistani-American, a super-fly woman. She embodies layered narratives derived from many cultural traditions and encounters. Seriously playful and playfully serious, she flies the world, bears witness, and makes the invisible visible, with camera and cleavage, a pair of glasses perched on her head, and wisps of grey. She is neither overly sexualized, nor completely covered. She represents most women, at neither end of the polemical spectrum. Instead, she is in the middle. And extraordinary in her ordinariness.

© 2019 Sarah K. Khan, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.28

## Amrita Simla Shero — Origin and Evolution

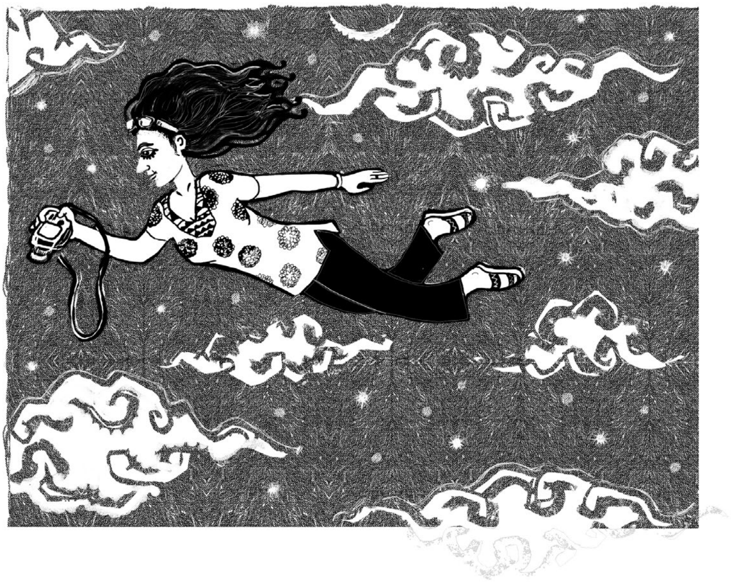


Fig. 27.1 Sarah K. Khan, 'Amrita Simla B&W', 2015. © Sarah K. Khan.

The presence of a brown supershero for public consumption is a form of resistance and strength. I created Amrita Simla to appeal to my community, as opposed to the fantasies or expectations of a white and/or male gaze. Troubled with the urgency of Black Lives Matter, indebted to the civil rights movement for my presence in this country, I needed to introduce another supershero, with fist raised, to the mix of Black, brown, LGBTQ s/heroes. On my terms, she appears first in my short film as a narrator, *Bowing to No One* — a non-poverty film about an indigenous Central Indian woman farmer, forager, and healer.[1] Simla is a required addition to the ever-expanding US and South Asian visual culture. More Black and brown super-sheroes flying the sky equip young and old with a vision of how they have power to soar. I push for the space to imagine, and demand belonging. I insert myself and my creations, without apology.

---

[1] 'Bowing to No One, Trailer,' Vimeo Video. 'Bowing to No One', the first film in the series, is about Satyavati, an indigenous woman farmer from Central India, who recounts her struggles to live sustainably on her land and forests. Posted by Sarah K. Khan, 4 January 2016, https://vimeo.com/150720245

The Shero Simla character emerged fully when I spent a year (2014–15) as a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar in India. I co-created her imagery with Sutanu Panigrahi, a graphic artist, painter, and designer based in Delhi. Amrita Simla's story derives from narratives that are not Euro- or America-centric but pull from my own curated ancestral South Asian/Muslim cultural heritages. She soars to the songs of her protective Punjabi *Jugni*[2] (female fireflies) whose social justice lights help her bear witness. The curled and flowing clouds she glides among are Persianized, like the miniature Mughal-Persian-inspired graphics she inhabits, and her nose is *Half Mughal, Half Mowgli*, à la Riz MC of the Swet Shop Boys.

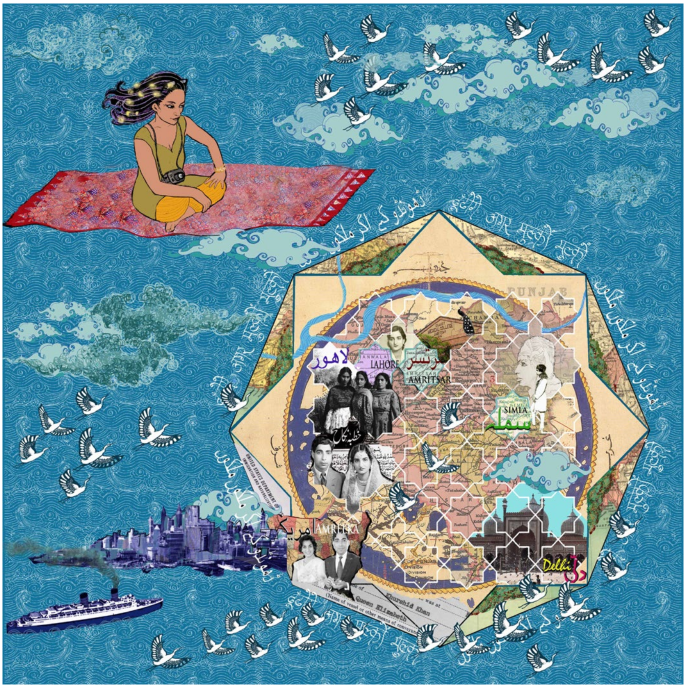


Fig. 27.2 Sarah K. Khan, 'Amrita Simla at Peace, Overlooking Her World', 2015. © Sarah K. Khan.

My virtual version of Amrita is entitled 'Amrita Partitioned Once, Migrated Twice'. It includes graphics based on my photography, archival family photographs, curated maps, and drawings. The layers shown represent one story, but Simla and her creator embody limitless strata and infinite terrains. The origin of her name, Amrita Simla, first: my father, born in Simla in 1928, grew up both in Simla and Amritsar (now located in modern-day India), with a brief stint in Old Delhi, before partition in 1947. In South Asia today, as in most parts of the world, a name signifies kinship, gender, religion, caste, class, status, geography, and much more. To stress my limitless strata and conceal other aspects, I chose a name that reveals location only; Amrita Simla is a northern South Asian shero. The name 'Amrita,' also invokes a healing nectar, *amrit* (in Sanskrit it means immortality, it is understood also as *soma*, the drink that confers immortality). Amrita is the healer and healed. Sometimes referred to as Sim Sim, her nickname means 'sesame' in Arabic. And in fact, the incantation that allows Ali Baba of the Arabian Nights[3] to access the thieves' treasure begins with 'Open Sesame!' *iftah yā simsim* (Arabic: افتح يا سمسم). Shero Sim Sim not only suggests her connection to her Muslim sensibilities but also places herself in the exotic Arabian Nights. In this case, however, Sim Sim is the magical sesame. The way-opener, she is both the lock and the key. She controls who enters, remains, and leaves her world.

---

[2] Umang Sabarwal, 'Jugni Songs and the Traveling Sparks of Freedom,' *Agents of Ishq*, 15 August 2017, http://agentsofishq.com/jugni/

An Arab map of the world anchors Amrita's creation story with histories from South Asia, the Muslim world, and its surrounding cultures.[4] At the foundation lies a map of the world by Al-Sharif al-Idris (c. 1100–1165), a Muslim from Al-Andalus who worked for the Norman King Roger II. Islamic map-makers excelled at mapping the world, and his world map moors Amrita's world. That I build this virtual collage on the foundations laid by an Arab-Muslim map-maker is not lost on me. I deliberately excluded one newer British colonial empire for an older hegemonic power, the Muslims of the past. A contradiction, and yet a different hook on which to hang some of Amrita's history.

---

[3] Robert Irwin (ed.), *The Arabian Nights*: *Tales of 1,001 Nights*, vols. 1–3 (London: Penguin UK, 2010).

[4] Al-Sharif al-Idris (c. 1100–1165), *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*. The 'book of pleasant journeys into faraway lands', or 'Book of Roger', *Tabula Rogeriana*. A sixteenth-century (1553 AD) manuscript of al-Idrisi's description of the world composed in 1152, this manuscript contains the complete text of al-Idrisi's medieval Arabic geography, describing the known world from the equator to the latitude of the Baltic Sea, and from the Atlantic to Siberia. By permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~23~23~126595~142784:WorldMap?qvq=w4s:/what/MS.%20Pococke%20375;lc:ODLodl~29~29,ODLodl~7~7,ODLodl~6~6,ODLodl~14~14,ODLodl~8~8,ODLodl~23~23,ODLodl~1~1,ODLodl~24~24&mi=0&trs=70

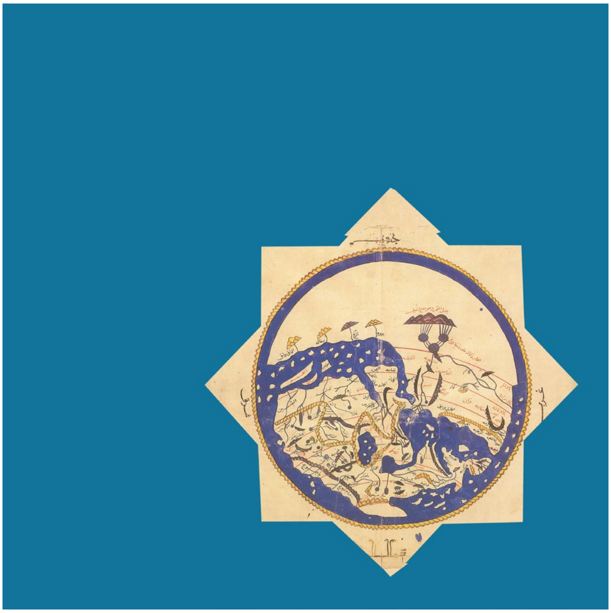


Fig. 27.2a Sarah K. Khan, ‘Arab Map of the World’, 2015, © Sarah K. Khan.

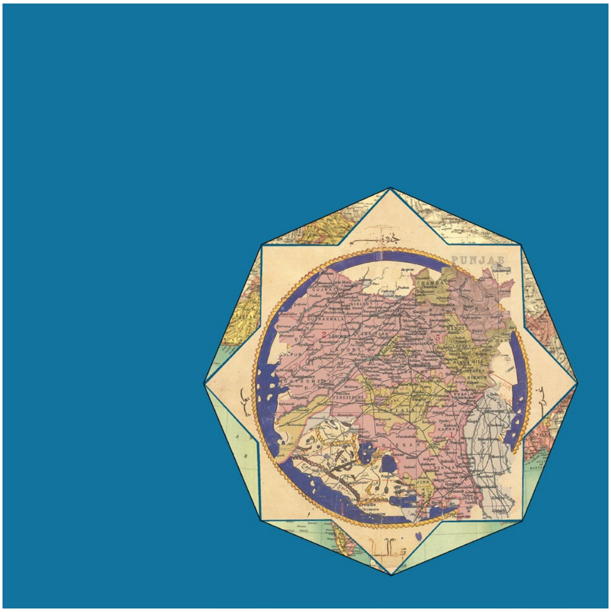


Fig. 27.2b Sarah K. Khan, ‘British Gazetteer Map of India Pre-Partition’, 2015. © Sarah K. Khan.

On the next stratum I placed a British Gazetteer map of northern South Asia from the early 1940s, before partition.[5] The map reveals the territory that existed before imperial powers imposed borders in a colonialist frenzy that led to the deaths of millions in addition to the displacement and migration of more than six million people.[6] [7] By adding this layer, maybe I could elicit longer, deeper stories from my family, especially my mother and father, who lived through partition. A medical student (his own father was a *Hakim* (healer), on the side) in Amritsar at the time, my father went with his medical school professor and his fellow Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim peers to see the trains recently arrived from Lahore filled with the dead bodies of massacred Hindus in August 1947. Similar trains filled with Muslim bodies arrived in Lahore. 'You will never know what it means to live under Hindu-dominated rule,' he raises his voice towards those who suggest that maybe there never should have been a partition. The placement of the pre-partition map helps me conjure healing. If the map is not partitioned, reframed and torn, then places are still whole. If the map does not contain borders, then my and my father's mind may wander a border-free universe. I will it to be that way by placing the map as another layer, another mooring in the collage. As the strata collect, a virtual collage unfolds. The patchwork layers are amuletic, known to me, and charged with import and prayer. They are hidden and revealed in pieces.

I added several more layers to 'Amrita Partitioned Once, Migrated Twice'. The virtual collage expresses tangible places: my father dressed in costume for a school play in Simla as a boy; the view of the Jama'a Masjid in Old Delhi, close to where his family lived; and a photo of his medical school before partition in Amritsar. Bilqis, my mother, the Queen of Sheba, strikes her filmy Bollywood pose with her sisters in Lahore. And a *Nikah Nama* seals their Muslim marriage, followed by a journey to *Amreeka* on the Queen Mary. A final photo in the sequence

---

[5] J. G. Bartholomew, *The Indian Empire. Imperial Gazetteer of India. New Edition, Published Under the Authority of His Majesty's Secretary of State for India in Council* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907–1909): a map of Northern South Asia, before partition, British Gazetteer, http://dsal.uchicago.edu/maps/gazetteer/images/gazetteer_frontcover.jpg

[6] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*: *Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

[7] Pankaj Mishra, 'Exit Wounds: The Legacy of Indian Partition', *The New Yorker*, 16 August 2007, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/08/13/exit-wounds

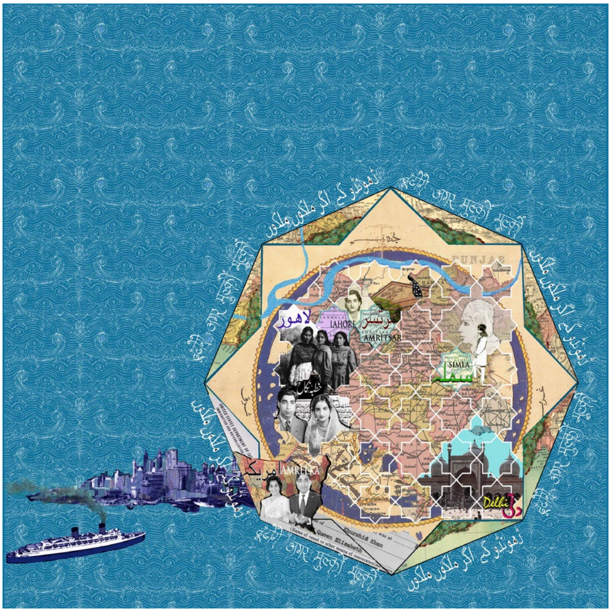


Fig. 27.2c Sarah K. Khan, 'Amrita Simla with Archival Family Photos', 2015. © Sarah K. Khan.

is the young couple at a party, my father with the requisite 1950s drink in his hand, and my mother with her hair fashionably coiffed. They beamed black and white, bright.

Before Amrita enters the stage, her world is now encircled with Urdu and Devanagari scripts that repeats a couplet sung by Abida Parveen, a Pakistani singer, based on the poem by Shaad Azeemabadi (1846–1927). The refrain loosely translates to 'If you find your nation, your nation… it is rare to find.'[8] I interpret the song to mean, 'If you find your place, your nation, your country, your peace, your love or lover… it is rare to find.' Her song bathes me in longing, and her words convey what many migrants feel, a yearning. One is in a constant state of searching for one's place in the physical and spirit worlds. A tugging at yourself, a continuous reminder exists that you are from somewhere else, belong nowhere, and yet belong everywhere. But you only kind of, sort of, belong.

---

[8] Abida Parveen, 'Dhoondo Ge Agar Mulkon', posted as 'Dhoondo Ge Agar Mulkon | Abida Parveen Songs | Abida Parveen Meri Pasand Vol – 2' by EMI Pakistan, YouTube, 21 September 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48c7H-1BenM. Translation: http://gurmeet.net/poetry/dhoondoge-agar-mulkon-mulkon/

The creation story nears completion. Airborne birds roam free without partitions and borders. Our family has no special ties to Ellis Island, where an earlier wave of immigrants arrived on *Amreeka*'s shores. We arrived after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was enacted in 1966. The sacrifices of the civil rights activists permitted the partitioned and migrated a second chance. And slowly, North American culture seeped into our souls. Just as much as Abida Parveen and her Sufi soul evoked a yearning, the Jackson 5 lit a fire in this five-year-old South-Asian-American girl. They helped me learn my ABCs and 123s on the Soul Train.

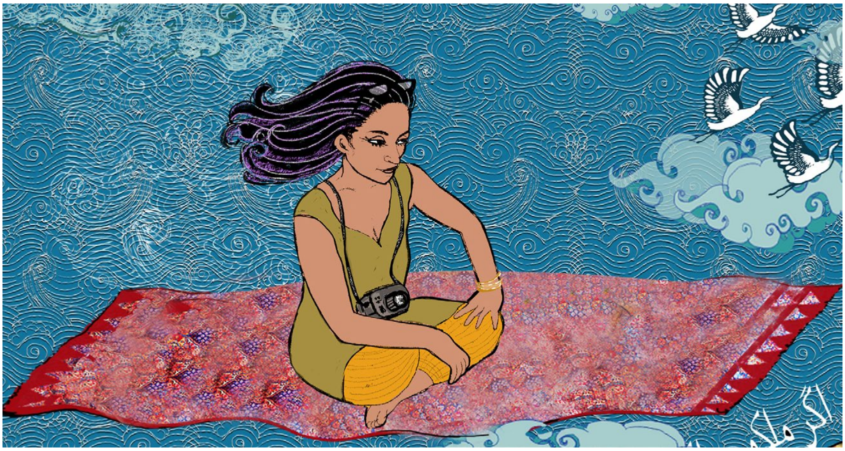


Fig. 27.2d 'Amrita on Her Carpet', 2015. © Sarah K. Khan.

Amrita appears on her intricately woven red magic flying carpet. She no longer considers herself half, as an immigrant's kid, but double and overflowing with fullness. She hovers, looking down at a story of her created self, composed and unruffled. Dressed simply, neither draped with excess clothing nor scantily clad. She floats. Always with camera and cleavage. Her glasses balanced. Her strands of grey are her strength, knowledge and power. She documents. She films with permission. Though older, she is attractive to herself in her comfort, first and foremost. And she has *jugni* (female fireflies) that infuse her hair and light her way. Punjabi *jugni* singer-protectors recall those who originally sang songs to protest British colonization and exploitation at the turn of the nineteenth century around the time of the Queen's

Jubilee. In the twenty-first century they reappear to protect and propel their Shero Simla, always forward towards the light. (For a complete playlist that accompanies the un-layering of Amrita, and subsequent multimedia projects, see the footnote.[9])

## Developing Amrita Simla: Animated, Comic, Graphic

Upon completing my Fulbright in India, I returned to the USA. I read Ta-Nehisi Coates' 'The Case for Reparations' in *The Atlantic*[10] and *Between the World and Me*.[11] And I learned about the Marvel Comics, *Black Panther* series he was authoring.[12] As a child I read *Archie's*, *Richie Rich*, *The Peanut Gallery*, and *Dennis the Menace*. I grew older, I stopped reading them. They did not include me. They did not reflect me. I turned away. This turning-away became a series of turnings-away from the multiple white eurocentric canons and epistemologies in traditional academic disciplines. I cobbled together my own education, filled with histories and stories and literatures that included me, or people closer to me. This included African-American culture, Arab history, South Asian, China, Brazil, and Nuyorican salsa culture.

---

[9] Essay Playlist:

(1) Abida Parveen sings '*Dhoondon Ge agar mulkon mulkon…*' Live performance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKGB-Rhkzho

(2) Jackson 5, *ABC*, Jackson5 ABC Album, 1970.

(3) Riz MC of The Swet Shop Boys, *Half Moghul, Half Mowgli*, Cashmere Album, 2015.

(4) Jugni: http://agentsofishq.com/jugni/

(5) Vijay Iyer, *Human Nature*, Solo Album, 2010

(6) John Santos, *Abuela*, La Mar Album, 2002

(7) Hakam Khan, Rajasthani Folk Song about the agricultural cycle, SKKhan's audio/video field recordings 2014

(8) Audio field recordings of spice porters working in Khari Baoli, Asia's largest spice market, Old Delhi 2014–15

(9) Audio recording Shabnam Virmani, singing about Sassi Puunun, a Sindhi Folk legend about separation from the beloved. New Delhi 2015.

[10] Ta-Nehisi Coates, 'The Case for Reparations', *The Atlantic*, June 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/

[11] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2015).

[12] Ta Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther*, Marvel Comics, https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/ta-nehisi-coates-new-comic-black-hell

The 2009 US inauguration, though freezing cold, signified a shift in my sense of place; a hopeful warmth enveloped me. Fast forward to Obama's final years in office. For the first time, I viscerally felt that I too belonged in North America. Despite my differing political views on many issues with the administration, the presence of a Black man and a Black family in the White House gave me hope that I not only belonged here, but was also going to fight for that right through my art practice and social justice engagements.

At the same time the US elections loomed. I was disturbed by mass incarceration, an assault on immigrants, and the post-9/11 hunt for Muslims and Arabs in New York.[13] I was researching my short film for the Migrant Kitchen Series, *Surviving Surveillance, Catering to America*, about the life of a Pakistani woman whose son was surveilled and entrapped by the NYPD. Shahina Parveen survived by catering.[14] A more sophisticated version of COINTELPRO[15] now targeted Muslims and Arabs, in addition to Black and brown bodies. Shahina and her family were caught in our post 9/11 quagmire. Amid these events, I learned of G. Willow Wilson's Marvel Comic Star Kamala Khan,[16] a Muslim Pakistani-American supershero. And I wanted more nuanced Black and brown s/heroes, in all their gradations, differences, and layers of complexity. I sought to tip the publishing and media worlds towards the possibility of complex representations. With the recent — at least on TED — acknowledgment of the need for more diverse chronicles,[17] Wilson and Coates' contributions of brown and Black narratives at Marvel Comics propelled me to introduce Amrita to broader audiences.[18] Amrita Simla now needed to emerge more fully in multiple forms — animation, comic and graphic representations (which are currently in progress), in addition to being the narrator of the Indian women farmers' short films.

---

[13] See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*: *Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*: *A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014); Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*: *An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014); Matt Apuzzo and Adam Goldman, *Enemies Within*: *Inside the NYPD's Secret Spying Unit and Bin Laden's Final Plot Against America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

[14] The short film has been an official selection at the Korean American Film Festival of New York 2017; TASVEER South Asian Film Festival Seattle, Washington, 2018; and screened at Museum of the Moving Image and Queens Museum in 2017.

[15] COINTELPRO, https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro

[16] Kamala Khan, Marvel Comics; Jia Tolentino, 'The Writer Behind a Muslim Marvel Superhero on Her Faith in Comics', *New Yorker*, 29 April 2017, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/g-willow-wilsons-american-heroes; Latonya Pennington, '15 Muslim Characters in Comics You Should Know', CBR.com, 3 February 2017, http://www.cbr.com/muslim-comic-book-characters-you-should-know/

[17] Chimananda Adichie, 'The Danger of a Single Story', TED, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en

## Other Works

The ethos of Amrita inspires my other bodies of popular and public work. The additional works deal, directly or indirectly, with women and migration, and farming and cooking as knowledge-based practices. Past and on-going projects include: Farmers of Color in Southern USA; Indian Women Farmers short film series, narrated by Shero Simla;[19] The Migrant Kitchens Series in Queens NY and Fez Morocco;[20] and The In/Visible Photography Series.[21] These works are transdisciplinary, involving film, audio, photography, graphic art, maps, charts, and texts.[22] Most are available in popular media outlets, and engage the themes of women, agency, migration and social justice.

## Envoi

I aim to defy erasure, to stitch permanently my presence along with other marginalized people into the fabric of local and global cultures. In a world that dismantles its free edges, erects borders and walls, guts its core values, and strips away basic human rights, I resist omission through popular media and socially engaged art. I offer a human and humane glimpse of singular, often female, voices. By the creative transdisciplinary documentation of women and the marginalized, I challenge exclusion. The fight against deletion, past, present, and future, anchors my multimedia production. And it propels me further to reimagine new and revive lost narratives: local and global s/heroes who dreamed, created, conquered, loved, played, and lived forever in the shadows and on the sidelines, dismissed to the margins. No more.

---

[18] Glen Weldon, 'Beyond the Pale (Male): Marvel, Diversity and a Changing Comics Readership', *Weekend Edition Saturday*, 8 April 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/04/08/523044892/beyond-the-pale-male-marvel-diversity-and-a-changing-comics-readership

[19] 'Bowing to No One, Trailer,' https://vimeo.com/150720245.

[20] Migrant Kitchens Series including articles, photography, detailed data-driven maps: Queens Migrant Kitchen Project Culinary Backstreets: https://culinarybackstreets.com/category/projects-category/queens-project-category/ and Asian American Writers' Workshop: Sarah K. Khan, 'Collateral Damage', *OpenCityMag*, 25 April 2017, http://opencitymag.aaww.org/collateral-damage/

[21] New York University, '"In/Visible: Portraits of Farmers and Spice Porters, India" Photography Exhibition by Sarah K. Khan to Debut at NYU's Kimmel Windows Galleries, June 7–September 7, 2018', https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2018/may/-in-visible--portraits-of-farmers-and-spice-porters--india--phot.html

[22] Priti Salian, 'The Exhibition Highlighting the Power of Migrant Cooks', *The National*, 6 December 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/food/the-exhibition-highlighting-the-power-of-migrant-cooks-1.799516

# Bibliography

Adichie, Chimananda, 'The Danger of a Single Story', TED, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en

Alexander, Michelle, *The New Jim Crow*: *Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

al-Idris, Al-Sharif, Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq, the 'book of pleasant journeys into faraway lands', or 'Book of Roger', *Tabula Rogeriana*, by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~23~23~126595~142784:WorldMap?qvq=w4s:/what/MS.%20Pococke%20375;lc:ODLodl~29~29,ODLodl~7~7,ODLodl~6~6,ODLodl~14~14,ODLodl~8~8,ODLodl~23~23,ODLodl~1~1,ODLodl~24~24&mi=0&trs=70

Apuzzo, Matt and Adam Goldman, *Enemies Within*: *Inside the NYPD's Secret Spying Unit and Bin Laden's Final Plot Against America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

Bartholomew, J. G., *The Indian Empire. Imperial Gazetteer of India. New Edition, Published Under the Authority of His Majesty's Secretary of State for India in Council* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907–1909).

Butalia, Urvashi, *The Other Side of Silence*: *Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

Coates, Ta Nehisi, *Black Panther*, Marvel Comics, https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/ta-nehisi-coates-new-comic-black-hell

Coates, Ta-Nehisi, 'The Case for Reparations', *The Atlantic*, June 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/

Coates, Ta-Nehisi, *Between the World and Me* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2015).

Irwin, Robert (ed.), *The Arabian Nights*: *Tales of 1,001 Nights*, vols. 1–3 (London: Penguin UK, 2010).

Khan, Sarah K., 'Collateral Damage', *OpenCityMag*, 25 April 2017, http://opencitymag.aaww.org/collateral-damage/

Khan, Sarah K., 'Bowing to No One, Trailer,' Vimeo Video, 4 January 2016, https://vimeo.com/150720245

Mishra, Pankaj, 'Exit Wounds: The Legacy of Indian Partition', *New Yorker*, 16 August 2007, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/08/13/exit-wounds

New York University, '"In/Visible: Portraits of Farmers and Spice Porters, India" Photography Exhibition by Sarah K. Khan to Debut at NYU's Kimmel Windows Galleries, June 7–September 7, 2018', https://www.nyu.edu/about/

news-publications/news/2018/may/-in-visible--portraits-of-farmers-and-spice-porters--india--phot.html

Parveen, Abida, ‘Dhoondo Ge Agar Mulkon’, posted as ‘Dhoondo Ge Agar Mulkon | Abida Parveen Songs | Abida Parveen Meri Pasand Vol – 2’ by EMI Pakistan, YouTube, 21 September 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48c7H-1BenM

Pennington, Latonya, ’15 Muslim Characters in Comics You Should Know’, CBR.com, 3 February 2017, http://www.cbr.com/muslim-comic-book-characters-you-should-know/

Rankine, Claudia, *Citizen*: *An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014).

Sabarwal, Umang, ‘Jugni Songs and the Traveling Sparks of Freedom,’ Agents of Ishq, 15 August 2017, http://agentsofishq.com/jugni/

Salian, Priti, ‘The Exhibition Highlighting the Power of Migrant Cooks’, *The National*, 6 December 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/food/the-exhibition-highlighting-the-power-of-migrant-cooks-1.799516

Stevenson, Bryan, *Just Mercy*: *A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014).

Tolentino, Jia, ‘The Writer Behind a Muslim Marvel Superhero on Her Faith in Comics’, *New Yorker*, 29 April 2017, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/g-willow-wilsons-american-heroes

Weldon, Glen, ‘Beyond the Pale (Male): Marvel, Diversity and a Changing Comics Readership’, *Weekend Edition Saturday*, 8 April 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/04/08/523044892/beyond-the-pale-male-marvel-diversity-and-a-changing-comics-readership

# 29. Diaspora, Indigeneity, Queer Critique: Tracey Moffatt's Aesthetics of Dwelling in Displacement

*Gayatri Gopinath*

This essay draws from my recent book, *Unruly Visions*: *The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (2018).[1] I use this phrase, 'the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora,' to name aesthetic practices that engage the visual register and that allow us to theorize gender and sexuality in relation to race and migration in multiple geographic and/or national locations. Most crucially, these aesthetic practices also allow us to apprehend the ways in which viable modes of dwelling and rootedness are created in the wake of colonial dispossession and displacement. Such processes of displacement, dispossession, and dwelling may very well be obscured within conventional historical archives, and may not be accessible through conventional disciplinary approaches. It is in the realm of the aesthetic that we can most clearly see and indeed feel the imprint of these histories that often elude disciplinary or canonical knowledge, that cannot be measured, quantified or categorized through conventional methodologies, but that nevertheless powerfully shape

---

[1] An expanded and modified version of this essay appears in Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*: *The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

© 2019 Gayatri Gopinath, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.29

the contours of our material lives in the present. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora thus constitute an alternative archive of that which remains submerged within dominant epistemologies, and they also enact and demand a reading practice of dominant archives that renders visible their gaps, fissures, and inconsistencies.

By engaging with the recent work of celebrated Australian photographer, filmmaker, and multimedia artist Tracey Moffatt, this essay is, more specifically, a preliminary attempt to contribute to an emergent conversation between diaspora studies and indigenous studies through a queer-studies lens. The concepts of diaspora and indigeneity are, more often than not, situated in a binary or oppositional relation to one another: indeed diaspora by its very definition seems to privilege mobility, hybridity, and uprootedness, while indigeneity similarly seems to privilege belonging, authenticity, and rootedness. The two concepts may also appear to be temporally mismatched: diaspora is often seen as the product and effect of postcolonial migration, whereas indigeneity is often framed in the context of ongoing colonial dispossession.

But while the concepts of diaspora and indigeneity may initially appear inherently oppositional, many scholars have rendered in rich historical and ethnographic detail the lived experience of indigeneity that evinces the fluid exchanges between the indigenous and the diasporic.[2] However if indigenous studies scholars have crucially identified how these exchanges reframe the contours of 'indigeneity' itself, diaspora studies scholars have been less adept at deeply engaging with these insights to explore how they might in turn transform an understanding of diaspora. This essay intends to do just that: if we take diaspora to name the movement of indigenous populations not only across nation-state borders but also across and between different sovereign indigenous nations or tribal land bases, between island and mainland, and between rural and urban spaces, new mappings of diaspora emerge that utterly displace the primacy of dominant nation-state formations as the inevitable locus of diasporic movement.

---

[2] See for instance Graham Harvey and Charles D. Thompson, 'Introduction,' *Indigenous Diasporas and Dislocation* (London: Routledge, 2016); Mark Watson, 'Diasporic Indigeneity: Place and the Articulation of Ainu Identity in Tokyo, Japan,' *Environment and Planning*, 42 (2010), 268–84; Reyna Ramirez, *Native Hubs*: *Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Gregory Smithers, *The Cherokee Diaspora*: *An Indigenous History of Migration, Resettlement and Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); J. Kehaulani Kauanui, 'Diasporic Deracination and 'Off-Island Hawaiians', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19:1 (2007), 137–60.

It is precisely the intertwining of histories of diaspora and indigeneity, displacement and dwelling, that are suggested by the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora. I understand Tracey Moffatt's work as exemplary of such practices, and as both queer and diasporic, not because of the specific identity markers and life history of the artist herself, nor simply because of the transnational/translocal circuits within which her work travels. Indeed, none of Moffatt's work is explicitly homoerotic or references same-sex desire, practices or subjectivities in any obvious sense. Rather Moffatt's work, as an instance of the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora, teaches us how to read: it schools us as viewers in a queer mode and method of reading that is as attuned to ongoing processes of racialization and colonial dispossession. I understand queerness in Moffatt's work as a critical lens and optic that refuses to situate these formations in a hierarchical, equivalent, or binary relation to each other. Queerness is an optic through which to read the co-implication of the diasporic and the indigenous; it also an optic that allows us to see and to sense occluded histories — specifically of settler colonial violence — and how they continue to imprint the present. But queerness also names the ways in which 'the normalizing logic of settler colonialism'[3] produces sexually and gender non-normative bodies that are then subject to discipline, containment, and regulation. Moffatt's work makes apparent how indigenous bodies are 'queered' by settler colonialism, in the sense of being positioned as aberrant, perverse, and deviant. In other words, queerness in Moffatt's work is both a critical hermeneutic and names a positioning outside of white-settler normativity.[4] And finally, Moffatt's queer-sighted vision enables a glimpse of what José Muñoz terms a 'forward-dawning futurity,' a vision of an alternative landscape that counters the deadening strictures of the here and now.[5]

---

[3] Andrea Smith, 'Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism', *GLQ*: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16:1–2 (2010), 42–68 (p. 53).

[4] I am indebted here to Stuart Hall's famous formulation of identity not as essence but as a positioning. See Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity*: *Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–37.

[5] José Esteban Munõz, *Cruising Utopia*: *The There and Then of Queer Futurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 7.

Moffatt, the daughter of an Australian Aboriginal mother and a white Irish father, was raised along with her three siblings by a white foster mother in a working-class suburb of Brisbane, Australia. I focus here on her 2013 exhibition *Spirit Landscapes*, one of her most autobiographical works, where she returns to the site of her childhood after twelve years of living in New York City. Moffatt has eschewed directly biographical readings of her work, and has also been reluctant to be labeled as an 'Aboriginal' or even 'Australian' artist.[6] Such a stance has led some critics to argue that she represents an urban indigeneity that embraces diasporic cosmopolitanism at the expense of, and at odds with, her indigenous roots. Indeed these critical engagements with her work reproduce precisely the commonplace understanding of the relation between diaspora and indigeneity as inherently oppositional. For instance, art historian Ian McLean notes: '[…] Gordon Bennett and Tracey Moffatt, the best known of […] urban art practitioners, discount their Aboriginality and make art that follows, in an almost classic sense, the post-colonial paradigms of migration — of exiles, diasporas and strangers […] However, these paradigms privilege a particular set of experiences that do not match those Aborigines who still walk with their ancestors […].'[7] In fact, if we read Moffatt's work as queer in the different senses I suggest above, it evinces a complex interrelation between the diasporic and the indigenous that, far from 'discounting' her Aboriginality, clearly draws on personal and collective histories and symbolic repertoires. The vexed psychic and material legacies of Australia's Aboriginal-child-removal policies — where Aboriginal children were systematically taken from their birth families and placed in missionary or government boarding schools, or with white families — as well as the ongoing history of Aboriginal dispossession more generally, provide the emotional undercurrent for much of Moffatt's work.

This is particularly clear in *Spirit Landscapes*, made up of five distinct photographic series of digital prints, which unabashedly engages with the artist's own fraught familial history and ancestral past. When shown at the Tyler Rollins Fine Art gallery in New York in 2013, *Spirit Landscapes* opened with the series 'Suburban Landscapes': six black-and-white photographs of unremarkable suburban streets are overlaid with brightly colored water crayon text that, as the gallery statement puts it, 'acts like a semi-transparent veil of memory over the streets of [Moffatt's] youth.'[8]

---

[6] See 'Tracey Moffatt', *Deadly Vibe*, 84 (February 2004), http://www.deadlyvibe.com.au/2007/11/tracey-moffatt

[7] Ian McLean, 'Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia,' in *Exiles, Diasporas, and Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 72–95 (p. 76).

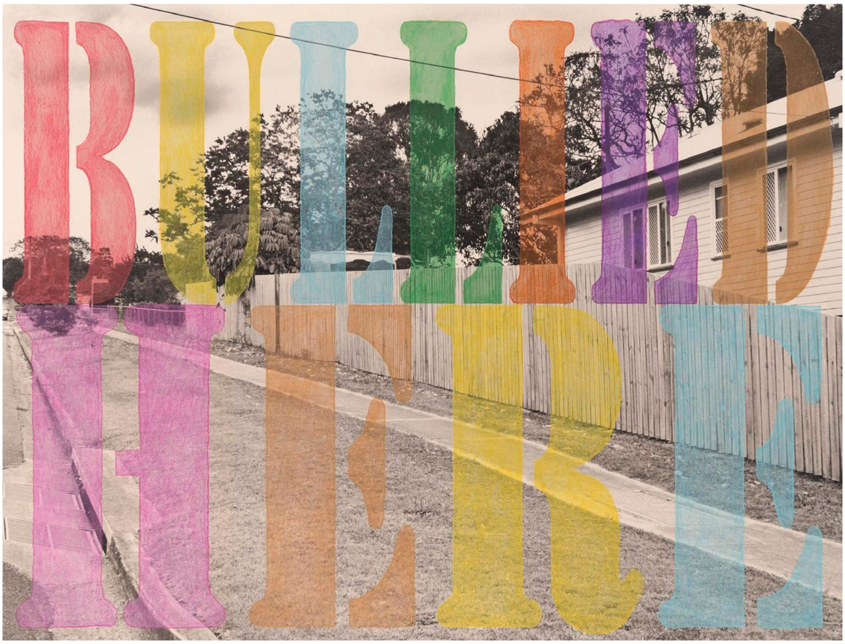


Fig. 29.1 Tracey Moffatt, from 'Suburban Landscapes', 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

The stenciled phrases — 'bullied here', 'stole a Mars Bar', 'tea at the Reverends', 'tossed flower petals', 'crossed the creek', 'to guitar lessons' — are rendered in capital letters that stretch to cover the entire surface of the print. The images memorialize the quotidian acts and ordinary affects, the minor moments of trauma, pleasure, excitement, and boredom, that saturate the experience of childhood and adolescence. The interplay between text and image in 'Suburban Landscapes' both indexes and collapses the temporal and geographic distance between the adult Moffatt recently returned from New York, and her childhood self in Brisbane of the 1960s and 1970s; indeed the images hold in tension and play these multiple temporal and geographic frames simultaneously. In interviews Moffatt has spoken of the Brisbane of her youth as ‘a holiday paradise — the heat, the joy, but also the terrible mood of fear and racism.’[9] Moffatt’s ambivalent relation to this space of ‘home’ — ‘the heat and the racism and the redneck attitudes’ as she puts it[10] — is evident in the disjuncture between the meaning of the text itself and the images of apparently innocuous suburban streets overlaid with cheery crayon colors: the stark phrase ‘bullied here’, for instance, is an assertion of and testament to the quotidian violences that are just as much of the fabric of everyday life as is the heat and boredom of ‘those endless Brisbane summers.’[11]

---

[8] Kathryn Weir, *Spirit Landscapes* (New York: Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2013), [n.p.].

Moffatt’s ambivalent relation to home as a site of both belonging and unbelonging is even more apparent when we view ‘Suburban Landscapes’ alongside ‘Picturesque Cherbourg,’ a series of six digital print collages that at Tyler Rollins was exhibited adjacent to it.

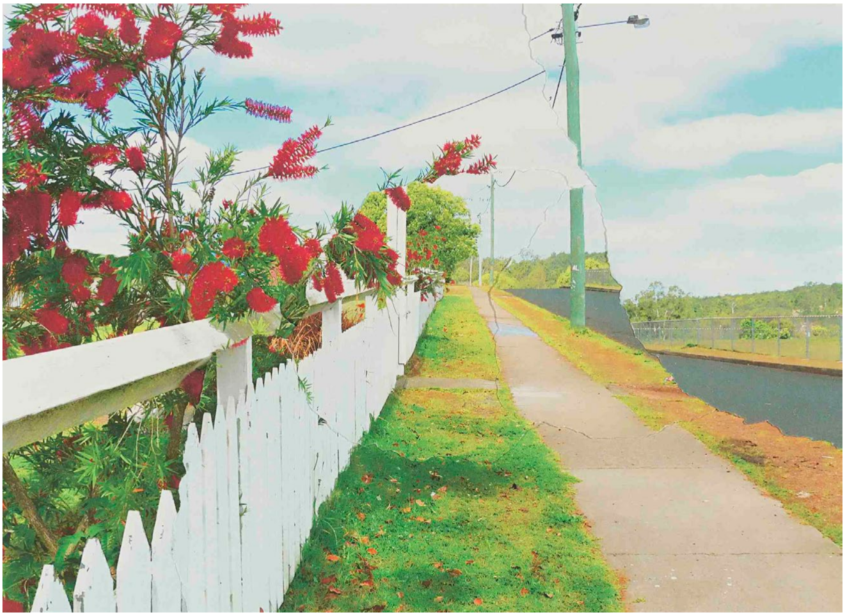


Fig. 29.2 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘Picturesque Cherbourg’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

---

[9] ‘Tracey Moffatt’, *Deadly Vibe*, 84 (February 2004), http://www.deadlyvibe.com.au/2007/11/tracey-moffatt

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

Initially the 'Cherbourg' images appear to be picture-postcard pretty, color-saturated landscapes of white picket fences and neat clapboard houses set against lush foliage and a bright blue sky filled with cottony clouds. A closer look, however, reveals the photographs to be in fact comprised of fragments torn apart and then imperfectly sutured together to make apparent the breaks, shards and ruptures in this vision of the picturesque.

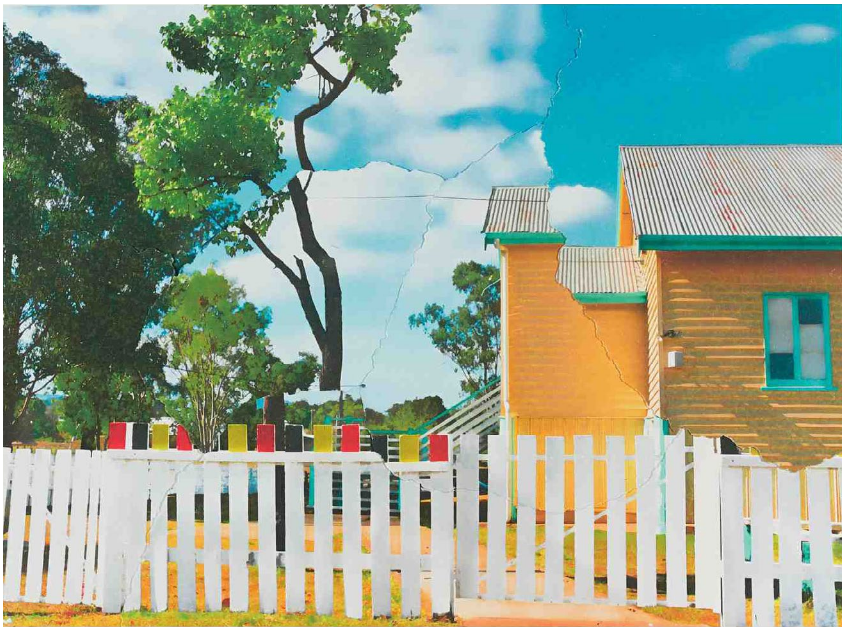


Fig. 29.3 Tracey Moffatt, from 'Picturesque Cherbourg', 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

Cherbourg itself is an Aboriginal 'settlement' founded in the late nineteenth century through the forced segregation, containment, and removal of disparate Aboriginal communities from all over Queensland, northern Australia. Moffatt's own family members were relocated to Cherbourg in the 1920s, and their descendants continue to reside there.

In order to appreciate the full import of Moffatt's images, it is helpful to consider the specific meaning of the 'picturesque' in relation to Australia. As an aesthetic ideal, the picturesque emerged in late-eighteenth-century Britain as a way of mediating between the sublime and the beautiful; landscape painters turned their attention to creating 'picturesque' images of Scotland, Wales and the Lake District, for instance, as a way of rendering these unfamiliar landscapes into those that were at once 'unthreatening, safe, and accessible.'[12] As social geographer Allaine Cerwonka notes, 'landscape painting [in Britain] in particular de-politicized the effects of the displacement of the peasants from the countryside by creating beautiful melancholy landscapes […] absent of beggars and gypsies who increasingly populated such landscapes in the nineteenth century. Picturesque landscape painting converted poverty and industrialization into art and thus kept it at a manageable distance from the bourgeois and the upper class.'[13] Cerwonka details how this British ideal of the picturesque was deployed in the white settler colony of Australia not only through visual technologies such as painting and photography but also through the actual reshaping of the land itself, for instance through the imposition of English-style gardens onto the Australian landscape: 'The aesthetic production of the landscape was a useful method for mystifying the colonial appropriation of land underway in Australia. Turning the Australian continent into an English countryside and farmland helped erase the physical evidence of Aboriginal presence and influence on the land.'[14] The production of the picturesque, then, was a key aesthetic strategy through which white settlers rendered an unfamiliar and threatening landscape both knowable and familiar. It enabled them to imagine an organic tie to the land, naturalizing Aboriginal dispossession and laying claim to Aboriginal lands under the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*: empty land belonging to no one that was uninhabited, uncultivated, and therefore available for white settlement.

It is precisely this mystification of colonial domination and the erasure of colonial violence in the framing of the picturesque that Moffatt's 'Picturesque Cherbourg' both references and dismantles. Moffatt's disquieting collages of ruptured landscapes and visions of 'home' directly reference the spatial practices of settler colonial domination in Australia. The apparent 'picturesqueness' of Cherbourg belies its history as a key site of containment, segregation, and disciplining of

---

[12] Allaine Cerwonka, *Native to the Nation*: *Disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 62.

[13] Ibid..

[14] Ibid., p. 66.

Aboriginal peoples; indeed 'inmates' (as its Aboriginal inhabitants were called) needed permission from settlement authorities to enter or leave Cherbourg until well into the 1970s. Various historians and first-person accounts have detailed the intense forms of 'bodily and sensory regimes'[15] that governed every aspect of inmates' lives. These forms of discipline, surveillance and regulation were spatialized in the built environment of Cherbourg itself, which was split into two distinct areas: the 'camp domain', where the majority of Aboriginal inmates lived, and the 'administrative domain', reserved for the white supervisors along with a number of favored Aboriginal inmates.[16] These inmates lived in small timber cottages that they built themselves and that were meant to foster a European heteropatriarchal domestic ideal, even as this ideal was impossible to achieve given the system of child removal and labor exploitation in place: family units were routinely disaggregated with adults forced into gendered forms of labor (domestic labor for the women, manual labor for the men), while children were housed in sex-segregated dormitories away from their biologically related kin. Historian Thom Blake describes the housing spaces of inmates as follows: 'These cottages were identical in form and located on small blocks and enclosed by timber fences. The cottages were provided for 'better' inmates who demonstrated they could adopt white norms of behavior and family life.'[17] In light of this history, Moffatt's photographs of seemingly innocuous, even banal images of flowers and sky, tidy houses and white picket fences, take on an entirely different, far more chilling valence: this is the built environment of settler colonial power, where the houses and fences, lawns and gardens, are not simply the markers of suburban domesticity. Rather, as Moffatt's fractured images indicate, this architecture indexes the transformation of bodies and landscapes that are deemed threatening and antithetical to white-settler norms of racial, gendered and sexual order. 'Picturesque Cherbourg,' then, reveals the ways in which indigenous bodies — seen as co-extensive with indigenous land — are 'made queer' by settler colonial logic, in the sense of being positioned as aberrant and developmentally out of step with European civilizational modernity, and therefore in need of management and transformation.

---

[15] Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Nation*: *Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), p. 248.

[16] See Thom Blake, *A Dumping Ground*: *A History of the Cherbourg Settlement* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), for a detailed study of the formation of Cherbourg.

[17] Blake, *A Dumping Ground*, p. 130.

Settlements like Cherbourg were meant to inculcate in their inmates a personal and collective historical amnesia through the criminalization and attempted eradication of indigenous languages, spiritual belief systems, kinship, and entire ways of life. What does it mean then for Moffatt to claim this space, one that attests to the ongoing violence of the settler colonial project, as home? At Tyler Rollins, directly facing 'Picturesque Cherbourg' on an opposing wall was displayed the most visually striking photograph series in the exhibition, entitled 'As I Lay Back on my Ancestral Land.' In six large-scale (49x72 inches) images, each of which is shot through a differently colored monochromatic filter, Moffatt lies on the earth and points her camera upward, capturing trees and sky; the outlines of nude female figures are faintly discernable among the clouds and tree branches.

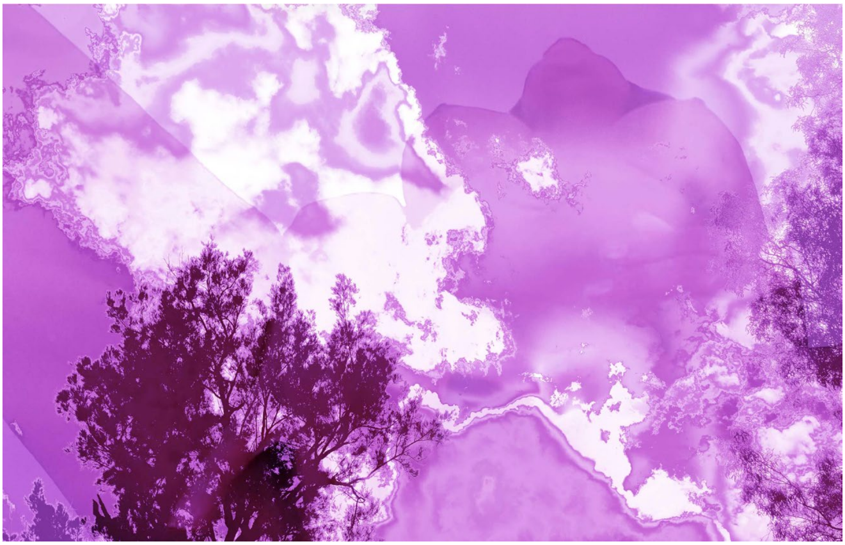


Fig. 29.4 Tracey Moffatt, from 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land', 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

As art critic Kathryn Weir comments on the images: 'The view from the ground of sky and trees is radical; photographic conventions favor the heroic tree portrait or the sweep of forest captured from above or yonder.'[18] Moffatt's claiming of 'her' 'ancestral land' is not a re-possession in the sense of ownership, control, and mastery that characterize a settler-colonial relation to land. Rather what emerge are landscape photographs that reject the generic conventions of landscape photography; given that the vantage point is from the ground looking up, away from the earth, in Moffatt's photographs the earth itself is felt and sensed rather than seen, manipulated or controlled.

Yet 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land' could also be read as a reinscription of essentialist notions of an inherent connection between the female body and nature, and between the indigenous subject and land/geography; certainly Moffatt's title makes the work available to such an interpretation. If read solely through what I would call a narrowly diasporic lens, Moffatt's apparent conflation of female bodies, indigeneity, and landscape appears indicative of what Stuart Hall terms 'a backward looking conception of diaspora,' one that is marked by 'the endless desire to return to "lost origins", to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning.'[19] Indeed moving through the gallery space from 'Suburban Landscapes' to 'Picturing Cherbourg' to 'As I Lay Back on my Ancestral Land,' one could read *Spirit Landscapes* as tracking a movement backwards, from the place of displacement to the place of origin: from Brisbane, to Cherbourg, to the female body and the land itself. But such a reading and critique of Moffatt's work would in fact misread the far more complex relation she maps out between her own embodied subjectivity and the space of 'home' in all its valences. Indeed as both 'Suburban Landscapes' and 'Picturesque Cherbourg' make clear, Moffatt's claiming of 'ancestral land' is a hard-won, complicated negotiation of various home spaces, all of which are simultaneously spaces of comfort and intense discomfort, and are multiply displaced, rent, and dislocated. Her images speak to what I would term a 'diasporic rootedness': her sense of being indigenous to the land is in fact rooted and routed in and through diaspora and the myriad dislocations and historical violences that both Cherbourg and the working-class suburban streets of Brisbane represent. Thus Moffatt's framing of 'ancestral land' holds important lessons for queer diaspora studies, a field that has long sought to disrupt narratives of origin and return. In Moffatt's work, 'ancestral land' is simultaneously a space of displacement; to 'lay back' on it is to lay claim to it, and to therefore inescapably reckon with traumatic histories of dispossession and the ambivalent modes of affective connection to and alienation from 'home' they engender. Her understanding of 'ancestral land,' then, precludes any simple claiming of such space as home, origin, or site of return.

---

[18] Weir, *Spirit Landscapes*.

[19] Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' p. 235.

In Moffatt's work, there is no generalizable category of 'the land' or 'the female body.'[20] Rather Moffatt's transposition of nude female figures onto the sky and trees must be read within the specific history of white-settler appropriation of indigenous lands and the gendered and sexual regulation of indigenous bodies. In light of this history, 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land' may in fact envision an alternative cosmology, a utopian landscape of possibility that José Muñoz would name queerness: a 'forward-dawning futurity' that 'is visible only in the horizon.'[21] Countering the multiple histories of violent dispossession and forced containment that continue to exact a brutal price on indigenous bodies and lands, Moffatt's imaginary landscape, or dreamscape rather, dares to imagine other ways of being in the world that are not beholden to settler colonialism's normalizing logic. It does so by envisioning a way of dwelling in displacement, one that wrests and lays claim to home spaces that have long been the site of the violent imposition of settler colonial norms and regulations.

This white-settler logic is directly referenced in 'Pioneer Dreaming', a series of six smaller, rather unassuming hand-painted photographic diptychs which at Tyler Rollins were exhibited as a kind of bridge between 'Suburban Landscapes' and 'Picturesque Cherbourg.' The right frame of each diptych depicts a white female heroine from classical Hollywood or Australian western cinema gazing out across the Australian outback, while the left frame of each diptych evokes the expansive landscape in subtle gradations of black, yellow, and red (the colors of the Australian Aboriginal flag).

---

[20] I draw this observation from Julia Bryan-Wilson's astute reading of Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* series. Moffatt's work is akin to Mendieta's in that, as Bryan-Wilson observes about the latter: 'Just as there is no such thing as "the earth" or "the goddess", there is no such thing as "the body" in Mendieta's work; she goes against "the body," to reassert the existence of, and interdependence between, many bodies.' Julia Bryan-Wilson, 'Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta,' in Stephanie Rosenthal (ed.), *Ana Mendieta*: *Traces* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013), pp. 26–38 (p. 36).

[21] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, pp. 7 and 11.

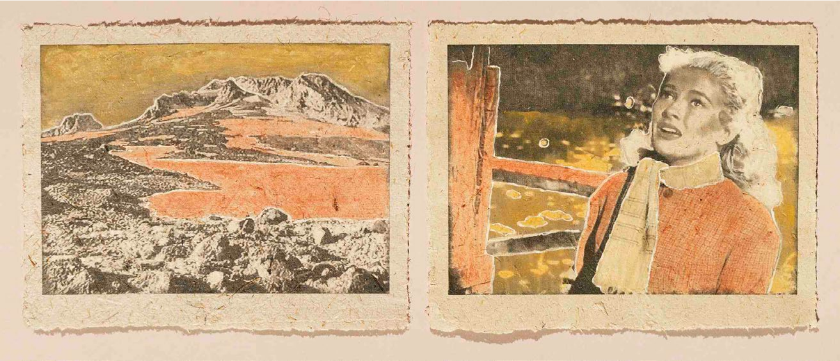


Fig. 29.5 Tracey Moffatt, from 'Pioneer Dreaming', 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

Historian Margaret Jacobs has detailed the crucial role that white women played in US and Australian settler colonial projects in their effort to regulate indigenous bodies and minds.[22] In Moffatt's foregrounding of the white heroine of popular US and Australian cinema, we can understand 'Pioneer Dreaming' to reference this gendering of settler colonial power and the centrality of maternalist discourses to indigenous dispossession in both national contexts. Moffatt has shied away from claiming that her work draws on 'traditional' mythologies and belief systems, preferring to speak of her work as articulating a highly 'personal mythology.'[23] Nevertheless both the landscapes of 'Pioneer Dreaming' and 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land' can be read as specifically evoking the continued salience of Aboriginal notions of Dreaming — a complex cosmology and spiritual system that maps 'the rich histories of ancestral sites and tracks that locate individual identity in particular places.'[24] Indeed Kathryn Weir notes that the subdued ochre tones of the landscapes in 'Pioneer Dreaming' recall the magisterial watercolors of Albert

---

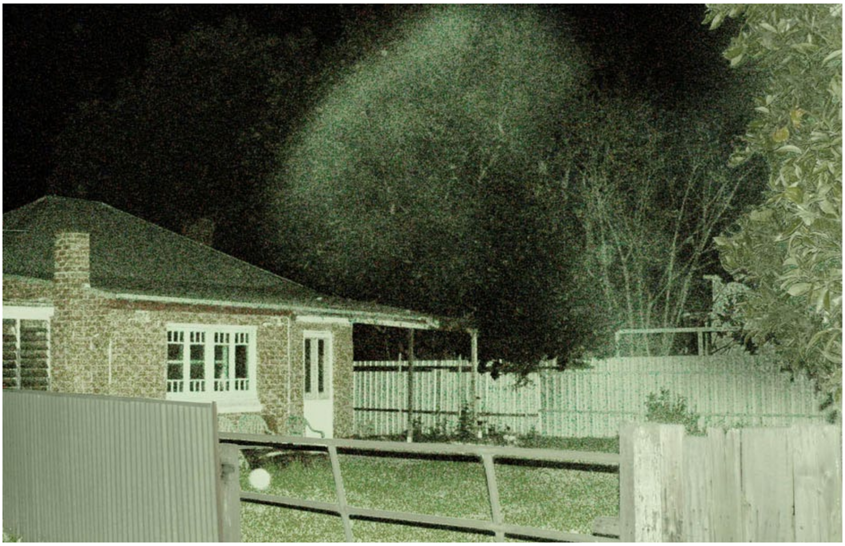
[22] See Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*.

[23] Kate Robertson, 'The Spectre at the Window: Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil* (1993),' *Senses of Cinema*, 81 (December 2016), [n.p.].

[24] McLean, 'Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia,' p. 75.

Namatjira, the mid-twentieth century Aboriginal painter who mastered the 'western' art of watercolor painting. Ian McLean argues that Natmatjira's landscapes 'depict a transcendent stillness through which Namatjira claims the modernity of Arrernte spiritualism and thus the continuing presence of Dreaming.'[25] Similarly Moffatt's evocation of the 'transcendent stillness' of Namatjira's landscapes in 'Pioneer Dreaming,' together with the dreamscapes of 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land,' suggest the ongoing resonance and power of alternative personal and collective cosmologies. These cosmologies provide a direct rejoinder to the 'Pioneer Dreaming' of the white-settler imagination, one that is replete with images of indigenous bodies and lands in need of civilizational uplift and cultivation.

Moffatt's final series in *Spirit Landscapes* is 'Night Spirits,' eight triptychs set apart from the main gallery space in a small, almost completely darkened room. The images of the Queensland outback — of desert landscape, a lone house, a telephone pole along the road, a river — are repeated and displayed in different permutations and through different monochrome filters of red, blue, green, or yellow.



---

[25] Ibid., p. 92. 'Arrernte' refers to the Aboriginal people in central Australia who are the original custodians of this land.

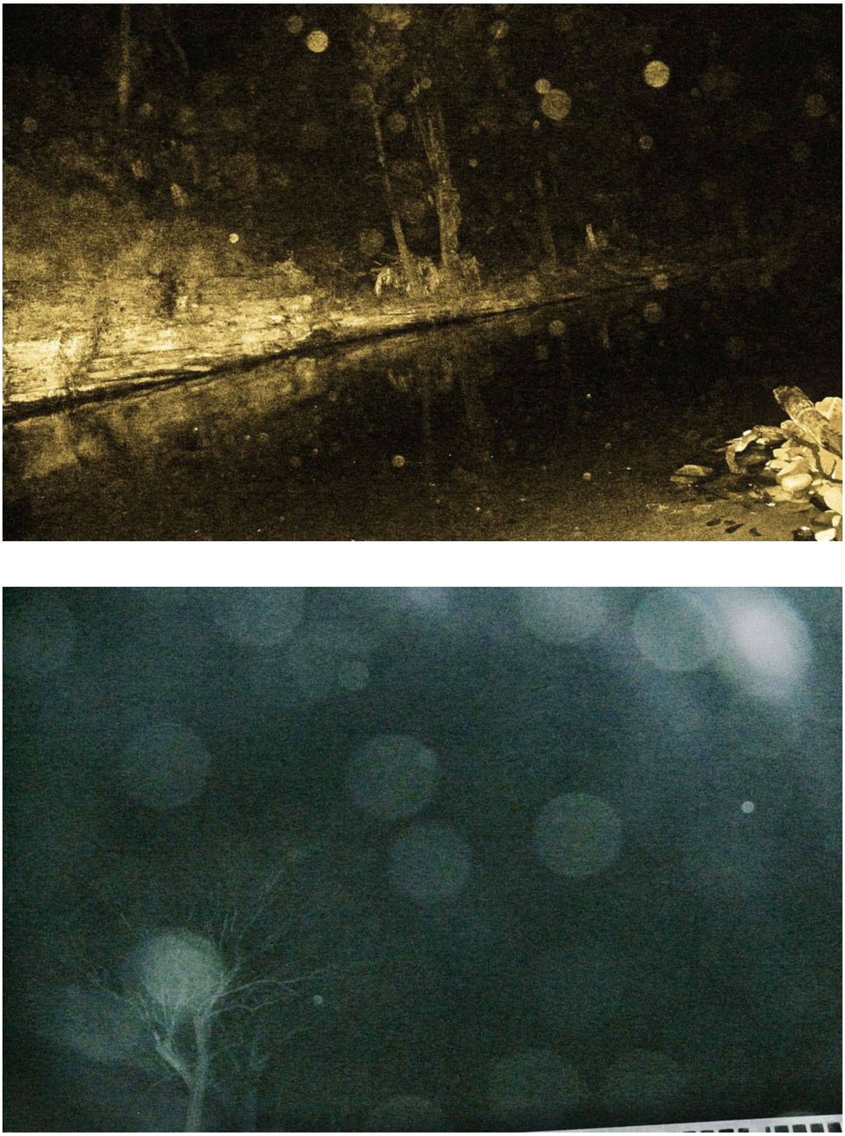


Fig. 29.6 Tracey Moffatt, from *Spirit Landscapes*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

What emerge are eerie nightscapes seemingly devoid of living beings, populated solely by ghostly, indeterminate, misty white shapes, splotches and shadows. The series seems to consciously mimic the 'spirit photographs' that gained tremendous popularity in Europe in the nineteenth century. These photographs, according to Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu, were meant to capture the so-called 'ectoplasm' that was believed to be the 'materialized phenomena for the world beyond the senses. Photographs were the medium for translating or making visible, indeed material, that which would otherwise be invisible.'[26] Kathryn Weir writes of the process by which Moffatt created these images: '[…] Moffatt drove alone at night along isolated roads in outback Queensland. She would stop the car and slowly and deliberately set up the camera, while the small hairs rose on the back of her neck and a tingle of fear sharpened her senses. The resulting intense, luminous images show strange traces populating the night, suggesting some lingering plasma residue of untold lives.'[27] Moffatt here turns to the sensorial — the feeling of fear and the bodily and mental transformations it causes — as a way to capture and render visible the specters of past violences. These violences continue to haunt the present and cannot be apprehended simply through conventional technologies of representation that seek to capture 'evidence' that is visible, quantifiable, and measurable. These apparently empty, deserted landscapes are in fact teeming with the bodies of the dispossessed that can only be sensed and felt in and through the body: Moffatt's body and by extension the body of the viewer, who is in turn affected and pulled into the state of trepidation and foreboding that initially gave rise to these images. Spectrality is in fact a recurrent theme in Tracey Moffatt's work; as Gerry Turcotte notes, through Australian government policies such as *terra nullius* and child removal laws, 'Aboriginal people were made ghostly […] turned into insubstantial spectres haunting their own land, a process that was reinforced in wider government policy, in historical record-keeping, in map-making, and […] in literary figurations.'[28] Moffatt's work responds to this 'imperial legacy of spectralizing Indigeneity'[29] not only by conjuring forth the ghosts that colonial violence produces but by insisting on their materiality, as they act on, and interact with, bodies and landscapes in the present.

---

[26] Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu, 'Introduction,' in Brown and Phu (eds.), *Feeling Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 15.

[27] Weir, 'Spirit Landscapes,' [n.p.].

[28] Gerry Turcotte, 'Spectrality in Indigenous Women's Cinema: Tracey Moffatt and Beck Cole,' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43:1 (2008), 7–21 (p. 8).

[29] Ibid.

Thus Tracey Moffatt's *Spirit Landscapes* makes evident how the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora are precisely that: a practice and a doing, a reading strategy and viewing tactic, that allow us to see and to sense differently. *Spirit Landscapes* quite literally enacts a queer-sighted vision that allows us to see the ghosts that live among us, that continue to shape our daily and nightly existence whether we are conscious of their presence or not. The work speaks to the ways in which dispossessed populations create home out of seemingly uninhabitable locations in the aftermath of past and continuing processes of removal and containment. Moffatt's images thus act as an alternative archive that records everyday forms of dwelling in displacement; they demand that we as viewers dwell in landscapes that are far from comfortable or comforting but that instead afford us a vision that demands that we see the intimacies of apparently discrete historical processes. In claiming Moffatt's work as an important instance of the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora, I do not wish to engage in a colonizing gesture that simply absorbs articulations of indigeneity under the sign of diaspora. Rather, I hope to have illuminated the complex interaction and interrelation between the diasporic and the indigenous that her work maps out: the ways in which indigeneity is routed through diaspora, just as diaspora is rooted in indigeneity. Moffatt's work enacts a queer method that foregrounds the intertwined nature of these apparently discrete and oppositional concepts. But queerness in Moffatt's work is also, crucially, a way of imagining alternative futures and possibilities, modes of dwelling and making home, despite brutal histories of displacement and dispossession. Now more than ever this seems like an indispensable and vital contribution.

# Bibliography

Blake, Thom, *A Dumping Ground*: *A History of the Cherbourg Settlement* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001).

Bryan-Wilson, Julia, 'Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta', in *Ana Mendieta*: *Traces*, edited by Stephanie Rosenthal (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013), pp. 26–38.

Cerwonka, Allaine, *Native to the Nation*: *Disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

Gopinath, Gayatri, *Unruly Visions*: *The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

Hall, Stuart, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity*: *Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–37.

Harvey, Graham and Charles D. Thompson, Jr., 'Introduction,' in *Indigenous Diasporas and Dislocation*, edited by Graham Harvey and Charles D. Thompson, Jr. (London: Routledge Press, 2016), pp. 1–12.

Jacobs, Margaret D., *White Mother to a Dark Nation*: *Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

Kauanui, J. Kēhaulani, 'Diasporic Deracination and "Off-Island Hawaiians"', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19:1 (2007), 137–60.

McLean, Ian, 'Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia,' in *Exiles, Diasporas, and Strangers*, edited by Kobena Mercer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 72–95.

Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia*: *The There and Then of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Ramirez, Reyna, *Native Hubs*: *Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Smith, Andrea, 'Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism', *GLQ*: *A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 16:1–2 (2010), 42–68.

Turcotte, Gerry, 'Spectrality in Indigenous Women's Cinema: Tracey Moffatt and Beck Cole,' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43:1 (2008), 7–21.

Watson, Mark, 'Diasporic Indigeneity: Place and the Articulation of Ainu Identity in Tokyo, Japan', *Environment and Planning*, 42:2 (2010), 268–84.

Weir, Kathryn, 'Spirit Landscapes,' in *Spirit Landscapes*: *Tracey Moffatt* (New York: Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2013), pp. 3–5.

# 30. The Performance of Doubles: The Transposition of Gender and Race in Ming Wong's Life of Imitation

*Kalia Brooks Nelson*

---

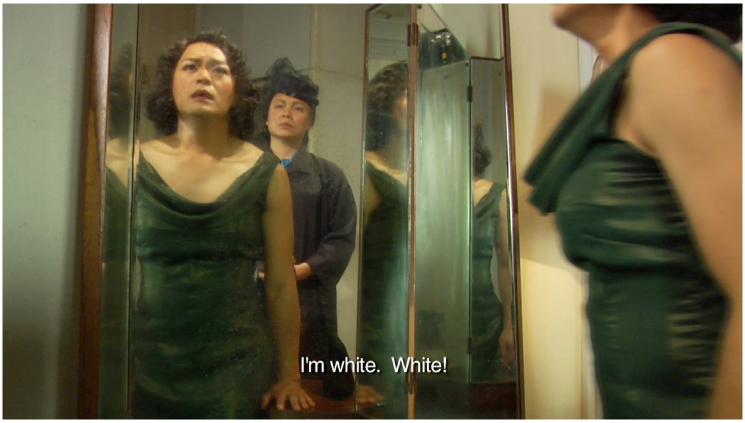

I'm white. White!

Fig. 30.1 Ming Wong, still from *Imitation of Life*, 2009, CC BY 4.0.

## Introduction

This chapter explores an example of how women's stories migrate through film. In particular, I am interested in the ways we learn about race and gender through Hollywood cinema, and how those stories are

© 2019 Kalia Brooks Nelson, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.30

interpreted and interpolated in other cultures in the world. I shall focus on Ming Wong's depiction of gendered race in his artwork *Life of Imitation* (2009), a video based on the movie *Imitation of Life* (1959). Race and gender are not discreet representations, but simultaneous expressions, and the term gendered race best describes their intersection as an image-identity on screen. This chapter focuses on the transformation of gendered race from its articulation in the cinematic version of *Imitation of Life* in 1959 to its new appearance in Ming Wong's artwork in 2009.

Gendered race, although not an invention of mass media, derives its meaning in large part from the mythology that images create. The mass media uses images of race and gender to invent narratives that shape collective identification. Herein we will explore how collective identification, as it relates to race and gender, is manifest through film. There is an inherent connection between the images we see and how we identify or are identified, and the silver screen has been highly successful at mediating this delicate relationship to both detrimental and productive ends.

When the image-identity of gendered race appears on screen, it is typically through the performance of *doubling* — an enactment used to mark sharp distinctions between the physical appearance of actors, or to signify a change within an actor from one mental state to another. It is important to note that doubling sets up a solid differential between who a character is, and is not.

Binary image-identification is a conventional form of doubling that is experienced in the male/female, Black/white dichotomies of socially constructed identity positions. The binary is a cultural reality that has been substantiated in cinematic images. I refer to this form of doubling as *unproductive*: it is meant to draw sharp, impassable lines between white/Black, male/female and so on, and is a system of classification that is grounded in the inequities of the patriarchal, white supremacist colonial social structure. Cinema has been exploited to instill this messaging into the collective consciousness.

Using Wong's remake, entitled *Life of Imitation*, I make the case for a *productive* doubling — an enactment of image-identification that acknowledges, but is liberated from, the old practices of racial and gender-based individuation. This performance of doubles accepts that identity positions are not static, but rather in a state of flux. Productive doubling is an embodiment that transcends the 'one or the other' prescription of appearances. It is a way of being that seeks a *tertiary experience*, which breaks from old pathological binaries, recognizes the image as myth, and carries the potential for new forms of radical identification.

## Imitation of Life

Before I continue with Wong, I want to briefly provide background on the movie adaptations of *Imitation of Life* in 1934 and 1959. The cinematic debut of Fannie Hurst's popular 1933 novel came to the silver screen in 1934, directed by John M. Stahl. The film was an unconventional visualization of race relations in the United States, not because it broke away from the use of gender-based racial tropes, but rather for its honest portrayal of the complexities of racial identity through the lives of four women. The story brought to a mass audience the economic predicament of two single mothers, one Black and the other white, in which race played a critical role in both enhancing and deforming the social bonds created between them. It also exposed to a mass audience the social taboo of racial passing.

The phenomenon of racial passing was a common practice among lighter-skinned Blacks in American and European society. Given the systematic disparities of racism, and the mental damage that came with it, racial passing was seen as a remedy for Black people who looked similar to white people to be accepted as white by their peers. This was accomplished by severing their connection to any part of their life that would jeopardize the newly assumed identity. That meant embodying the cultural norms of white privilege at the expense of Black people, even those to whom you were related. The practice of such self-identification in *Imitation of Life* causes the 'white-looking' daughter to denounce her 'Black-looking' mother. Stahl's film was the first to portray racial doubling by enacting the inter- and intra-personal dynamics of the maneuver on screen.

In 1959, Douglas Sirk remade *Imitation of Life* at a time when race, at the center of the film's plot, was at the forefront of social, cultural and political discourses in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The civil rights movement in the United States was well underway, and issues of race, as well as greater numbers of Black actors, were finding their way into cinema. Depictions of women at this time remained limited, however, and, in the instance of Sirk's rendition of *Imitation of Life*, were less progressive than portrayals from the 1930s.

Fannie Hurst's bestselling novel arose out of the Jazz Age, and it represented in mass media one of the earliest depictions of the modern, independent woman in American culture.[1] J. Hoberman wrote of John M. Stahl's direction of the 1934 movie that 'it was not without progressive intent and, released during the second year of the New Deal, addressed issues of race, class and gender almost head-on.'[2] One of the obvious amendments in Sirk's version was to the portrayal of class so that Annie (previously known as Delilah) was 'downgraded from corporate asset to live-in domestic servant.'[3] Sirk's movie rehabilitated the role of the traditional Black maid, played in his version by Juanita Moore. Lana Turner played the white heroine, Lora Meredith. Lora too had been rewritten from self-made businesswoman to aspiring actress. This reflected a greater reluctance in the 1950s to show images of women who obtained wealth through the strength of their mental prowess rather than their looks or their domestic labor.

Sirk's film, more so than the 1934 original, enhanced the visibility of the double. Hoberman accurately noted of the film, 'everyone is doubled and everything is mirrored.'[4] The contrast between both mothers is heightened by Annie's palatable lack of agency and Lora's exemplary passion to make her own way in the world. They are both representatives of gendered racial ideals, so that the image of the Black woman is self-effacingly obedient in order that the image of the white woman stands out as a symbol of glamorous, self-determined achievement.

Along with this, the oppositional images of the daughters are driven by Sarah Jane's (Annie's daughter) self-hating mania, as the unfortunate inverse to Susie's (Lora's daughter) conformity to the image of her mother. In Sirk's film, Susie was the mirror image of Lora with her platinum blonde hair. Also like Lora, Sarah Jane (previously

---

[1] J. Hoberman, 'Two Takes on "Imitation of Life": Exploitation in Eastmancolor', *New York Times*, 14 May 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/17/movies/homevideo/two-takes-on-imitation-of-life-exploitation-in-eastmancolor.html?_r=0

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

Peola) 'seeks to realize herself in show business.'[5] Michael Rogin, in his essay entitled, 'Blackface, White Noise: The Jazz Singer Finds His Voice,' (1992) pointed out that the practice of doubling to portray the character's shifting identities has a tradition that goes back to the time of silent film. He pointed to *The Student from Prague* (1913, 1926) and Charlie Chaplin's *The Idle Class* (1921) as precedents for the 'magical doubling device.'[6] Sirk's film gave the audience a powerful dose of the unproductive binary. This kind of bifocal representation of gendered race is challenged by Ming Wong's remake of the film.

## Four Transpositions

Wong focuses on the reunion scene from Sirk's 1959 film. Annie enters the room and asks if she can sit down. Sarah Jane abruptly stops her mother from sitting and tells her, 'somebody is coming.'[7] Annie explains that she has arrived unexpectedly because, 'I just want to look at you.'[8] Her daughter abruptly replies, 'I'm somebody else.'[9] She turns to face the mirror and proclaims her new identity — 'I'm white!'[10]

Ming Wong's production of the scene undoes the legibility of the double. Under his direction the actors enter speaking the pathological language of racial inferiority. Oscillating between sadness and anger, the mother and daughter confront the existential outcome for a mulatto or light-skinned woman in a racist society. The crescendo of the scene at which Sarah Jane proclaims her whiteness is precisely the moment at which Wong intervenes. He grew up in Singapore, the small island nation off the tip of southern Malaysia, and his appropriation of this scene at first seems a curious choice. Then it becomes evident that the artwork is an exercise in visual transposition (transferring the context of *Imitation of Life* from Hollywood to Singapore) in order to disrupt the cinematic tradition of the subjective double. I have identified four examples of such transpositions.

---

[5] Ibid.

[6] Michael Rogin, 'Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1992), 417–53 (p. 431).

[7] Excerpt from *Imitation of Life*, 1959.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

Firstly, Wong transposes the title, shifting it from *Imitation of Life* to his *Life of Imitation*. He therefore releases the narrative from its prior literary and cinematic history, which gives him space to make revisions. The title change is also a hint to the viewer of a familiar tale being retold. In the narrative, Sarah Jane's search for a new identity (acquired through imitation) is equivalent to the pursuit of a life. She is implicated in the original title as the imitator or imposter — the anti-heroine who is envious of the authenticity that her white counterparts claim as part of their racial inheritance. She resents the burden of her Blackness.

The pathology of racism, which gives rise to her mental dysfunction, is emphasized through the emotional bond between Sarah Jane and her mother, which essentially frees society from the responsibility of inflicting racial violence through structural and cultural norms. Rather, Sarah Jane is the impostor, the outsider who desperately wants to be accepted by the same culture that stigmatizes and maligns her. In the face of de facto racism, her self-hatred is expressed as a personal problem that could be solved by the pretense of living as someone else. Because her difference is a stain, she is condemned to hiding even as she seeks to be recognized as someone else.

The transposed title given by Wong, *Life of Imitation*, removes the emphasis from *Life* as the normative feature and replaces it with *Imitation*. This slight shift in wording reorientates the value of identification (as it pertains to the embodiment of gendered race) from its position on the periphery and locates it as a central feature in the human enactment of reality. Identities develop through processes of imitation as a result of creating one's appearance in the world. When we perform the self, we are living in a uniquely human social reality that is not a product of nature, but rather exists parallel to it. Furthermore, imitation is a phase in all forms of self-identification, not just for those who find themselves marked by difference. Wong's video indulges in the mimicry of performing the roles of gendered race. This shift in the primacy of two words removes the stigma of imitation by rejecting the notion of an original life. We are, therefore, not impostors, but incarnate beings with the ability to inhabit, release and move through different manifestations of the self as a requisite activity of human life.

The second transposition takes place in Wong's choice of actors. He directs male actors to perform traditionally female roles. His actors are dressed in the likeness of the characters from the 1959 version.

In so doing, he challenges the stability of the gender roles that are portrayed in the film. Hollywood, especially in its 'Golden Age', produced images of women that were designed to represent a bodily ideal of 'woman'. The audience was intended to identify with these images and consume them through the movies. That era in Hollywood celebrated a particular type of woman, and the role of the 'leading lady', was typified by Lana Turner's performance. She embodied a level of feminine glamour that only existed as a fantasy to the masses of viewers who watched her on screen.

The performative aspects of femininity and race in *Imitation of Life* are 'fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs.'[11] The danger here, according to Judith Butler, is that:

> [The] disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain. The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender — indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another.[12]

Wong not only subverts the legibility of gender identity for the audience, but also, and just as importantly troubles the discourse of sex and sexuality within the film itself — opening it up to narratives of homosexuality that are perhaps latent in both the literary and cinematic versions of the story, but certainly not overt.

The structures of impersonation reveal one of the main fabricating mechanisms through which the social construction of gender takes place.[13] This is evidenced through Wong's second transposition in which the cultural practice of drag or cross-dressing parody the concept of an original or primary gender.

The performance of cross-dressing has been a site of contestation in feminist theory. Butler sought to recoup the potential of drag as a site of criticality by writing:

---

[11] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge: New York, 1990), p. 131.

[12] Ibid., pp. 135–36.

[13] Ibid., p. 137.

> [S]uch parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities. But the relation between the 'imitation' and the 'original' is, I think, more complicated than that critique generally allows.[14]

It is precisely the psychological and social discord between the embodied relation of the 'imitation' and the 'original' that is at the center of the tension in Wong's video. We learn from the movie the self-destructive effects that Sarah Jane's quest for racial authenticity can have on an individual, and with the additional layer of drag Wong introduces a further destabilization of the image of a primary gender identity. The addition of the gender principle is yet another rendition of life's imitations. In this regard, Butler remarked that:

> The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance.[15]

Her recognition of a third dimension, which I referred to earlier as a tertiary experience, is an essential subversion of the binary structure of identity formation that relies on the notion of a stable, unified self. It is precisely this emergence of alternate planes of self-image that reveals the transience of the image itself, and more importantly its dislocation from any original source. By relinquishing the authority of the primary self, identity becomes subject to a multitude of discursive relations that always point back to the arbitrary production of representation overall.

The third transposition is connected to the second in that it involves the combination of race and gender, and occurs when the actors, dressed as women, began speaking the language of race. The actors represent each of the main ethnic groups in Singapore: Chinese, Indian and Malay. In the third transposition the cultural/social phenomenon of ethnicity is simplified into the binary lingual system of race. Wong conflates the British traditions of racial categorization that are the legacy of its imperial footprint in the diverse geographic regions of Asia and the Americas.

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

In Wong's rendition the colonial encounter creates a proximity of racial experience between Singapore and the United States. By using Hollywood film as his source, he encourages the audience to witness the mechanisms of colonization that were carried out through the image-generating machineries of Hollywood cinema. Racially speaking, the audience is thrust into considering the parallel circumstance of the *Oriental* and the *Black*.

Edward Said wrote, 'to speak of Orientalism is to speak mainly [...] of a British and French cultural enterprise.'[16] The Oriental was the product of the British and French colonial expansion in the East, while the Negro was the product of the European colonial project in the western direction. The word Oriental pointed to what Franz Fanon described as the 'new type of man' that, like the Negro, was an invention of the white, colonial gaze.[17] Just to elaborate on the geographic distinction: the Negro, as Fanon stipulated, was the main product in Africa and the West Indies. The Oriental, on the other hand, was the product of the European's imagination of the people who populated the vast regions of Northern Africa, the Middle East, India, the Far East and Southeast Asia. Orientalism as a way of seeing distorted the cultural traditions and differences among people from these regions as a means of reinforcing European superiority in all aspects of colonial life.

The Oriental (as with the Negro) had no private character. Her body emerged as *other* than the normal, from a world already given, and because of this it was a public entity. She did not have the capacity to achieve pure ontological being, as her body both equated to, and negated, sameness. The *other* did not experience 'ecstatical Being-in-the-world,' — because her body, as Fanon and Said would agree, was over-determined by the processes of *othering*.[18] The former British colonies of the United States and Singapore shared an uncanny kinship in the representation and reception of race. In Wong's video, the limiting, binary language of race is revealed through his inclusion of a third form (again, the tertiary) that is represented through ethnic variation.

The fourth transposition Wong establishes for the audience relies less on language and more on movement. It is a transmutation between characters as each of the actors rotate through the two roles of mother and daughter. The constant shifting that occurs among the three actors as they inhabit both characters evokes a new performance of identity on screen, one that exposes the insufficiency of the colonial language of race to give meaning to the way individuals move through identity positions. This transience indicates a culture in which passing as a means of hiding is superseded by passing as a kind of 'coming out,' or exposure to the fallacy of the unitary self.

---

[16] Edward Said, 'Orientalism', *The Georgia Review*, 31:1 (Spring 1977), 162–206 (p. 204).

[17] Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1952), p. 95.

[18] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), p. 464.

In Wong's video the characters are uprooted from the viewer's trained expectations about their appearance by the constant movement between the roles and the actors who portray them. This fluidity marks a shift in the way doubling functions in society — subverting it from a plane of limited representation to a process in which the emergence of new forms became inevitable.

According to Stuart Hall, the concept of representation is the sphere of human activity that houses the formation of the subject:

> Representation is possible only because enunciation is always produced within codes, which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time.[19]

Conversely, representation is described in cultural studies as most commonly grounded in a 'mimetic' theory in which 'one images a reality that exists "outside" the means by which things are represented.'[20] Hall used the examples of the 'anti-racism and post-war Black experience in Britain' where the struggle over the access to the right to representation was at the center of cultural politics.[21] This phenomenon was akin to the civil rights movement in the United States. He wrote:

> Politically, this is the moment when the term 'Black' was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance […].[22]

In this case, the term 'Black' was reformulated from a stigmatizing marker to 'a critique of the way Blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible "other" of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses.'[23] The recuperation of the term 'Black' as Hall outlines, was an attempt to establish a cultural politics that indicated a shift in the way former colonial subjects were represented in music, fashion, literature, visual arts and cinema. Hall focused on cinematic manifestations of the Black image in Britain in the 1980s, which transgressed the old mimetic conflict over the rights of authorship to produce more agnostic images that opened up a space to critique 'the essentially good Black subject.'[24]

---

[19] Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', *Documents*, 7 (1989), 441–49 (p. 446).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 441.

[22] Ibid.

Hall's commentary on cinema helps us think about the historical position of the Black image in film (such as in *Imitation of Life*), as well as the potential for cinema as a site for new representations. Hall emphasizes that Blacks in Hollywood cinema had typically been objects in the space of cinema, but rarely subjects. 'The struggle to come into representation' as Hall asserts, was primarily grounded in a critique of 'the degree of fetishization, objectification and negative figuration, which are so much a feature of the representation of the Black subject.'[25] This was a concern that went beyond the absence or marginality of the Black experience in cinema to specific contestation with its simplification and stereotypical character.

Hall wrote that the cultural politics that developed around the critique of Black representation in cinema had two principle objects:

> First, the question of access to the rights to representation by Black artists and Black cultural workers. Second, the contestation of the marginality, the stereotypical quality and the fetishized nature of images of blacks, by the counter-position of a 'positive' black imagery. These strategies were principally addressed to changing what I would call the 'relations of representation'.[26]

These 'relations', Hall argues, are grounded in a mimetic theory, and are unproblematic because they do not challenge the basic structure of knowledge by which the idea of the 'Black' came into being — keeping it a rather static form of representation. The 'positive' character of the mimetic Black image is unproductive because the moralist approach also limits the discursive capacity of the subject. Simple transference of the image from 'bad' to 'good' still works to conceal the unstable grounds by which racial categorization was built. For Hall, cultural politics had to get beyond the moralist approach in order to confront the complexity of subjectivities (many of which are held in conflict) within a particular racial group. He identifies this field of complexity within representation as the discursive sphere. It was a new phase in cultural politics that was no longer mimetic. The discursive emphasized how the processes of representation were constructed within meaning, and as such opened the space for a kind of othering (what I call productive) that embraced difference rather than rejected it.

---

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 444.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

## The Tertiary Experience

Within the British context, the discursive aspect of the politics of representation marked the end of the essential (or mimetic) Black subject. Hall writes:

> The question of the Black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity.[27]

This is precisely the question Wong addresses in his remix, *Life of Imitation*. The video challenges the cinematic legacy of the essential subject as it pertains to race and gender. You will recall that he explodes the image of the Black subject and the oriental by inserting into the scene men dressed as women who represent the three main ethnic groups in Singapore. The dimension of class as it intersects with gender is readymade within the narrative, so Wong does not need to alter the scenario of the live-in domestic, and her daughter who seeks to gain fame, independence and a new identity as a dancer in the entertainment industry.

We can use Hall's remarks to better understand the politics of representation at play in the final scene between mother and daughter in *Imitation of Life.* The original script, which Wong's actors recite, was indicative of the mimetic phase of representation. It was the archetypical Black/white dichotomy in which the individual performs the image-type that precedes her. The mother, Annie, does this with great success as the maid of soon-to-be wealthy Lora. Sarah Jane, on the other hand rejects her prescribed Blackness mainly thanks to her lighter skin color, which allows her passage into a white identity. This is not a welcome transition however, within the mimetic phase of representation in which the politics of race are deeply entrenched and racial categories are strictly upheld in spite of corporeal ambiguity.

---

[27] Ibid., p. 444.

The audience of *Imitation of Life* witness Sarah Jane's fleeting desire, but are unable to sympathize with her conflict. She is scripted as the antagonist — the villainous ingrate who is unable to return the affections of her Black mother and is envious of the white family who sheltered her. The original script did not problematize race, the conditions that gave rise to the event of racial passing, or the ill-fated social effects of the broken home. Instead, it reinscribed racial categories by portraying the antagonist as a failed anti-heroine — unsuccessful at every attempt she makes toward her goal. Hall goes on:

> Just as masculinity always constructs femininity as double […] so racism constructs the Black subject: noble savage and violent avenger. And in the doubling, fear and desire double for one another and play across the structures of otherness.[28]

In the above passage Hall points us to a site of critical intervention in the process of *othering*. The double becomes a motif to be exploited, challenged and pulled asunder — not in the affirmation of the status quo, but in the generation of multiples that unveil the instability of the essential image. Wong complicates the recitation of the original script by doubling the screens in his installation. The two monitors play simultaneously, one version in English with Malay subtitles and the other in Malay with English subtitles. The sound echoes from the two-channel video installation as double, and mother and daughter are doubled by the actors switching between roles on both screens. The discursive politics of representation in Wong's video mesh the questions of racism inextricably with questions of gender. As a cinematic remake it includes the narrative of race, but it is also, and most distinctively, intermixed with the dimensions of class, ethnicity and gender that are inseparable from cinematic representation of the Black subject.

---

[28] Ibid., p. 445.

# Bibliography

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge: New York, 1990).

Fanon, Franz, *Black Skin*, *White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1952).

Hall, Stuart, 'New Ethnicities', *Documents*, 7 (1989), 441–49.

Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962).

Hoberman, J., 'Two Takes on "Imitation of Life": Exploitation in Eastmancolor', *New York Times*, 14 May 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/17/movies/homevideo/two-takes-on-imitation-of-life-exploitation-in-eastmancolor.html?_r=0

Rogin, Michael, 'Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1992), 417–53.

Said, Edward, 'Orientalism', *The Georgia Review*, 31:1 (Spring 1977), 162–206.

# PART SEVEN

# THE WORLD IS OURS, TOO

# 31. The Roots of Black American Women's Internationalism: Migrations of the Spirit and the Heart

## *Francille Rusan Wilson*

Black American women's intentional travels began in the late eighteenth century as migrants fleeing slavery and racism in the US, alone or with their families, escaping in visible numbers to Canada, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Trinidad and Mexico. Information from and about these woman migrants, fugitives and travelers circulated through letters, newspaper articles and petitions to Congress but some women emigrants returned to the United States to tell their stories. In one such case, Eliza Bowers (1824–1878) returned to Baltimore from Trinidad in the mid 1840s having moved there — in her words she was 'deported to Trinidad'[1] — with other free Black families as a youngster at the start of the third significant migration of Black Americans to the island. Back

---

[1] Nathan Francis Mossell, unpublished autobiography, 1–2 in the University of Pennsylvania Archives, http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/upf/upf1_9ar/mossell_nf/mossell_nf_autobio.pdf. Nathan Mossell wrote that his mother told them 'exciting stories of her deportation, when a child […] about 1838'; it is more likely that her family was part of several hundred free Black people from Baltimore who voluntarily emigrated to Trinidad from 1839–1841. See Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port*: *The African American Community of Baltimore 1790–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), pp. 215–21.

© 2019 Francille Rusan Wilson, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.31

in Baltimore, Eliza married Aaron Mossell, a free Black brick maker, and began a family. But as the political situation for free people of color deteriorated, the family of four fled Maryland moving first to Hamilton, Ontario in 1853 and later returning to the US as a family of eight after the Civil War, settling in upstate New York.

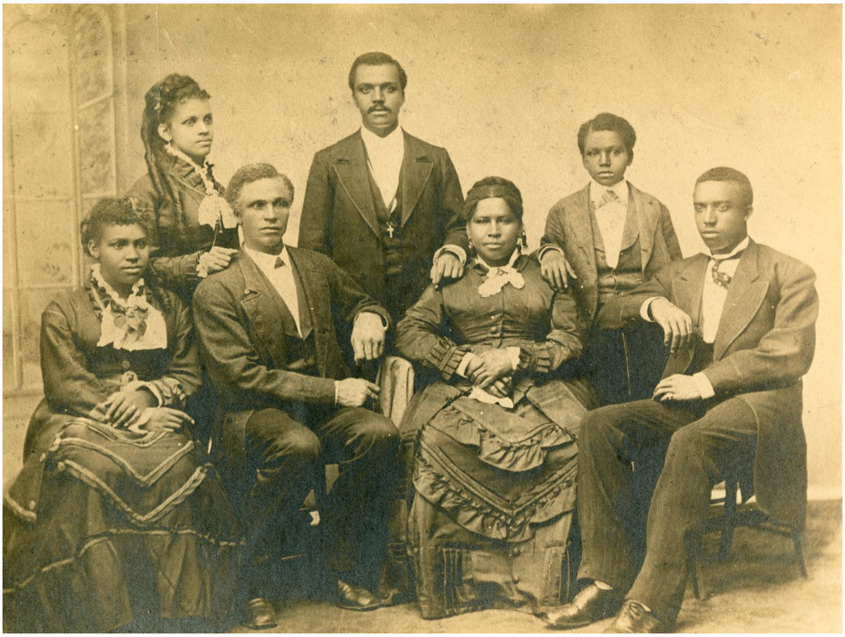


Fig. 31.1 The Mossell family, group portrait, ca. 1875. Photographer unknown. Eliza Bowers Mossell, 3rd from right; Aaron Mossell Jr. (Sadie's father) standing 2nd from right. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

One hundred years after Eliza's return to Baltimore, her granddaughter, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898–1989) supported petitions to the newly formed United Nations for safeguarding the rights of Black Americans, and launched her own campaign to persuade the US to ratify UN conventions on genocide, forced labor, and the political rights of women and children. Was Sadie Alexander influenced by stories of her grandmother Eliza's relentless quest for freedom? How did Black American women develop a commitment to international human rights and forge links with women activists, especially other 'women of the darker races' across time and class?

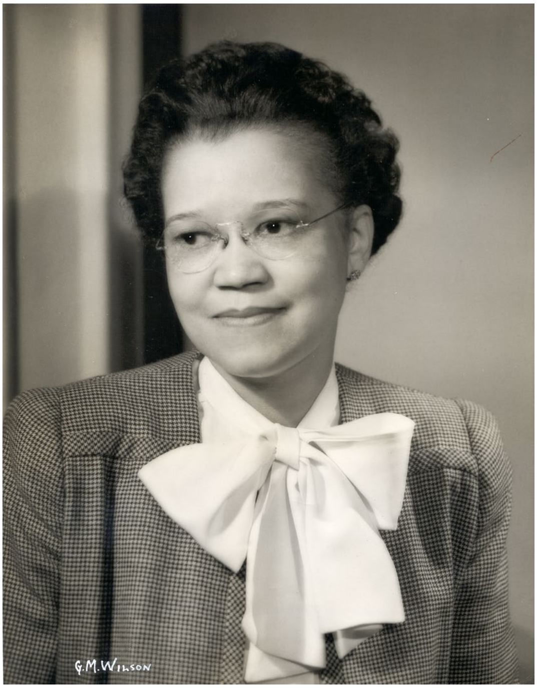


Fig. 31.2 Sadie T. M. Alexander (1898–1989), ca. 1948. Portrait photograph by Wilson G. Marshall. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

Black American women were an active part of a centuries-long circulation of ideas concerning human rights causes and concerns, serving as speakers, travelers, missionaries, and migrants. Historians Robert Harris and Robin Kelley remind us that Black peoples on both sides of the Atlantic became interested in the possibilities and penalties of international law, foreign policy and the status of other peoples of color as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Haitian revolution, abolitionist and emancipation movements in the Caribbean and South America. The scramble for Africa, the question of emigration to Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the racial dimension of the Spanish American War were frequent topics in the Black press, pulpits, and among political organizations.[2] A small cadre of Black American women were also international travelers as representatives of religious bodies and women's clubs.

---

[2] Robert L. Harris, Jr., 'Racial Equality and the United Nations Charter', in Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (eds.), *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), pp. 126–48; Robin Kelley,

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME, f. 1816) offered gendered positions of authority and international contacts for women. After the end of slavery African Methodists established district offices, schools, missions, and congregations in west and southern Africa and the Caribbean. Women were in charge of the AME's foreign missionary societies and raised funds to send missionaries and build schools abroad. By the 1880s AME women had established missions in Haiti, San Domingo, Trinidad, St. Thomas, and Sierra Leone, providing a constant flow of information about economic and political conditions in the Caribbean and Africa to churchwomen throughout the United States. In 1888 Fannie Jackson Coppin (1837–1913), president of the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society, was the denomination's delegate to the Centenary Conference of Protestant Missions held in London. Coppin was a former slave, school principal, and, as a graduate of Oberlin College, one of the most educated women of any color in the United States. Her address to the section on Women's Missions to Women focused on women's rights and she admonished men for failing to realize that there was not a shred of scriptural basis for denying women an active role in church matters.[3] In 1900, she moved to Cape Town, South Africa after her husband, the Reverend Levi Jenkins Coppin, was elected the thirtieth AME Bishop. Her account of her work and travels in South Africa stressed the similarities of the oppression experienced by native Africans, Cape Coloreds, and Muslims. 'Perhaps one of the things that has caused Mohammedans to step over the religious barriers that have kept the dark races apart in Africa, is the fact that, when the lines of proscription are drawn — and this is becoming more and more so — the Malay, the Indian-East Indian — the native and the "coloured" are all treated alike in matters social.'[4]

---

*Freedom Dreams*: *The Black Radical Imagination* (New York: Beacon Press, 2002), chs. 3 and 5.

[3] James Johnson (ed.), *Report of the Centenary Conference of Protestant Missions to the World, Held in Exeter Hall, London* (*June 9–19*), vol. 1 (London: James Nisbet, 1888), pp. 412–14.

[4] Fannie Jackson-Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints on Teaching* (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1913), pp. 122–33, quote on p. 132. Lawrence S. Little, in *Disciples of Liberty*: *The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884–1916* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), pp. 41–43,

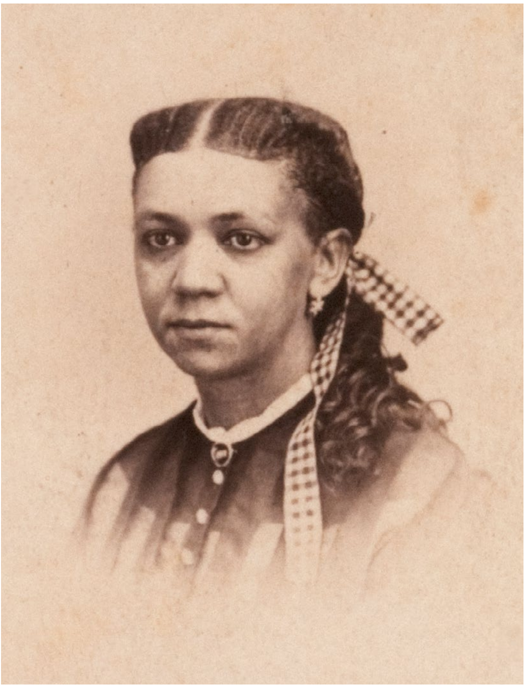


Fig. 31.3 Fannie Jackson Coppin, 1865. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives.

Coppin offered a model of religious and educational activism that stressed women's equality and critiqued imperialism, while three slightly younger women from Sadie Alexander's mother, Mary Tanner Mossell's generation continued to travel abroad on behalf of religious, racial and gender projects and received extensive coverage and favorable comment in the Black press. Ida B. Wells (1862–1931) made two trips to England in 1893 and 1894 to garner support for her anti-lynching campaign. Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954) gave speeches calling for racial and gender equality at international women's conferences in 1904, 1919 and 1937. Addie Hunton lived and studied in Europe, aided Black soldiers in France in 1918–19, and became an important activist in the Pan-African Movement.

Sadie Alexander was six years old in 1904 when Mary Church Terrell spoke at the International Conference of Women (ICW) in Berlin.

---

argues that the success of the Church Review under Levi Coppin was due to Fannie Coppin's skill as an editor.

Terrell, an Oberlin graduate and founding member of the National Association of Colored Women, received many favorable comments from her hosts as the only American delegate to give her address in German. Terrell quickly felt that she 'represented not only the colored women of my country' but as the only person of African descent at the conference, 'I represented the whole African continent as well.' After the ICW conference, Terrell stopped in Paris to see Henry O. Tanner's prizewinning 'Raising of Lazarus.' She gained a personal viewing at the Louvre after explaining that she knew the Tanner family in the US, 'his father, his mother, his sisters, his brothers,' and declaring that if she did not see the painting, 'I could not return to my country without my head erect.'[5] The expatriate artist was Sadie Tanner Mossell's uncle and young Sadie met the Black intelligentsia, including Terrell, at the Philadelphia home of her grandfather, AME Bishop and influential editor Benjamin Tucker Tanner.

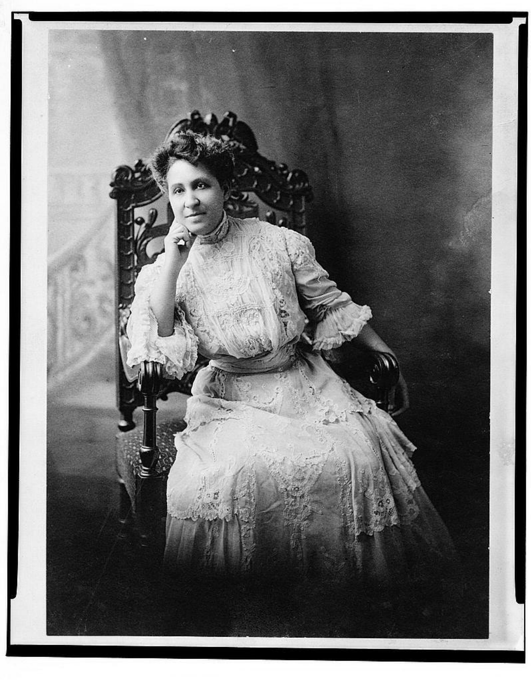


Fig. 31.4 Mary Church Terrell, ca. 1890, three quarter length portrait, seated, facing front. Photographer unknown. Library of Congress. Public domain.

---

[5] Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, 1940), pp. 204, 197–208. The painting is now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

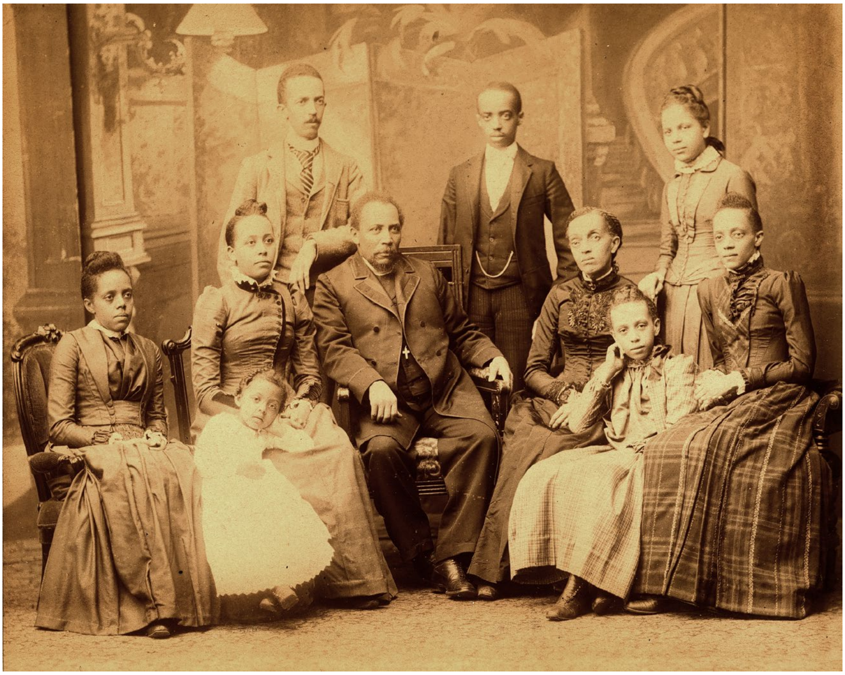


Fig. 31.5 Tanner family, group portrait, 1890. Photographer unknown, Mary Tanner Mossell (Sadie's mother) seated far right; Henry O. Tanner standing left. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

In 1919, Terrell, a charter member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, was selected by the Women's Peace Party as one of thirty American delegates to the meeting of the International Congress of Women. Terrell was thus able to evade the concerted efforts of the State and War Departments to prevent African Americans from attending the Paris peace conference by denying them passage to Europe. Terrell soon observed that she was the only delegate that was not white, 'it finally dawned upon me that I was representing the women of all the non-white countries in the world.' In that spirit, Terrell introduced a resolution on behalf of the US delegation calling for the end to discrimination in education or employment based upon race, color, or religion. She also criticized the Versailles Peace Conference for its poor treatment of Japan and failure to condemn racial discrimination and called for 'justice and fair play for all the dark races of the world.'[6]

---

[6] Terrell, pp. 333, 335, 329–47.

Dubbed the 'genteel militant' by historian Sharon Harley, Mary Church Terrell became even more militant if ever genteel near the end of her productive life at age ninety in 1952, when she both signed the radical *We Charge Genocide* petition to the UN by the Civil Rights Congress and wore a hat and gloves when picketing a segregated restaurant in Washington, D.C.[7]

Addie W. Hunton's life also brings together multiple sources of foreign policy ideas that had critical intergenerational implications for Sadie Alexander and the women of her generation: the Black women's club movement, women's peace movements, the 'Y' movement, and Pan-African conferences. Hunton (1866–1943) and her husband William Hunton created YWCA and YMCA branches at Negro colleges. Both 'Y' organizations had regular unsegregated international conferences that created opportunities for young Black Americans living under Jim Crow to meet their counterparts from around the globe.[8] Addie Hunton and her children moved to Europe while she studied foreign languages for several years before the First World War. When the US entered the First World War, a newly widowed Hunton and two other intrepid Black women traveled to France with the American Expeditionary Forces joining eighty Black male social workers assigned to serve the 150,000 Black soldiers serving in segregated units. Her eyewitness account detailed her growing disillusionment as a result of the US military's discriminatory practices.[9] At the war's end Hunton attended the 1919 Pan-African Congress in Paris led by W. E. B. Du Bois, a long time friend and neighbor. In 1920 Hunton and Terrell helped the National Association of Colored Women launch the International Council of Women of the Darker Races, an indication of Black clubwomen's increasing interest in forging ties with women across continents.

---

[7] Sharon Harley, 'Mary Church Terrell: Genteel Militant', in Leon Litwak and August Meier (eds.), *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 291–307. William Patterson (ed.), *We Charge Genocide*: *The Crime of Government Against the Negro People* (New York: International Publishers, [1951] 1970), pp. xvii–xviii.

[8] Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*: *Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890–1950* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2006), pp. 62–64, 200–01. Johanna Selles, 'Women and Historical Pan-Africanism: The Hunton Family Narrative of Faith Through Generations', *Pan-African News Wire,* 19 November 2006, http://panafricannews.blogspot.com/2006/11/women-and-historical-pan-africanism_19.html

[9] Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson, *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle Press, 1920), pp. 22–40; Susan Kerr Chandler, '"That Biting, Stinging Thing Which Ever Shadows Us": African American Social Workers in France During World War I', *Social Services Review* (September 1995), 498–514. Nikki Brown, *Private Politics & Public Voices*: *Black Women's Activism from World War I to the New Deal* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006), pp. 84–107.

In 1923 Sadie Alexander, newly married, was struggling to find meaningful employment despite having earned a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, while Hunton and a small group of Black women 'who believe in the universality of the race problem' started the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations.[10]

Hutton and the Circle raised funds for Du Bois to attend the 1923 Pan-African Congress held in London and Lisbon, and they organized the fourth conference with over two hundred delegates that was held in New York City in 1927. That same year, Sadie T. M. Alexander added a law degree to her growing educational accomplishments: she already was one of the first three Black women to earn a PhD, and the first Black American with a doctorate in economics. Although she went to law school because of limited opportunities to work as an economist, Alexander became the first Black woman to earn a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and first to pass the state bar exam. She joined her husband Raymond Pace Alexander's law firm in Philadelphia and they practiced law together for over thirty years.[11]

Sadie T. M. Alexander's long standing emphasis in her public life was to use her own privileged status as a 'true daughter' within the AME church and her growing influence in numerous local and national civic organizations to call for women's political and economic empowerment. Her parallel participation in Black women's organizations that had focused international policy agendas drew her into the foreign affairs arena by the late 1930s.[12] One of the first institutions that Alexander sought to directly influence on international issues was her own AME Church, but she did not initially show the same concerns for international peace and solidarity as Mary Church Terrell or Addie Hunton who together had helped the denomination formulate clear positions on international affairs that decried colonial practices in the 1930s. Alexander's public opinion of whether Blacks had a vital interest in fighting fascism evolved between 1935–40 from the isolationism favored by Republicans, albeit inflected with a racial critique, to fervent support of the Double V concept of victory abroad over fascism, and victory at home over white supremacy. During the 1930s Alexander also began to travel more outside the United States, going to Europe and Russia with her husband and began a long association with Haitian lawyers who made her an honorary member of their bar association.

---

[10] Brenda Gayle Plummer, 'Evolution of the Black Foreign Policy Constituency', *Trans/Africa Forum*, 6 (Spring/Summer 1989), 66–81; Christine Lutz, 'Addie Hunton: Crusader for Pan Africanism and Peace', in Nina Mjagkij (ed.), *Portraits of African American Life Since 1865* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 109–27, quote at p. 116; Penny M. Von Eshen, in *Race Against Empire*: *Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 58–59, maintains that Hunton got a degree in linguistics from the Sorbonne, but other sources say she studied at the University of Heidelberg.

[11] Francille Rusan Wilson, '"All of the Glory… Faded… Quickly": Sadie T. M. Alexander and Black Professional Women, 1920–1950', in Sharon Harley and the Black Women and Work Collective (eds.), *Sister Circle*: *Black Women and Work* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 164–83.

In October 1935, Alexander gave a speech promoting neutrality to women gathered at Bethel AME church in Baltimore. Black people, she argued, were disproportionately affected by international wars since they were already the lowest paid and most vulnerable. 'We were urged to join in making the world safe for democracy when we ourselves never enjoyed the true benefits of democracy.'[13] Rather than falling for this argument again as war enveloped Europe, Black American women should try to affect public opinion at home by urging neutrality and should take up the plea, 'War Must Cease'.[14] However, once the United States entered the war, Alexander pivoted, having also switched political parties from Republican to Democrat and advised Black churchwomen to continue to fight for gender as well as racial equality by embracing Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. Her subsequent speeches depicted the Second World War as an opportunity for women's advancement arguing, 'the war [is] using a new reservoir of Woman Power and Negro women along with all other American women are entering every activity of the nation's life including the armed forces,'[15] foreshadowing her role in the successful campaign in 1947 to desegregate the armed forces. Sadie Alexander now also helped to focus both the AME church and Black women's organizations postwar visions in a more activist manner as they firmly linked colonization with segregation and called for an end to both. National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) President Mary McLeod Bethune asked Alexander to help plan a panel on 'racial policies as the basis for permanent peace' for their 1942 annual meeting. Alexander asked Bethune, a college president and New Deal official, to invite other women of color from 'China, India, Haiti, South America and Mexico as well as representatives of minority groups in the United States' to participate.[16] Alexander had now fully embraced the international solidarity with women of color on political, economic, and gender issues long advocated by Mary Church Terrell and Addie Hunton.

---

[12] Francille Rusan Wilson, 'Sadie T. M. Alexander: A "True Daughter"of the AME Church', *A.M.E. Church Review*, 119: 391 (2003), 40–46; Sadie Alexander to Rev. Edward E. Taylor, 26 August 1942, in Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (hereafter STMA) Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives, Box 55 ff 18. Francille Rusan Wilson, 'Becoming "Woman of the Year": Sadie Alexander's Construction of a Public Persona as a Black Professional Woman, 1920–1950', *Black Women, Gender, & Families*, 2:2 (2008), 1–30. Alexander considered herself a 'true daughter' because her maternal grandfather Benjamin T. Tanner (1835–1923) and paternal uncle Charles W. Mossell (1849–1915) were prominent AME ministers and other relatives were lay leaders and missionaries.

[13] Sadie T. M. Alexander, 'The Role of the Negro Woman in the Postwar South', unpublished speech, ca. 1945, STMA papers 71/80.

[14] 'War Must Cease', STMA papers 7/49.

In 1946 Alexander was one of two women and two African Americans appointed by President Truman to a fifteen-member committee to recommend changes in the country's civil rights policies.[17] Alexander's talking points to build public support for the President's Committee on Civil Rights 1947 Report, *To Secure These Rights*, stressed the linkage between US civil rights practices and US foreign policy, charging that the gap between US beliefs and US practices was creating a 'moral dry rot.' She attacked the House Un-American Activities Committee in public speeches linking it to Nazi policies, saying that after the investigations and witch hunts, 'we will have purges, Gestapos and concentration camps.' Ever the economist, Alexander warned that full postwar employment should be the goal rather than job discrimination which might harm the ability of postwar America to feed itself and Europe: 'Firing a Mexican, a Jew, a Negro or any other worker because of his race or religion creates a vicious economic circle.'[18] The Truman Administration was sensitive to the potential effect of Jim Crow on US foreign policy, and the State and Justice Departments began the unprecedented step of supporting selected lawsuits aimed at dismantling formal segregation. Alexander made this point when she argued that, 'our security is tied to that of the people of all other countries. What happens to the American Indian, to the Mexican, to the Oriental, to the Negro in New York or in Georgia is taken as evidence of our attitude toward millions of people abroad of the same races as these victims of our un-democratic practices at home. Our enemies abroad hold up these incidents as proof that democracy in America is a fraud, and proclaim their system of government the only true road to freedom.'[19] The gruesome murders of Black veterans, bombings of civil rights activists, capricious and harsh sentences for minorities while known white killers walked free all received unfavorable international coverage, as Alexander predicted. Alexander was an officer or on the board of several Black American organizations that successfully petitioned the United Nations for observer status including the NCNW and National Bar Association.[20]

---

[15] Sadie T. M. Alexander, 'The Role of the Negro Woman in the Postwar South', unpublished speech, ca. 1945, STMA papers 71/80.

[16] 'Program of Annual Conference of National Council of Negro Women, Inc. Oct 16–18 1941.' STMA to MMB 8/12/42 both in STMA Papers 57/9.

[17] The committee had twelve prominent white men, one white woman — Mrs. M. E. Tilley a Methodist churchwoman, and a Black man — Channing Tobias of the Phelps Stokes Fund and Alexander.

Sadie Alexander and other Black lawyers in the city were not invited to join the Philadelphia Bar Association (PBA) until 1952, twenty-five years after she had passed the state Bar. The same year Alexander traveled to India and Israel and she visited many other countries as a delegate to conferences and as a private citizen in the years that followed. Not content to rest on her considerable laurels, Alexander began to gather materials on the UN's human rights conventions including the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) and those having to do with the political rights of women and children, opposing slavery and forced labor. Despite the Holocaust, the US would not ratify the Genocide Convention for fear racial minorities would invoke the 'and

---

[18] 'Americans are Called Mentally Ill Because of Fear and Hate in Nation', *New York Times*, 8 October 1948 describes Alexander's address at a forum sponsored by twenty-nine organizations in New York at 60th Street and Park Avenue on 'Proposals for A Better World'. 'Why We Must Act Now To Secure the Recommendations of President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights', 3 pages typed, no author, STMA Papers, Box 40/5. 'Why We Must Act' contains the same phrases Alexander is quoted saying in the *New York Times* article.

[19] Ibid.

[20] 'Resolutions to be presented to the Legal Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations Conference', STMA 50/30.

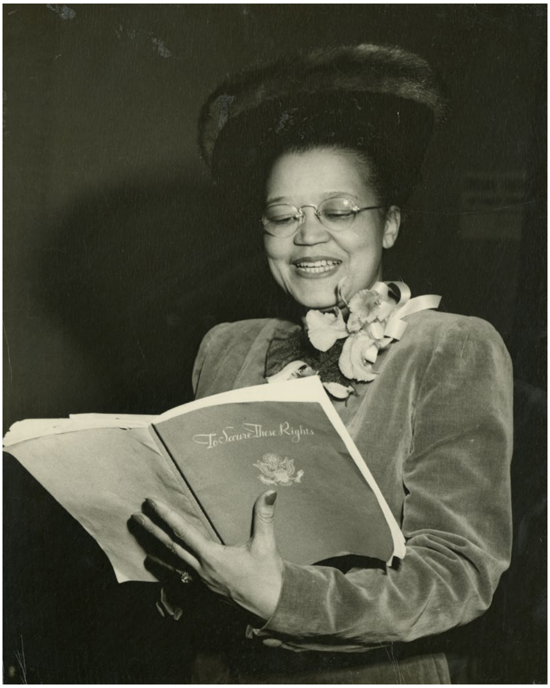


Fig. 31.6 Sadie T. M. Alexander holding *To Secure these Rights*, ca. 1947. Photographer unknown. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

punishment' section from the title to use international law to force the end of segregation and racial discrimination, and it was indifferent to the other human rights conventions. By 1965 Alexander had become the chair of the PBA's subcommittee on human rights treaties and conventions. Her subcommittee began a two-year effort — ultimately fruitless — to get their organization to recommend that the American Bar Association change its position and support the ratification of the conventions on genocide and on practices akin to slavery, forced labor, and the political rights of women. Alexander keenly remembered her efforts to link segregation, women's rights, and international atrocities some twenty years earlier, but she found her colleagues in the PBA less interested in condemning genocide. Three of the five-person subcommittee voted in favor of ratification of the treaties (with one no vote and one abstention). In what must have been a bid to have some success with the full body, the committee voted to send the recommendation to ratify all the conventions forward but to have a separate vote on the Genocide Convention. Despite the successes of the Civil Rights Movement in 1965–66, Alexander might have thought time was going backward rather than forward in terms of human rights issues. At the same time, Sadie Alexander was working to persuade the Philadelphia Bar to reject genocide, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton set out in Oakland California to write the platform of their new organization, the Black Panther Party.[21] The Panthers' critique of western hypocrisy and their desire to use the UN to obtain Black peoples' human rights was not very different from the postwar petitions to the UN of the Civil Rights Congress or the National Bar Association that Alexander had supported.

The United States did not ratify the Genocide Convention until 1988 under President Jimmy Carter, forty years after it was adopted by the United Nations. Alexander died one year later at age ninety-one. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander was not a radical by any conventional definition, but her insistence that American democracy should exhibit the same core principals in foreign and domestic policy was grounded in a centuries-long Black oppositional critique that called on the US to protect the human rights of all persons.

This chapter has used a grandmother and granddaughter who never met to chart the enduring legacy of Black women activists, migrants, and travelers who used their voices, writings, and their church to call for human rights. These women's prophetic visions of their place and space in the world stretched from the determined search for freedom over decades and thousands of miles by Eliza Bowers Mossell to her granddaughter Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander's urgent public voice in twentieth-century debates over race, gender, economic opportunity, and foreign policy. Alexander continued a long tradition of Black American women intellectuals' advocacy for the rights of women, and their opposition to racism and imperialism in all its forms — at home and abroad. Her life provides a window onto the multi-generational nature of African-American women's repeated attempts to bring their country and their world's crimes against people of color to an international stage and to forge solidarities with like-minded women of all nations and creeds.

---

[21] 'October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program', in *The Sixties Project* http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/Panther_platform.html

# Bibliography

'Americans are Called Mentally Ill Because of Fear and Hate in Nation', *New York Times*, 8 October 1948.

'Program of Annual Conference of National Council of Negro Women, Inc. Oct 16–18 1941.' STMA to MMB 8/12/42, STMA Papers 57/9.

'Resolutions to be presented to the Legal Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations Conference', STMA 50/30.

'Why We Must Act Now To Secure the Recommendations of President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights', 3 pages typed, no author, STMA Papers, Box 40/5.

Alexander, Sadie T. M., 'The Role of the Negro Woman in the Postwar South', unpublished speech, ca. 1945, STMA papers 71/80.

—, to Rev. Edward E. Taylor, 26 August 1942, in Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (hereafter STMA) Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives, Box 55 ff 18.

Brown, Nikki, *Private Politics & Public Voices*: *Black Women's Activism from World War I to the New Deal* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006).

Chandler, Susan Kerr, '"That Biting, Stinging Thing Which Ever Shadows Us": African American Social Workers in France During World War I', *Social Services Review* (September 1995), 498–514.

Harley, Sharon, 'Mary Church Terrell: Genteel Militant', in Leon Litwak and August Meier (eds.), *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 291–307.

Harris, Robert L., Jr., 'Racial Equality and the United Nations Charter', in Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (eds.), *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), pp. 126–48.

Hunton, Addie W. and Kathryn M. Johnson, *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle Press, 1920).

Jackson-Coppin, Fannie, *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints on Teaching* (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1913).

Johnson, James (ed.), *Report of the Centenary Conference of Protestant Missions to the World, Held in Exeter Hall, London* (*June 9–19*), vol. 1 (London: James Nisbet, 1888).

Kelley, Robin, *Freedom Dreams*: *The Black Radical Imagination* (New York: Beacon Press, 2002), chs. 3 and 5.

Little, Lawrence S., *Disciples of Liberty*: *The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884–1916* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000).

Lutz, Christine, 'Addie Hunton: Crusader for Pan Africanism and Peace', in Nina Mjagkij (ed.), *Portraits of African American Life Since 1865* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. 109–27.

Mossell, Nathan Francis, unpublished autobiography, University of Pennsylvania Archives, http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/upf/upf1_9ar/mossell_nf/mossell_nf_autobio.pdf

'October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program', in *The Sixties Project* http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/Panther_platform.html

Patterson, William (ed.), *We Charge Genocide*: *The Crime of Government Against the Negro People* (New York: International Publishers, [1951] 1970).

Phillips, Christopher, *Freedom's Port*: *The African American Community of Baltimore 1790–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Plummer, Brenda Gayle, 'Evolution of the Black Foreign Policy Constituency', *Trans/Africa Forum*, 6 (Spring/Summer 1989), 66–81.

Selles, Johanna, 'Women and Historical Pan-Africanism: The Hunton Family Narrative of Faith Through Generations', *Pan-African News Wire*, 19 November 2006, http://panafricannews.blogspot.com/2006/11/women-and-historical-pan-africanism_19.html

Terrell, Mary Church, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, 1940).

Von Eshen, Penny M., *Race Against Empire*: *Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

Wilson, Francille Rusan, '"All of the Glory… Faded… Quickly": Sadie T. M. Alexander and Black Professional Women, 1920–1950', in Sharon Harley and the Black Women and Work Collective (eds.), *Sister Circle*: *Black Women and Work* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 164–83.

—, 'Becoming "Woman of the Year": Sadie Alexander's Construction of a Public Persona as a Black Professional Woman, 1920–1950', *Black Women, Gender, & Families*, 2:2 (2008), 1–30.

—, 'Sadie T. M. Alexander: A "True Daughter" of the AME Church', *A.M.E. Church Review*, 119:391 (2003), 40–46.

—, *The Segregated Scholars*: *Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890–1950* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2006).

# 32. 'The World is Ours, Too': Millennial Women and the New Black Travel Movement

*Tiffany M. Gill*

> After you've been perusing black-related websites for a while, you notice something: A lot of them are created, written and run by women. Many are travelogues, recounting journeys taken all over the world, but a growing number also are travel businesses catering directly — and in many instances, exclusively — to women.[1]

In a bustling city of eight million people, New York City's Penn Station on a fall afternoon feels like the town square. If you spend enough time there, you are bound to run into someone you know, or at the very least someone you recognize. On a beautiful fall afternoon in 2016, after spending the day at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture examining the archival record left by Black international travelers, I had the rare luxury of a few spare minutes before I boarded Amtrak's Keystoner home to Philadelphia. Thirsty and battling mid-afternoon fatigue, I stopped into Pret a Manger to buy an iced green tea to keep me awake on the ride home. As I stepped into the line, I noticed

---

[1] 'SISTERS Are TRAVELING for Themselves', *I'm Black and I Travel!*, 24 January 2010.

© 2019 Tiffany M. Gill, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.32

a young Black woman standing in front of me. Well, actually, I noticed her bag — an exquisite satchel with a bold yet tasteful print. To my untrained eye, the pattern looked South African and the woman carrying it exuded an air of effortless cosmopolitanism. Just as I was prepared to compliment her on the bag and give her some 'game recognizes game' Black girl love, I noticed that she looked tired and did not seem to be in the mood to engage a stranger. As I approached her, I realized that she looked familiar and within a few seconds, I let out an audible gasp of disbelief. I had realized that the woman with the exquisite bag was none other than Evita Robinson, the founder and creator of the Nomadness Travel Tribe, an award-winning travel group representing young adult travelers of color. As a historian of Black leisure and international travel, I had been watching Robinson's meteoric rise as a travel entrepreneur since she came on the scene in 2011. I recognized Robinson because she was an integral part of the Nomadness brand; her innovative use of social and digital media made her instantly recognizable. As we chatted, I was impressed not only with her style, but her calm yet piercing manner and hands-on approach to running 'the Tribe' as Nomadness is called.

This essay examines the ways that Black millennial women travel entrepreneurs and influencers, like Evita Robinson, use social and digital media to launch and sustain what has been called the New Black Travel Movement. Despite an overall downward trend in international travel expenditures for Americans more generally, African Americans have experienced a dramatic increase in their international travel since 2013. While only three per cent of African Americans intended to travel abroad in 2013, the number doubled to six per cent in 2014, and by 2016 the number exploded to 37 per cent.[2] Most of this growth is occurring among Black women between the ages of 18 and 35.

The new Black Travel Movement of the early twenty-first century was born from a generation of young women who inherited an economic downturn and an unstable job market, and were forced to reconcile the dissonance of celebrating America's first Black president in an era of intensifying anti-Black violence. Robinson and the cadre of Black women travel influencers who emerged in this era saw themselves as providing opportunities for millennials of color to escape, albeit temporarily, the trauma of being Black in the US. In so doing, they join in a much longer historical tradition of African Americans employing mobility as a mechanism of freedom. Whether enslaved runaways fleeing plantations, Black abolitionists traveling to Europe to expose the evils of slavery, southerners desiring to escape Jim Crow by migrating to northern and midwestern cities, or the descendants of those southern migrants returning to the south in search of economic opportunities, African Americans have often used travel as a liberation strategy. This essay interrogates the ways that Black women travel influencers in the era of digital media link their global travels to their desire to reclaim the dignity and pleasures they are often denied within the United States. However, as they seek to provide Black women with opportunities to see the world, they contend with the notion that promoting international leisure travel is nothing more than elitist escapism. As such, they are rooting their travel ventures in more noble goals — breaking down global anti-Black stereotypes, building community, and linking to social justice movements.

---

[2] Phoebe Parke, 'Why the Black Travel Movement Has Taken off', *CNN*, 15 June 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/15/africa/black-travel-discriminatory/index.html

## Black Travel Movements: A Historical Perspective

Major media outlets including CNN, the *New York Times*, MSNBC, and the *Huffington Post* as well as those focusing on the African-American market like *Essence* and *Ebony* have tried to make sense of the New Black Travel Movement.[3] Much of the coverage marvels in disbelief at what they perceive as the novelty of Black folks unapologetically embracing their right to travel the globe.[4] Indeed, despite substantial archival evidence to the contrary, there are still doubts as to whether African Americans have engaged in international leisure travel in significant ways. For example, in the only essay addressing African Americans in the *Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, Virginia Whatley Smith found it necessary to pose the question: 'Do African Americans ever travel as leisure class tourists?' Smith found that while the archival record demonstrates that Africans Americans have traveled internationally for various purposes, the scholarly record highlights travel for political purposes and virtually ignores leisure travel.[5]

---

[3] For just a sampling of coverage see: Parke, 'Why the Black Travel Movement Has Taken Off'; Ashley Southall, 'Black Travel Groups Find Kindred Spirits on Social Networks', *The New York Times*, 23 July 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/travel/black-travel-noire-nomadness.html; 'What Does It Mean to be African American Abroad', *Melissa Harris Perry Show*, MSNBC, 2 August 2015, http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/watch/what-it-means-to-be-african-american-abroad-498925635550; Zoe Donaldson, 'This Blogger's Mission Is to Show that Travel Is for Everyone', *Huffington Post*, 4 April 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/this-bloggers-mission-is-to-show-that-travel-is-for-everyone_us_58dab2b3e4b01ca7b4276df4; 'INTERNATIONAL PLAYER: Evita Robinson, the Nomad Diva', *Ebony*, 19 July 2012, http://www.ebony.com/life/evita-robinson-the-nomad-diva#axzz4YNM3iuFX

[4] See Charlise Ferguson, '"We out Here": Inside the New Black Travel Movement', *The Daily Beast*, 4 January 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/04/we-out-here-inside-the-new-black-travel-movement.html;

In fact, African Americans have unabashedly promoted international leisure travel and developed entrepreneurial infrastructures to make the dream of traveling abroad a reality since the dawn of the twentieth century. In other words, they did many of the things now celebrated in the 'new Black travel movement,' revealing that while this twenty-first century iteration may be innovative, it is not unprecedented. Earlier travel movements emerged in times of class anxiety as a result of a rapid growth in the Black middle class, as evidenced in the years after the Second World War, or when a social or political movement opened up new possibilities and expectations of leisure, as in the decades after the civil rights movement. In other words, the 'new Black travel movement' is part of a much longer history of Black travelers and travel entrepreneurs embracing the globe as a way to express their desires to be free.[6] However, the contemporary Black travel movement is the first to emerge within the era of digital media, and Black women entrepreneurs have used the tools at their disposal to create vibrant counter-narratives

---

Rahel Gebreyes, 'Growing Black Travel Movement Challenges Perceptions of the Typical Globetrotter', *Huffington Post*, 28 January 2015, sec. Black Voices, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/28/black-travel-movement_n_6558930.html

[5] Virginia Whatley Smith, 'African American Travel Literature', in Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 197–213 (p. 212).

[6] Most of the scholarship on Black leisure travel has been focused on domestic travel during the Jim Crow period and the indignities experienced by Black travelers; see Andrew W. Kahrl, '"The Slightest Semblance of Unruliness": Steamboat Excursions, Pleasure Resorts, and the Emergence of Segregation Culture on the Potomac River', *Journal of American History*, 94 (March 2008), 1108–36; Mark S. Foster, 'In the Face of "Jim Crow": Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890–1945', *Journal of Negro History*, 84 (Spring 1999), 130–49; Cotton Seiler, '"So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By": African American Automobility and Cold War Liberalism', *American Quarterly*, 58 (2006), 1091–117.

about Black women's place in the world.[7] Among the most important innovators in this movement is Evita Robinson, whom I ran into on that auspicious fall afternoon in Penn Station.

## The Tribe That Evie Built

The Nomadness Travel Tribe began just as Evita Turquoise Robinson (called Evie by her close friends) embarked on the excitement and uncertainty of adulthood. In the summer after her 2006 graduation from Iona College where she majored in Film and Television, the upstate-New-York-born Robinson traveled to Europe. In a moment that sounds like a scene from a movie, she describes sitting on the Grand Lawn in Paris staring at the Eiffel Tower and coming to the realization that her life's trajectory would be different than many of her peers. 'I had graduated college less than three months prior and as everyone else was looking for a job, I looked for the world.'[8] After living and traveling throughout Europe and Asia on her own for almost four years, she decided to combine her background in communication and her love of travel by creating a blog and web series. At the time, she was living and teaching English in Nigata, Japan, feeling isolated and longing to see more people who looked like her as she traversed Asia. She also wanted to demystify travel for her friends and family back home who she realized were never coming to visit her.[9]

The web series gained a small but strong following early on and gained the attention of a producer of a web-based reality show called *Jet Set Zero* who invited Robinson to join the cast. The premise of the show was simple — invite three strangers on a trip to Thailand and record their experiences. In many ways, the show suited Robinson well. Her larger-than-life personality and natural comfort in front of the camera had her on track to become a breakout star in the series.

---

[7] For more on Black counterpublics in the blogosphere see Catherine Knight Steele, 'Black Bloggers and Their Varied Publics: The Everyday Politics of Black Discourse Online', *Television and New Media*, 19:2 (May 2017), 1–16.

[8] 'International Player: Evita Robinson, The Nomad Diva', *Ebony*, 19 July 2012, https://www.ebony.com/life/evita-robinson-the-nomad-diva/

[9] Reagan Jackson, 'Nomadness: The New Tribe Changing the Face of Travel', *The Seattle Globalist*, 4 December 2014, http://www.seattleglobalist.com/2014/12/04/nomadness-travel-tribe-young-black-women-with-passports/31311

However, a bout of Dengue fever forced her leave the show and return home to the US to recuperate. Shortly after settling back home for what she thought would be a short respite, one of her close friends was killed in an accident. As she processed her grief, Robinson realized that as much as she loved exploring the world on her own, she missed being a part of a community — a community even larger than the one that was forced on her by *Jet Set Zero*. This desire is what ultimately led to the creation of the Nomadness Travel Tribe in 2011, a community for 'the edgy, world-educated, under-represented demographic' who want to see the world in a group of what Robinson likes to call 'chosen family' or 'tribe.'[10]

The process to join the tribe is relatively simple. Members must have at least one passport stamp, watch a short video that describes the mission of Nomadness, and then pass a ten-question Newbie Bootcamp Quiz based on what they watched. In an attempt to mitigate against criticisms that the passport stamp requirement is elitist, Nomadness added NMDN Black Box, a six month online course designed to help potential tribe members navigate the psychological, physical, or economic barriers to travel.[11] Membership of the Tribe allows you access to a closed Facebook group where you can connect with members around the globe, be the first to hear about airline fare glitches for inexpensive travel, and learn about trips and events planned by Nomadness. While the Facebook group is robust and active, the trips and events are where the community that Robinson was craving when she created the group comes to fruition. In the six years since Nomadness began, Robinson has sponsored and led over thirty international group trips, three major conferences and BBQs, and multiple global meetups everywhere from Dubai to Johannesburg.

However, Robinson is quick to remind people that she is not a travel agent. Instead, she considers herself a curator of international experiences for an underserved travel market. Despite all the changes in the travel industry, namely the role of the travel agent in the internet age, as well as in Black life, one thing has remained — the role of women as leaders in the Black travel industry as well the dominance of Black

---

[10] 'The Movement', https://www.nomadnesstv.com/

[11] 'NMDN Black Box | Our Mission: To Eradicate Any Barriers of Entry You Have into the World of Travel. (seriously.)', http://nmdnblackbox.com/

Fig. 32.1 Evita Robinson, founder of Nomadness Travel Tribe. Used with permission from Evita Robinson.

women as travelers. Nomadness, estimates that 85% of their Tribe members are Black women.[12]

As Evita Robinson was filming *Jet Set Zero* in Thailand, Zim Ugochukwu was a college student traveling through India. While in Delhi, she saw an advertisement for a skin lightener. 'As the woman's skin got lighter,' Ugochukwu explained, 'her smile got wider. It seemed to say that being as dark as I am is something to be ashamed of.'[13] Not only did this trip open Zim's eyes to the global dimensions of anti-Blackness, but it caused her to think more deeply about her own experience as a Minnesota-born woman of Nigerian descent traveling abroad. She realized that she never saw images of people who looked like her in depictions of travelers. 'If you skim through the travel section at Barnes & Noble, you'll find blonde women gallivanting across Iceland or Italy, but that's not me. I set out to change that narrative.'[14] She created Travel Noire in 2013 in an attempt to not only change the public discourse about who travels, but to provide young Black globetrotters like herself with resources on how to navigate the world, and like Nomadness cultivate a global family by choice.

---

[12] 'The Movement', https://www.nomadnesstv.com/

[13] Donaldson, 'This Blogger's Mission'.

Fig. 32.2 Frazer Harrison, Zim Ugochukwu at AirBnB Open Los Angeles. Getty Images.

Unlike Robinson who sees herself as a creative before an entrepreneur, Ugochukwu approaches Travel Noire first and foremost as a business. She used the money she saved working in the biotech industry to launch Travel Noire first as a digital platform with instructional and user-generated content. After building an audience over eighteen months, Travel Noire began offering trips and bringing groups of strangers together on excursions. Unlike the Nomadness model where one must first become a member of the Tribe before joining any international trips, anyone with a passport, and $2000-$4000 (the average price for an excursion) can participate. While the ticket price is more expensive than the itineraries offered by Nomadness, Ugochukwu contends that the added perks are well worth the cost. Every Travel Noire trip includes airfare, accommodation, meals, personal tour guides, and most activities.

One of the amenities that sets Travel Noire apart is the professional photographer that accompanies every group trip. While the capturing and curation of images has been central to the experience of the modern traveler for well over half a century, the ubiquity of smartphones in the last decade empowers amateurs and professionals alike to capture memorable images, while social media provides a global canvas on which to exhibit them. The increasingly popular video- and photo-sharing site Instagram, established in 2010, was acquired by social media giant Facebook in 2012, just as Nomadness and Travel Noire came on the scene. By 2017, Instagram had over 800 million users and a devoted following in the Black travel world.[15] While Nomadness' Instagram feed shows a preference for a more vernacular photographic style, the images circulated on Travel Noire's Instagram account are usually polished, staged, and sophisticated, with carefully adorned Black bodies flanked by breathtaking landscapes and architecture.[16] The stunning images, which amalgamate the exoticism of *National Geographic* with the fashion sensibilities of *Vogue*, have drawn almost a half a billion followers to Travel Noire's Instagram page.

---

[14] Ibid.

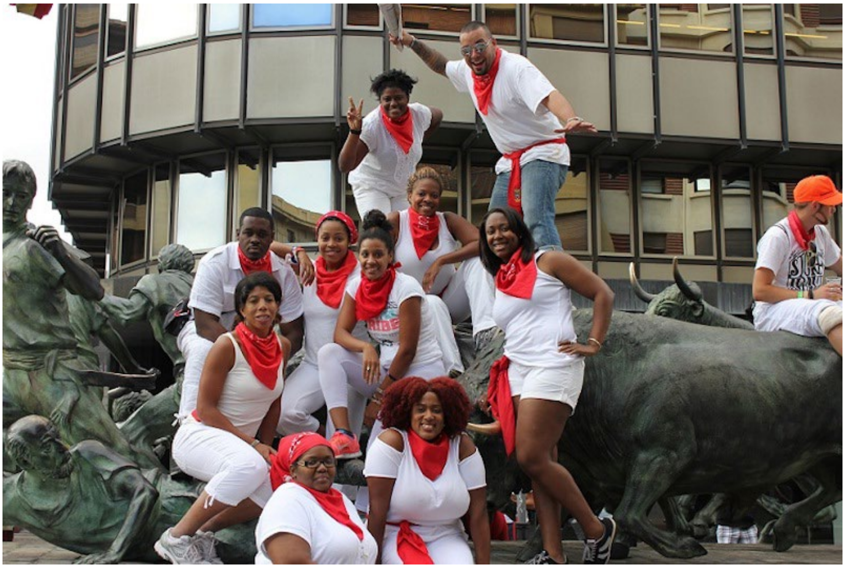


Fig. 32.3 Nomadness Travel Tribe, Pamplona, Spain. Image courtesy of Sheila Brown, CC BY 4.0.

---

[15] For the history of Instagram, see Ben Woods, 'Instagram: A Brief History', *Magazine*, 21 June 2013, https://thenextweb.com/magazine/2013/06/21/instagram-a-brief-history/

[16] For more on the evolving role of travel photography, see Deepthi Ruth Azariah, *Tourism, Travel, and Blogging: A Discursive Analysis of Online Travel Narratives* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

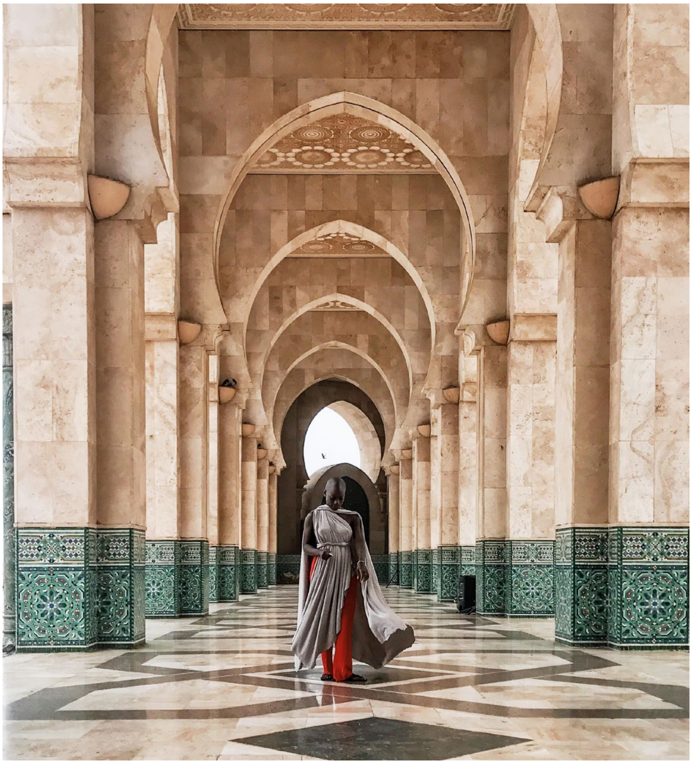


Fig. 32.4 'In the Hasaan II Mosque,' *Travel Noire* Instagram page. Image courtesy of Abena Bempah, CC BY 4.0.

While the twenty-first-century Black press is a shadow of its former glory, visual social media outlets like Instagram have in many ways taken on its role in allowing Black traveling millennials to self-represent. For Zim Ugochukwu, the visual representations of Black travelers is not superfluous, but critical to Travel Noire's overall mission: 'if you see somebody who looks like you in a certain destination, on a billboard doing things you never thought you could do, then that thing becomes a possibility.'[17] Robinson concurs and highlights the ways that social media has enabled Black millennials, 'to own our own narrative and create platforms where we can showcase ourselves.'[18] *Ebony* writer

---

[17] Southall, 'Black Travel Groups Find Kindred Spirits on Social Networks'.

[18] Mary Cass, 'Q&A: Evita Robinson, founder, Nomadness', *J. Walter Thompson Intelligence*, 17 January 2017, https://www.jwtintelligence.com/2017/01/evita-robinson-founder-nomadness/

Tracey Coleman explained that for Black travelers of her generation, there is a deeper meaning to these visual self-performances than merely showing off. She explains, 'when we post that selfie in front of the Eiffel Tower or at the peak of Mt. Kilimanjaro, we make a statement far more powerful than the photo caption. Our collective journey has been a long one, and those photos are badges of pride that carry more weight than we realize.'[19] Writing for the popular digital platform Blavity, an author identified only as HeyitsKarla went a step further, inviting Black travelers to flood their social media timelines 'with pics and videos of Black individuals and Black women who travel, so much to the point where it isn't something we view as extraordinarily unimaginable.'[20] In other words, these images are not simply about showcasing beautiful locales or projecting an idealized self. Instead they become a vehicle for promoting 'the idea that the world is ours, too,' according to millennial travel writer Kyla McMillan.[21] For many young Black Americans, consuming and curating these photographs is a radical act of self-discovery and a political declaration.

However, not everyone is convinced that these travel groups should be celebrated. Some writers and bloggers have questioned what they consider the elitism and 'divisive snobbery of wanderlust,' promoted by Travel Noire and Nomadness. An article on *Ebony* went so far as to ask if 'passport stamps are the new paper bag test,' likening the desire among millennials to see the world to those institutions and organizations in the early twentieth century that excluded people based on color and status. 'One look at the Travel Noire Instagram account,' the article continued, 'could have you all up in your feelings wondering why you're not on a camel in some desert you can't pronounce.'[22] In response to such criticisms, Nomadness and Travel Noire prefer to highlight the ways they save travelers money. In recent years, both organizations have been focusing less on extravagant group trips and more on helping to connect their members through global meetups, BBQs in cities like Philadelphia and Detroit, and helping them to find and book significantly discounted tickets through airline computer glitches. For example, early in the morning on Christmas Day in 2015, Eithad Airlines had a fare glitch that lowered prices to places like Abu Dhabi and Johannesburg to as low as $250 round trip. So many Travel Noire and Nomadness Tribe members, 1000 and 400 respectively bought tickets under the hashtag #bookdatish, that it caught the attention of Eithad Airlines as well as AirBnB, which began offering discount codes and seeking partnerships with both groups.

---

[19] Tracey Coleman, 'Are Passport Stamps the New Paper Bag Test?', *Ebony*, 2 February 2015, http://www.ebony.com/life/are-passport-stamps-the-new-paper-bag-test-999

[20] heyitskarla, 'Why Traveling While Black Is A Form of Resistance', *Blavity*, https://blavity.com/why-traveling-while-black-is-a-form-of-resistance

[21] Kyla McMillan, 'Why the Black Travel Movement Is Necessary', *JetMag*, 26 September 2016, https://www.jetmag.com/talk-back-2/black-travel-movement/

[22] Coleman, 'Are Passport Stamps the New Paper Bag Test?'

After years of failed attempts to expand the travel market, airline companies and travel-based corporations are also noticing the power of what Robinson and Ugochukwu have built. In an interview, Zim Ugochukwu explained that 'brands have been struggling to figure out how to reach Black travelers in ways that are authentic and inoffensive,' and are turning to her to for help. She continued, 'this isn't a trend, it's something that's here to stay. And brands are realizing that if they don't jump in on that, then they will lose out.'[23] When reflecting on the role of Nomadness in spearheading the new Black travel movement, Robinson declared, 'for years, we were ahead of our time. I think the industry thought it was a fad or something that was going to subside with time. But we're still here and kicking, and now that the movement itself has grown, they're finally paying attention.'[24] For good or ill, the innovative use of digital and social media by Black millennial women has now placed Black international travelers on the radar not only of the media, but of travel-related companies.

Increased corporate attention, however, has not simplified the complications of traveling Black while carrying the blue US passport. For example, travelers in these organizations have extensive online discussions about the ways their presence as Black Americans abroad impacts the power dynamics around race and racism in the places where they travel. Online forums warn travelers about the perils of turning other people's misery into our fun. They also help one another navigate the complex reality of feeling liberated from American racial constraints while traveling abroad, but also encountering the global circulation of damaging stereotypes about Black Americans that have reached the most remote places of the world. Evita Robinson explained the uncertainty of being a Black international traveler in an article in 2015: 'three years and over twenty Nomadness trips later, the truth is, I never know how we are going to be received when we walk through the door. I'd be lying if I didn't say that some countries worry me more than others. There are nuances to being a Black traveler.'[25] The challenges are especially acute for Black women. They mention being denied reservations with home share companies based on their profile pictures, having cops called by neighbors who did not think they belonged in the neighborhoods where they rented apartments and homes, as well as the pressure to alter their behavior so as not to fuel narratives about loud Black women in public spaces.[26]

---

[23] Southall, 'Black Travel Groups Find Kindred Spirits on Social Networks'.

[24] Cass, 'Q&A: Evita Robinson, founder, Nomadness'.

Furthermore, the intersectional political economy of race, gender, and sexuality is such that African-American women are often mistaken for sex workers abroad and receive aggressive and unwanted attention. Popular travel blogger Oneika Raymond recounted a harrowing experience while in Ireland: 'I was accosted by some Irish men as I walked down the street — they heckled me and told me that I had a big, fat ass, and could I wiggle it even more as I walked, telling me as well to "show them what I was working with."'[27] On the other hand, many Black millennial women described the joy of feeling more beautiful and desired when traveling outside of the US. Tyra Seldon, a self-described writer and motivational speaker, explained, 'I used to tell my girlfriends that if they ever needed a self-esteem pick-me-up then to go to Italy or Southern France. Black women of all hues, sizes, and shapes are considered *muy bella*.'[28] As both of these examples elucidate, Black women's bodies and perceived sexual availability have an impact on their experiences abroad, either affirming ideas about their alleged promiscuity or subverting notions of beauty that often render them undesirable in the US.

---

[25] Evita Robinson, 'From India to Augill Castle: How Nomadness is Changing Perceptions of Black travel', *Mashable UK*, 23 July 2015, https://mashable.com/2015/07/22/nomadness-travel/?europe=true#RnFUaFuKQiq6

[26] For recent examples see Doug Cris and Amir Vera, 'Three Black People Checked Out of their AirBnB Rental. Then Someone Called the Cops on Them', *CNN*, 10 May 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/07/us/airbnb-police-called-trnd/index.html; Tiffany Fitzgerald, '"These are the White Stairs": The Enduring Insults of Golfing While Black', *The Guardian*, 25 April 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/apr/25/black-female-golfers-police-called; Katie Rogers, '#LaughingWhileBlack Wine Train Lawsuit is Settled', *New York Times*, 20 April 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/us/women-settle-11-million-lawsuit-with-napa-valley-wine-train.html

[27] Oneika Raymond, 'Currently in Ireland and Onward to Scotland Tomorrow…', *Oneika the Traveller*, 11 July 2009, http://www.oneikathetraveller.com/currently-in-ireland-and-onward-to-scotland-tomorrow.html

Despite the uncertainties, many are willing to take on the risks associated with international travel, because as African-American women they recognized that their lives were often devalued back home. Blogging under the group name, 'Las Morenas of Espana,' an author who decided to expatriate after years of traveling abroad writes:

> *I've come to the conclusion that the United States of America wants me to die; or at the very least, is indifferent to my survival.* Now, don't get me wrong, I love the US. I love my country. It's where I was born, it's where I grew up. It gave me Jazz, southern BBQ, Sam Cooke and New York City. What I am saying is, the US just doesn't love me back. If it did, it would try harder to keep me alive.[29]

As the assault on Black life was becoming more and more evident to her and her millennial peers, Evita Robinson explained, 'many of our Black American travelers are more comfortable (and statistically speaking, safer) in countries other than our own at the moment. It's a reality we bear, take with us, and try to seek refuge from anytime we can.'[30] Indeed, the Black travel movement was maturing alongside another social movement— the Black Lives Matter movement. In the same article, Robinson spoke eloquently of the pain she felt returning from traveling abroad only to be welcomed home with news of another killing of an African American at the hands of police:

> In 2015, every single time I left the United States, I came back to news of a black killing or unlawful arrest of some kind. Landing home from a personal getaway to Honduras, I was greeted with the tragic story of Tony Terrell Robinson's killing. Completion of my birthday trip to South Africa left me inundated with unavoidable playback footage of the Walter Scott shooting.

---

[28] Tyra Seldon, '3 Powerful Things That Traveling the Globe Taught Me', *Shoppe Black*, 24 April 2017, https://shoppeblack.us/2017/04/traveling-globe/

[29] Leslie Hatcher, '5 Things I've Learned about the US Since I've Left the US', *Las Morenas de España*, 10 June 2016, http://www.lasmorenasdeespana.com/blog/5-things-ive-learned-about-the-us. Emphasis in the original.

[30] Robinson, 'From India to Augill Castle'.

> A week later was Freddie Gray.
>
> It seems endless. I am more frequently left questioning myself: Are these shootings happening more often? Or, are we just more aware because of social media? Who knows? The one thing I can answer is that it's made the Nomadness Travel Tribe's mission all the more evident: We need a balance to how Black Americans are represented to the rest of the world.[31]

Robinson soon realized that Nomadness not only had an obligation to help Black Americans travel globally, something she hoped would change perceptions of Black people abroad, but that they needed to take a more visible role to advocating for Black life at home in the US. As such, the Nomadness social media team created the slogan 'We Travel and We Care about Home.'[32]

More than just a branding technique, the slogan was designed to highlight that many of the Tribe members, including those on the High Council, the organization's leadership team, were already involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. The Nomadness Tribe's second annual travel conference in New York in Fall 2016 featured a panel with BLM activists who were also Tribe members. In addition to encouraging other Tribe members to become involved in the struggle for Black life in their communities, they discussed the problem with normalizing Black Death on social media where videos of Black people being killed and assaulted by the police are in constant rotation. International travel, the panelists contend, is a way celebrate joy in the midst of pain, a powerful form of self-care as well as a politicized act of resistance.

A writer on the website Blavity proclaimed that 'Traveling as a black woman is resistance […] It's a clear message to young boys and girls & anyone of color, telling them that they can take up as much space as they want to in this world because the world is just as much theirs as it is anyone else's.'[33] Black women travelers and travel entrepreneurs in the twenty-first century are claiming their place in the world without apology by expanding the contours and geography of freedom movements through their creative use of visual and digital media. While they are certainly not the first African Americans to create a travel movement, they are among the youngest and the boldest.

---

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] heyitsKarla, 'Why Traveling While Black Is a Form of Resistance'.

More importantly, they are unapologetic in their insistence that young African-American women have the right to claim the world on their own terms. While it is still too soon to judge their full impact, their role in transforming the international travel industry and promoting the complexities of Black pleasure and pain is undeniable.

# Bibliography

'INTERNATIONAL PLAYER: Evita Robinson, the Nomad Diva', *Ebony*, 19 July 2012, http://www.ebony.com/life/evita-robinson-the-nomad-diva#axzz4YNM3iuFX

'International Player: Evita Robinson, The Nomad Diva', *Ebony*, 19 July 2012, https://www.ebony.com/life/evita-robinson-the-nomad-diva/

'NMDN Black Box | Our Mission: To Eradicate Any Barriers of Entry You Have into the World of Travel. (seriously.)', http://nmdnblackbox.com/

'SISTERS Are TRAVELING for Themselves', *I'm Black and I Travel!*, 24 January 2010.

'The Movement', https://www.nomadnesstv.com/

'What Does It Mean to be African American Abroad', Melissa Harris Perry Show, MSNBC, 2 August 2015, http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/watch/what-it-means-to-be-african-american-abroad-498925635550

Azariah, Deepthi Ruth, *Tourism, Travel, and Blogging*: *A Discursive Analysis of Online Travel Narratives* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

Cass, Mary, 'Q&A: Evita Robinson, founder, Nomadness', *J. Walter Thompson Intelligence*, 17 January 2017, https://www.jwtintelligence.com/2017/01/evita-robinson-founder-nomadness/

Coleman, Tracey, 'Are Passport Stamps the New Paper Bag Test?', *Ebony*, 2 February 2015, http://www.ebony.com/life/are-passport-stamps-the-new-paper-bag-test-999

Cris, Doug and Amir Vera, 'Three Black People Checked Out of their AirBnB Rental. Then Someone Called the Cops on Them', *CNN*, 10 May 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/07/us/airbnb-police-called-trnd/index.html

Donaldson, Zoe, 'This Blogger's Mission Is to Show that Travel Is for Everyone', *Huffington Post*, 4 April 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/this-bloggers-mission-is-to-show-that-travel-is-for-everyone_us_58dab2b3e4b01ca7b4276df4

Ferguson, Charlise, '"We out Here": Inside the New Black Travel Movement', *Daily Beast*, 4 January 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/04/we-out-here-inside-the-new-black-travel-movement.html

Fitzgerald, Tiffany, '"These Are the White Stairs": The Enduring Insults of Golfing While Black', *Guardian*, 25 April 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/apr/25/black-female-golfers-police-called

Foster, Mark S., 'In the Face of "Jim Crow": Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890–1945', *Journal of Negro History*, 84 (Spring 1999), 130–49.

Gebreyes, Rahel, ‘Growing Black Travel Movement Challenges Perceptions of the Typical Globetrotter’, *Huffington Post*, 28 January 2015, sec. Black Voices, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/28/black-travel-movement_n_6558930.html

Hatcher, Leslie, ‘5 Things I’ve Learned about the US Since I’ve Left the US’, *Las Morenas de España*, 10 June 2016, http://www.lasmorenasdeespana.com/blog/5-things-ive-learned-about-the-us

Heyitskarla, ‘Why Traveling While Black Is a Form of Resistance’, *Blavity*, https://blavity.com/why-traveling-while-black-is-a-form-of-resistance

Jackson, Reagan, ‘Nomadness: The New Tribe Changing the Face of Travel’, *The Seattle Globalist*, 4 December 2014, http://www.seattleglobalist.com/2014/12/04/nomadness-travel-tribe-young-black-women-with-passports/31311

Kahrl, Andrew W., ‘“The Slightest Semblance of Unruliness”: Steamboat Excursions, Pleasure Resorts, and the Emergence of Segregation Culture on the Potomac River’, *Journal of American History*, 94 (March 2008), 1108–36.

McMillan, Kyla, ‘Why the Black Travel Movement Is Necessary’, *JetMag*, 26 September 2016, https://www.jetmag.com/talk-back-2/black-travel-movement/

Parke, Phoebe, ‘Why the Black Travel Movement Has Taken Off’, *CNN*, 15 June 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/15/africa/black-travel-discriminatory/index.html

Raymond, Oneika, ’Currently in Ireland and Onward to Scotland Tomorrow…’, *Oneika the Traveller*, 11 July 2009, http://www.oneikathetraveller.com/currently-in-ireland-and-onward-to-scotland-tomorrow.html

Robinson, Evita, ‘From India to Augill Castle: How Nomadness is Changing Perceptions of Black Travel’, *Mashable UK*, 23 July 2015, https://mashable.com/2015/07/22/nomadness-travel/?europe=true#RnFUaFuKQiq6

Rogers, Katie, ‘#LaughingWhileBlack Wine Train Lawsuit is Settled’, *New York Times*, 20 April 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/us/women-settle-11-million-lawsuit-with-napa-valley-wine-train.html

Seiler, Cotton, ‘“So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By”: African American Automobility and Cold War Liberalism’, *American Quarterly*, 58 (2006), 1091–117.

Seldon, Tyra, ‘3 Powerful Things That Traveling the Globe Taught Me’, *Shoppe Black*, 24 April 2017, https://shoppeblack.us/2017/04/traveling-globe/

Southall, Ashley, ‘Black Travel Groups Find Kindred Spirits on Social Networks’, *The New York Times*, 23 July 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/travel/black-travel-noire-nomadness.html

Steele, Catherine Knight, 'Black Bloggers and Their Varied Publics: The Everyday Politics of Black Discourse Online', *Television and New Media*, 19:2 (May 2017), 1–16.

Whatley Smith, Virginia, 'African American Travel Literature', in Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 197–213 (p. 212).

Woods, Ben, 'Instagram: A Brief History', *Magazine*, 21 June 2013, https://thenextweb.com/magazine/2013/06/21/instagram-a-brief-history/

# 33. Performing a Life: Mattie Allen McAdoo's Odyssey from Ohio to South Africa, Australia and Beyond, 1890–1900

*Paulette Young*

## Introduction

A well-dressed attractive African-American young woman poses for her portrait at the Richmond Studio. She wears a fitted jacket with large lapels and brocade trim, her starched winged-collar shirt adorned with a ribbon bow tie, paired over a long, richly draped skirt finished with a tightly cinched front-laced corset at her waist. She holds the brim of a beaver cap against her thigh and displays a tennis racket prominently across her body like a baby. Her hair is pulled away from her face with soft curls at front calling attention to her thick eyebrows and large, dark piercing eyes. She gazes directly into the camera's lens, spellbound by the experience of capturing this moment in time — or perhaps she is transfixing the viewer with her determined gaze. She stands within a carefully placed arrangement of ferns and other plants. The photo studio's painted background has a blurred tree and a winding stream with flowers and other plants, projecting a sense of otherworldliness (see Fig. 33.1). The hand-scripted notation on the upper right of the

© 2019 Paulette Young, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.33

reverse side of this cabinet card photograph identifies the sitter as 'Martha McAdoo', photographed by Houghton and George at The Richmond Studio, 38 Richmond Hill, Port Elizabeth. Charles Henry George and A. T. Houghton operated their studio at this address in Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa in 1892.

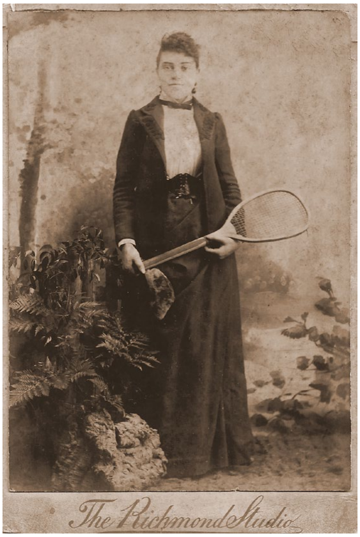


Fig. 33.1 Mattie A. McAdoo with tennis racquet. Photo by The Richmond Studio (ca. 1890–91), Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Image courtesy of Young Robertson Gallery Collection, New York. All rights reserved.

This image presents a first-person perspective, by a Black woman, on life in South Africa during the late 1800s through a moment caught in the camera's lens. It is an important archival text and visual language documenting a glimpse into the life of an African-American woman living and working abroad.[1] For example, the tennis racquet in this photographic portrait is a thoughtful commentary on the determination of this Black woman to obtain full inclusion in the cultural norms of the day. The tennis racquet is not a simple prop but likely deliberately selected to represent a cosmopolitan awareness of contemporary life. The oldest tennis club in South Africa was the Richmond Tennis Club, established in 1877. By 1881, tennis had become a major feature of colonial life in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.[2] However, Blacks were largely restricted from participation in this highly popular cultural phenomenon in Africa and the US.

---

[1] During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, prominent African Americans understood and fully embraced the power of the photograph to influence public perceptions concerning race and class and adopted this new medium in their struggle for social, economic and political justice. African-American intellectuals like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, among others, believed that the photographic image had the potential to communicate ideals beyond words from a first-person perspective and promote social, political and cultural progress for Blacks and Americans in general. See Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle

## Who Was Martha Allan McAdoo?

### Background

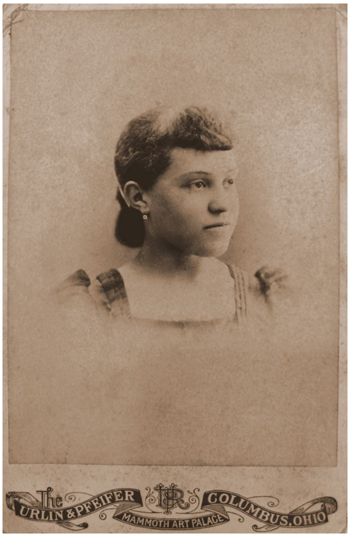
Before she was Martha McAdoo, Martha Eliza Allan, known as 'Mattie' to her family and friends, was born on 27 January 1868 in Columbus, Ohio where she studied singing and attended public schools (see Figs. 33.2 and 33.3). Mattie was a talented contralto who received critical praise in the local press. Commenting on her strong voice, a critic noted, 'To hear her sing, and not seeing the singer, one would judge at once it was a male tenor.'[3] After graduating from the Columbus Normal High School, Mattie taught for two years in Ohio and Washington, D.C. Restless and tired of teaching, she responded to an advertisement by Mr Orpheus Myron McAdoo for singers interested in performing abroad (see Figs. 33.4 and 33.5).

---

Smith (eds.), *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

[2] The period between 1775 and 1885 marked the rise of sports as leisure activity in post-industrial England and the introduction of sports, including tennis, to South Africa. While tennis served as an important part of the assimilation and mobilization of the new South African elites, Black Africans were segregated from these institutions. However, by the end of the 1880s, Blacks had formed their own tennis clubs in several towns. Djata notes, 'South African Black elites used sports as a measure of social status.' The 'imperial' sports were significant for the African elite to 'establish their "civilized credentials" in the Black community and in the eyes of whites.' Sundiata A. Djata, *Blacks at the Net: Black Achievement in the History of Tennis, Volume II* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), p. 53.

[3] 'A Phenomenal Vocalist', *Cleveland Gazette*, 4 July 1891.



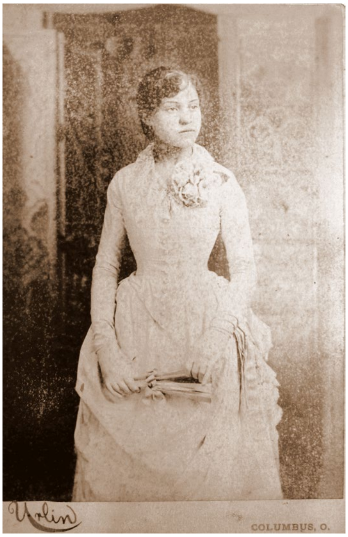


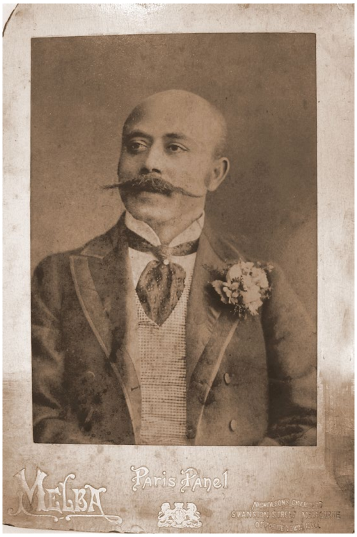
Fig. 33.2 (left) Marta 'Mattie' Eliza Allan, contralto calling card. Photo by Urlin & Pfeifer Studio, Columbus, Ohio, ca. 1884. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

Fig. 33.3 (right) Martha 'Mattie' Eliza Allan's high school graduation portrait. Photo by Urlin Studio, Columbus, Ohio, ca. 1885. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

Young Mr. McAdoo had great experience as a traveling performer. While a student at the Hampton Institute in Virginia (now Hampton University), he was a founding member of the Hampton Student Quartette.[4] Orpheus had also been leading baritone for the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a company originally formed in 1873 by Fisk University students to raise funds for their school, an education center for Blacks, located in Nashville, Tennessee. The group's performance of Negro spirituals was well received; by 1875, they earned close to $100,000 which enabled them to complete Jubilee Hall. Their rich success inspired the formation of similar groups of Jubilee Singers in other Black colleges including Hampton, Tuskegee and Wilberforce, to name a few. In 1886, Orpheus and the troupe, under the direction of Frederick J. Loudin, commenced a worldwide tour that included England, Australia, India, Japan and Burma. Three years later, McAdoo built on his experience with the Fisk Jubilee Singers to form his own company.[5] Trusting Mr McAdoo's success and experience in the international performing arena, Mattie signed a contract as soloist with *Orpheus Myron McAdoo's Virginia Concert Company and Jubilee Singers* for a three-year tour including Great Britain, Glasgow, India and the West Indies.

---

[4] Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight*: *The Rise of African American Popular Music 1889–1895* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), p. 120.



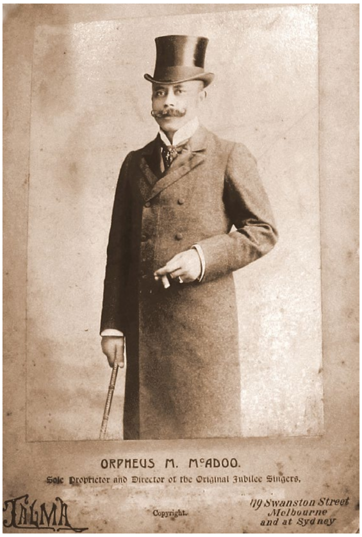


Fig. 33.4 (left) Orpheus Myron McAdoo, formal portrait. Photo by Melba Studio, Melbourne, Australia, ca. 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

Fig. 33.5 (right) Orpheus Myron McAdoo, formal portrait, 'Orpheus M. McAdoo, Sole Proprietor and Director of the Original Jubilee Singers'. Photo by Talma Studio, Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, ca. 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

What would drive a twenty-two-year-old, educated and gainfully employed Negro woman in 1890 to leave her familiar life behind and migrate to faraway lands?

---

[5] Ibid.

## Life in Ohio and Beyond

Mattie Allan was born during the Civil War era, a period of great tumult that probably influenced her decision to migrate abroad. Although Ohio outlawed slavery in 1802 and played a major role in the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad, discrimination on public transportation, in theaters, restaurants and jobs persisted. African-American women's employment choices were generally limited to teaching, midwifery, and housekeeping, including working as a maid, cook or laundress.[6] Mattie, however, was aware of her well-received singing and performance talents and her inner drive to be a success. She saw the opportunity to escape the bonds of racism and sexism and realize her dream to be an international star.

Mattie's home state's newspaper, the *Cleveland Gazette*, a Black-owned weekly dedicated to examining issues impacting the African-American community, describes her as 'well educated, having the advantage of being schooled along with white pupils in the mixed schools of Columbus.' 'Tall and stately looking, very fair, could easily pass for white, did she desire.' Commenting on her impending foray abroad, the paper noted, 'To many a young woman, the idea of such a trip, far away from home, amidst strangers would have caused them to recoil, but Miss Allen is quite masculine in her will, and nothing ever daunts her. The circumscribed limit of the school room was always an undesirable restraint to her. She was restless and like a caged bird longed for freedom, for the possibilities and probabilities of the great world. As she often said, 'I want to do something and be something, I want to make a name!''[7]

Orpheus McAdoo understood the potential for his group in South Africa and Australia. During his previous tours with the Fisk Jubilee singers, he witnessed the transformative power of music on both white and Black audiences. He believed that a group of talented, cultivated representatives of the Black race would challenge the stereotypes held by local whites and would have a profound effect on African Blacks. Dress, style and manner were key components of the group's acceptance by the South African and Australian communities.[8]

---

[6] 'African Americans in Ohio', *Ohio Memory*, https://www.ohiomemory.org

[7] 'A Phenomenal Vocalist.' In 1891–93, Cleveland's [African-American] *Gazette* reported regularly on the activities of the Jubilee Singers.

[8] Information compiled from various materials from the archives of Yale University underscore the enormous success of McAdoo's singers in South Africa. Orpheus M.

## Dress and Presentation through Photographs

Orpheus and Mattie carefully chose the style of dress in which the group would present themselves to the public. They understood the powerful role of clothing and style in presenting a sophisticated and professional aura. Mattie's style and confidence did not go unnoticed by the press (see Fig. 33.6).

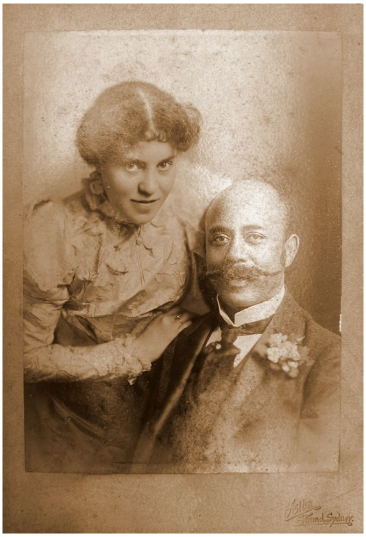


Fig. 33.6 Studio portrait of Mattie and Orpheus McAdoo in stylish dress. Photo by Alba Studio, Sydney, Australia, ca. 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

---

McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Presenting themselves as talented, cultivated representatives of their race debunked many of the negative stereotypes held by the white colonists, while delighting the educated South African Blacks (Abbott and Seroff, *Out of Sight*, p. 121).

Campbell notes, 'The McAdoo Singers' visit touched South Africans across boundaries of race and class, but it had its most galvanic effect on educated African Christians. To "progressive" Africans, caught in the ebb tide of nineteenth-century liberalism, the Singers offered a testament of hope, a confirmation not only of prevailing beliefs about African-American progress and attainment but of their own imagined future. The Singers' dress was dapper, their demeanour urbane. They spoke English fluently, a hallmark of elite status in South Africa. While separated from slavery by just a generation, they moved easily through South African society as honorary whites, performing for mixed audiences and earning the plaudits of white society.' James Campbell, 'Models and Metaphors: Industrial Education in the United States and South Africa', in Ran Greenstein (ed.), *Comparative Perspectives on South Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc. 1998), pp. 90–134 (p. 109).

> The most superb dress seen for a long time on the stage here was worn Tuesday night by Madame Mattie Allan McAdoo. It was a delicate sea-green floral silk, with a short train. The V-shaped apron was embroidered in crimson true lovers' knots, two rows of crimson made the hem, and small crimson bows were on the short sleeves, also exquisite lace a diamond necklace, brooch and bracelets, and enormous pearls finishing off the most elaborate dress worn here by any singer for a long time. Mrs. McAdoo is a graceful woman.[9]

> Madame Mattie Allen McAdoo is a chic dresser. Her pink brocade with frills and lace jacket was a whiff from Paris, I'm sure. But her putty colored cloth great coat, vandyked on the hem, with a trained skirt trailing underneath, topped by a violet hat, is charming. Now what other woman would be daring enough to wear a violet hat, with violet tulle veil, ending in immense loops and ends of tulle waving under the left ear? Not many…[10]

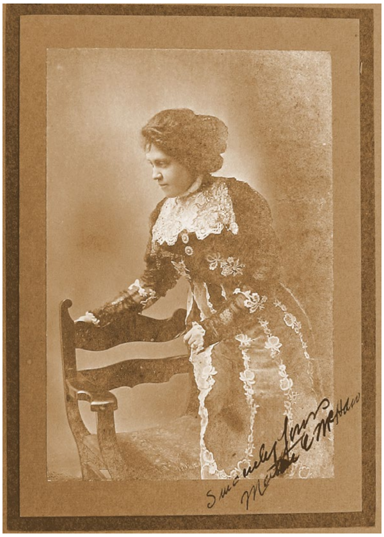


Fig. 33.7 Mattie A. McAdoo as a soloist. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

---

[9] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Australian newspaper clipping, Scrapbooks 1886–95.

[10] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Scrapbooks 1886–95.

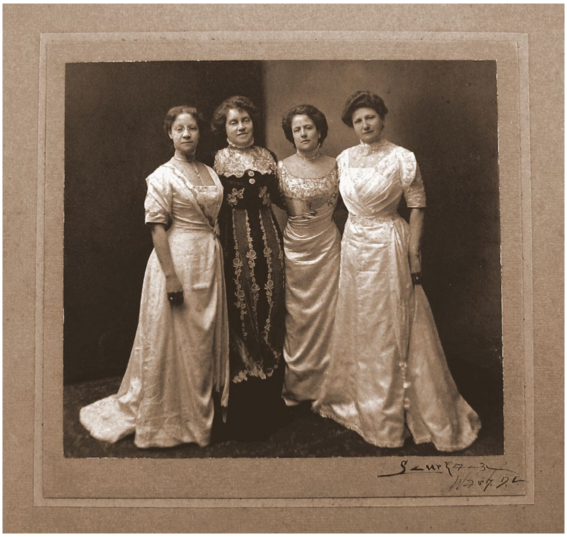


Fig. 33.8 Mattie A. McAdoo (2nd from left) with her quartet. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

Mattie and Orpheus also understood the power of the photograph to create perceptions around race, class and gender and called upon it as a way to promote their musical genius and also speak for social justice. Their studio portraits were a contrast to servile stereotypical images of the time. Carefully constructed studio portraits in Victorian formal attire with proper accoutrements, including hair and accessories, highlight the importance of the presentation of the self to counteract common beliefs and negative stereotypes of Negroes of the period (see Figs. 33.4–9).

These photographs show bold figures possessed of great character, as displayed through their posture and comportment. They also highlight a sense of cosmopolitan life. These images present a first-person perspective, from a Black woman, of life in South Africa, Australia and America at the time through a moment caught in the camera's lens. It is an important archival text documenting a period (1890 to the early 1900s) in the life of a Black family living and working abroad.

## On to South Africa and Beyond

On 21 June 1890, The Virginia Concert Company and Jubilee Singers opened at Cape Town, South Africa to a large audience. 'On Saturday evening, the hall was packed from floor to ceiling with a most enthusiastic audience, who testified by their rapturous applause that they heartily enjoyed the various efforts of the singers and the fine programme presented.'[11]

Orpheus McAdoo used creative strategies to navigate race including singing 'quaint, melodious and charming singing' of traditional gospel songs designed to highlight racial uplift.[12] Educated Black South Africans also embraced the company and felt proud of their accomplishments.

The company was highly successful, performing in large cities and small towns from 1890–92. Their singing and performance style had a profound effect on both white and Black African audiences. Many listeners found the spiritual songs of slavery inspiring. Scholars credit McAdoo's tour as a defining moment in the development of South African choral music, pointing to the rise of the 'African Jubilee Singers' as a by-product of the Virginia Jubilee Singer's tour.[13] 'Bloemfontein has quite taken to the Jubilee Singers, and considering the admirable manner in which the arrangements are carried out, and the decided talent of the performers, to say nothing of the unique character of the entertainment provided, it is no wonder that they have been received in our midst in the most enthusiastic manner. Since their first appearance on Friday evening, which was under the distinguished patronage of Mrs. Reitz and a large party from the Presidency, they have been rewarded with crowded houses, such as have never been witnessed in the Town Hall for the purpose of hearing any professional performance, in the history of our City. Mr. McAdoo is a genuine type of the man of the world. He has travelled all over the civilized globe, and is a keen observer of human nature, and a man with whom the most learned can spend an hour's profitable conversation.'[14]

---

[11] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Scrapbooks 1886–95.

[12] Chinua Akimaro Thelwell discusses McAdoo's specific application of racial uplift politics as a strategy to counter the commonplace notions of Black regressive behavior. He highlights McAdoo's canny ability to merge Black civility and refinement and minstrelsy on the stage to promote a new racial narrative. Chinua Akimaro Thewell, '"Modernizing" Hybridity: McAdoo's Jubilee Singers, McAdoo's Minstrels, and Racial Uplift Politics in South Africa, 1890–1898', *The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 15:1 (2014), 3–28, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17533171.2013.864169.

[13] For a detailed examination of the historical impact of McAdoo's spiritual songs of slavery on Black South African choral practices, see Veit Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Idem, *African Stars*: *Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Mattie Allan was especially favored. Local newspapers noted, 'Miss Allan has a genuine Tenor voice, which she manipulates artistically and charms her audience greatly.'[15] 'Miss Mattie Allan, the lady tenor, created a perfect furore, [sic] and received the honor of a double encore, the audience being particularly delighted with her charming jodeling [sic].'[16] 'Miss Mattie Allen was encored over and over again, her singularly beautiful voice being thoroughly appreciated.'[17] However, while the company's musical talent was appreciated, their stay in South Africa was not without incident.

## Race and Performance in South Africa

While viewed as 'Negro' in the United States, the company was reclassified in different terms, including 'Colored' in South Africa.[18] A newspaper article reflects the confusion regarding the troupe's racial identities. Under the heading, 'Arrivals' the article states, 'The Jubilee Singers arrived yesterday and created quite a commotion at the Grand Hotel, where they are staying, it being somewhat unusual to see such a large number of creoles, quadroons, and West Indian natives gathered together at one dinner table. The gentlemen of the company are all fine-looking fellows, and there is always a fascination about the large dark eyes of a creole or quadroon lady, so that altogether it will be easily understood that the arrival of the singers attracted considerable attention.'[19]

---

[14] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers.

[15] 'The Jubilee Singers,' *The Wynberg Times*, 13 July 1895.

[16] 'Amusements. Jubilee Singers,' *The Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette*, 28 January 1896.

[17] 'The Jubilee Singers,' *The Teadock Register*, 17 April 1896.

[18] Thewell asserts that McAdoo strategically used South Africa's three-tiered racial classification system to his advantage by claiming to be a 'Coloured' American, to gain social and cultural entrée. Thewell, '"Modernizing" Hybridity'.

[19] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Scrapbooks 1886–95.

The troupe was given status as 'honorary white,' which was bestowed upon all Blacks as non-African visitors.[20] They could travel over all regions in South Africa, including the mines and after sunset.[21] However, to be sure, not everyone was enamored with the idea of Blacks representing American ideals. In an interview with *The Australian Christian World*, McAdoo related the group's encounter with the 'colour line' in South Africa. When the singers were invited by the American Consul to a 4th of July celebration in Cape Town, McAdoo revealed that the consul received a letter denouncing the invitation of 'niggers' to a public dinner. The writer was a Georgian from America who stated he had never sat at the same table as a Black man and never would. The Counsel published the letter verbatim to the consternation of the Jubilee Singers' supporters who demanded the Georgian show his face.[22] While this lead to great advertising for the company, all was not well.

While preparing to leave Cape Town for the interior, the company was reminded of the strong racial prejudice, particularly in Transvaal and the Orange Free State, where there was a 9pm curfew for Blacks. Native-born Black Africans were required to have passes for travel in the country and could not own a business. While the company did secure a special proclamation written in Dutch and English that allowed the group free movement and safe passage, McAdoo and his members were uneasy with this prejudicial treatment, specifically the Pass System.[23] In a letter to his mentor, General S. C. Armstrong, founder and president of Hampton Institute, he wrote: 'There is no country in the world where prejudice is so strong as here in Africa. The native here is treated as badly as ever the slave was treated in Georgia. Here in Africa the native laws are most unjust; such as any Christian person would be ashamed of. Do you credit a law in a civilized community compelling every man of dark skin, even though he is a citizen of another country, to be in his house by 9 o'clock at night, or he be arrested? […] Black people who are seen out after 9 o'clock must have passes from their masters. Indeed, it is so strict that natives have to get passes for day travel.'[24]

---

[20] Campbell, 'Models and Metaphors', p. 109.

[21] The New Jagersfontein Mining & Exploration Company, Limited presented a pass to 'Mr. McAdoo & Party of 8 to visit the Company's Compounds and works within the Mining Area June 1896, after Sunset'. (Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers.) Black South Africans were generally only given restricted access in daytime during working hours.

[22] 'The Jubilee Singers,' *The Australian Christian World*, 30 June 1892, p. 5.

[23] Ibid.

Upon reaching Durban, McAdoo recalled that the company settled into their rooms booked three months prior, but they were asked to leave. The landlady informed them that because they were Black, she would lose her borders and be ruined and pleaded, 'for the sake of my dear daughters, you must go.' Orpheus McAdoo assured the woman that 'I have six ladies upstairs, who have fair, white souls, even though their skins are dark […] I'll get all my young men to sign an agreement not to make love to your daughters, so you'll be safe on that score.' But to no avail. New accommodation had to be found in the pouring rain and it was close to midnight before they were resettled. It so happened that the racist Georgian from Cape Town was courting one of the landlady's daughters and browbeat the woman with warnings of miscegenation until she relented. McAdoo related the incident to the audience from the stage after a thrilling and well-received performance. As fate would have it, the daughters were in the audience along with the racist Georgian suitor, who was accosted and badly beaten by his fellow concert goers.[25]

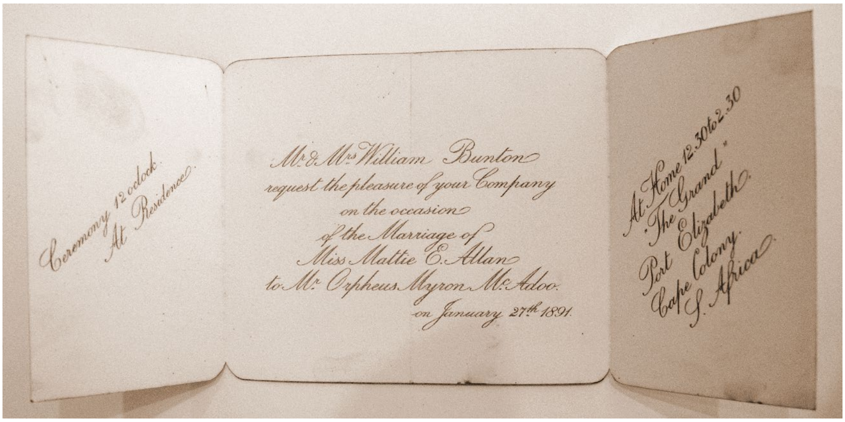
In late January 1892, the company embarked on a tour of Australia and New Zealand. But before leaving South Africa, Orpheus and Mattie married in a noon ceremony at the residence of Mr And Mrs William Bunton, followed by a reception at the Grand Hotel, Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, South Africa. The African-American weekly, *The Cleveland Gazette*, which closely documented the concert company with a special emphasis and pride in their native daughter Mattie, highlighted a 'Wedding in the Transvaal' noting that 'Exceptionally fine invitations announcing the marriage, January 27th [1891] at Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, South Africa, of Miss Mattie E. Allen of Columbus, Ohio, and

---

[24] 'A Letter from South Africa: Black Laws in the Orange Free State in Africa,' [n.d.], published in *Southern Workman*, 19 November 1890: 120, reprinted in Josephine Wright, 'Orpheus Myron McAdoo — Singer, Impresario', *The Black Perspective in Music* 4:3 (1976), 320–27 (p. 322).

[25] 'The Jubilee Singers,' *The Australian Christian World*, 30 June 1892, p. 5. Also, 'The Jubilee Singers. Orpheus is interviewed,' *The Star*, 17 September 1891.

Orpheus Myron McAdoo have reached many of their friends in this country'[26] (see Fig. 33.9). It is important to note that the Marriage Justice considered not marrying Mattie and Orpheus given that the bride had 'extremely fair skin, whose father is white' which would violate cross-racial marriages in South Africa. Despite her appearance to many as 'white', Mattie never chose to adopt a white identity and instead she strongly embraced her African heritage. She proudly identified herself as 'Negro' and the marriage proceeded.



Ceremony 12 o'clock.
At Residence.

Mr. & Mrs. William Bunton
request the pleasure of your Company
on the occasion
of the Marriage of
Miss Mattie E. Allan
to Mr. Orpheus Myron McAdoo.
on January 27th 1891.

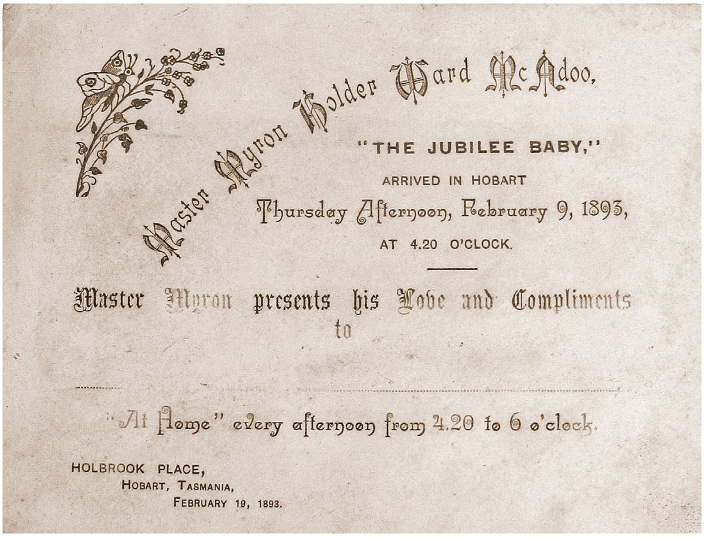
At Home 12.30 to 2.30
"The Grand"
Port Elizabeth.
Cape Colony.
S. Africa.

Fig. 33.9 Invitation to the marriage of Miss Mattie E. Allan to Mr. Orpheus Myron McAdoo, Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, South Africa, 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

While touring in Tasmania, Mattie gave birth to Master Myron Holder Ward McAdoo. 'Master Myron Ward McAdoo "The Jubilee Baby" arrived in Hobart Tasmania, Thursday afternoon, February 9, 1893 at 4:20 o'clock. Master Myron presents his love and compliments' (see Fig. 33.10).

---

[26] 'A Wedding in Transvaal,' *Cleveland Gazette*, 10 January 1891.



Master Myron Holder Ward McAdoo,

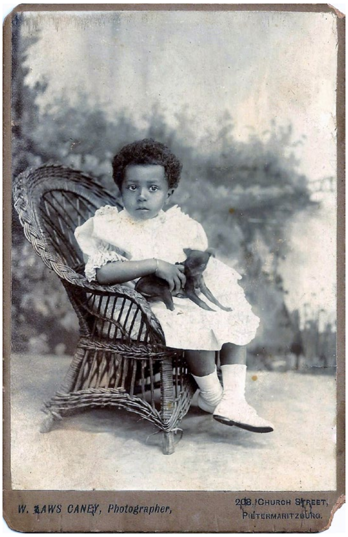
"THE JUBILEE BABY,"
ARRIVED IN HOBART
Thursday Afternoon, February 9, 1893,
AT 4.20 O'CLOCK.

Master Myron presents his Love and Compliments
to

"At Home" every afternoon from 4.20 to 6 o'clock.

HOLBROOK PLACE,
HOBART, TASMANIA,
FEBRUARY 19, 1893.

Fig. 33.10 Birth announcement for Master Myron Holder Ward McAdoo, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 9 February 1893. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.


W. LAWS CANEY, Photographer,
208, CHURCH STREET,
PIETERMARITZBURG.

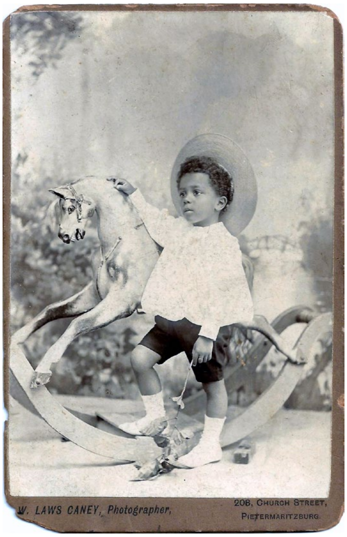

W. LAWS CANEY, Photographer,
208, CHURCH STREET,
PIETERMARITZBURG.

Fig. 33.11 Baby Myron McAdoo with puppy. Photo by W. Laws Caney Studio, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, ca. 1895–96. Image courtesy of Young Robertson Gallery Collection, New York. All rights reserved.

Fig. 33.12 Baby Myron McAdoo with rocking horse. Photo by W. Laws Caney Studio, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, ca. 1895–96. Image courtesy of Young Robertson Gallery Collection, New York. All rights reserved.

The company left Australia and New Zealand returned to South Africa in 1895 for a second tour. This time, responding to changes in musical tastes, the company broadened its repertoire to include comedy and ministry. The group's name was changed from *the Virginia Concert Company and Jubilee Singers* and renamed *McAdoo's Minstrel and Vaudeville Company* and included a variety of singers and performers[27] (see Figs. 33.13 and 33.14).

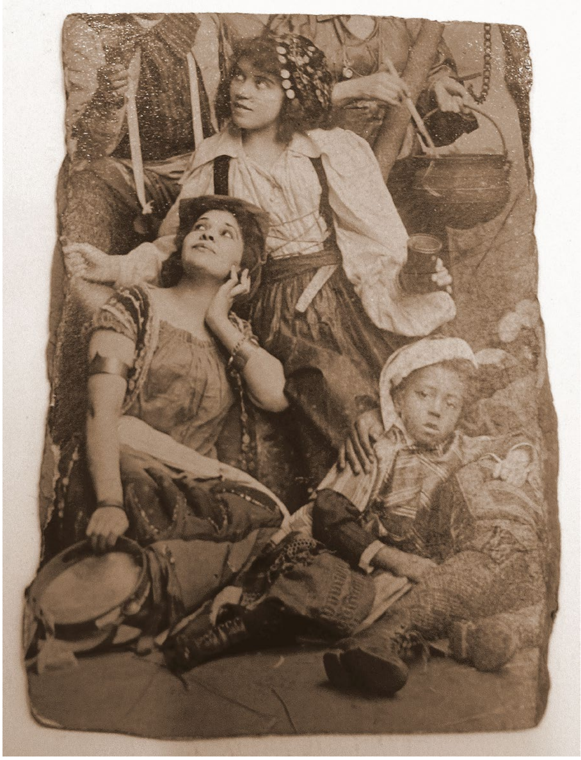


Fig. 33.13 Jubilee Singers as vaudeville concert singers. Note little Myron McAdoo at bottom right, ca. 1898. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

---

[27] Abbott and Seroff, *Out of Sight*, p. 127.

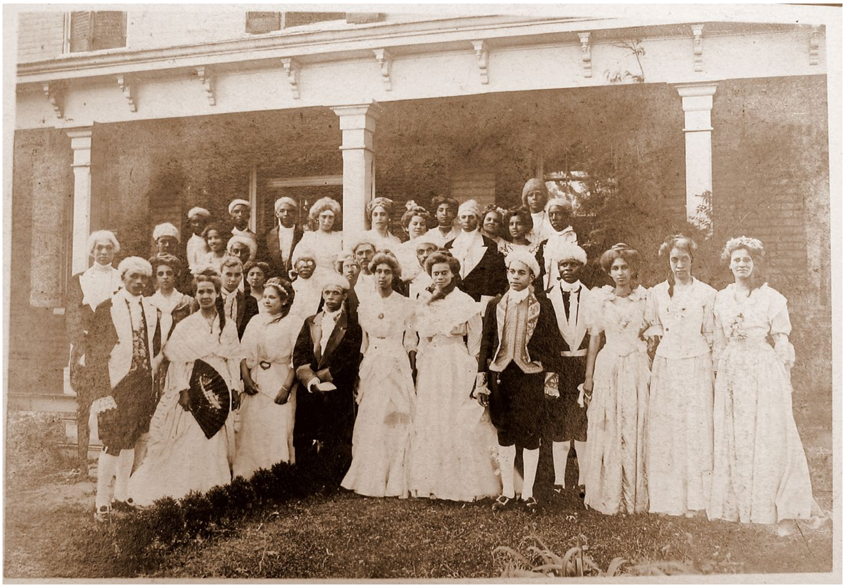


Fig. 33.14 McAdoo Company performers. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

McAdoo's company left South Africa and went back to Australia in 1898 and, while touring there, Orpheus returned to the US to assemble a modern African-American minstrel troupe[28] named *The Georgia Minstrels and Alabama Cakewalkers*. Mattie was left in charge of the Jubilee Singers in his stead and the company continued to flourish.[29] McAdoo's

---

[28] Whiteoak notes that Black American 'blackface' artists entered the minstrel field after the Civil War, noting that, 'to be successful, they had to adopt and adapt the demeaning blackface stereotyping and comic distortion of themselves and their culture. […] While white minstrels in burnt-cork make-up were respected for cleverness of their parody […] African-American minstrels were often perceived by colonial Australians as just playing their African-American selves — mildly exotic and inherently amusing live exhibits.' John Whiteoak, 'A Good Black Music Story?: Black American Stars in Australian Musical Entertainment Before "Jazz"', in Stephen Loy, Julie Rickwood and Samantha Bennett (eds.), *Popular Music, Stars and Stardom* (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2018), pp. 37–54, http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n4313/pdf/ch03.pdf. To combat this misinterpretation of African-American performance styles, McAdoo's Georgia Minstrels and Alabama Cakewalkers introduced the new 'ragtime' and cakewalk-style minstrelsy to Australia. See John Whiteoak, *Playing Ad Lib: Improvisatory Music in Australia, 1836–1970* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999), pp. 116–34.

[29] 'Orpheus and His Lyre, On a Big Tour. Interview with Mr. McAdoo', *Weekly Edition*, 14 November 1896. It is important to note the great success of the group at this

Minstrels knew their audience and were praised for the 'freshness and originality' of their show, which included a magnificent performance of 'the Cake Walk'. The ability to reinvent the group served McAdoo well. He noted, 'I have met with financial success far and away beyond my wildest dreams and anticipations. In all my travels, I have met with the most flattering receptions, and the press generally have been unanimous in their kind expressions of praise.' He continued, 'Future Hopes. When I have finished with my present line of business, my crowning ambition is to open a first-class Coloured Opera Company in Great Britain, return to South Africa, and my *ultima thule* is Australia, and home to Virginia.'[30] This was not to be. Six weeks after the end of the Australia tour, on 17 July 1900, Orpheus McAdoo took ill and died at the age of forty-two.[31] He is buried in Waverly Cemetery, Sydney Australia (see Fig. 33.12).

## A Return to the US

After her husband's death and funeral, Mattie returned to the US with her son Myron, initially living in Cleveland. She later moved to Boston where she educated Myron and finally settled in Washington, D.C. where she spent the remainder of her life.

Meanwhile, McAdoo's Jubilee Company rebranded itself as, 'McAdoo's Fisk Jubilee Singers'. They performed in Australia and New Zealand for the next three years. Some members broke away from the company and formed their own performing groups. Orpheus's brother Eugene created a troupe and travelled to England with much success. Eventually McAdoo's Jubilee Company became integrated with white Australians and continued performing in the country into the early 1930's.[32]

Back in the US, Mattie continued performing, forming a new group, this time with her sister Lula Allen and her brother Robert Allen (see Fig. 33. 15). She also performed as a soloist and with a quartette (see Figs. 33.7 and 33.8). Mattie became a highly successful businesswoman in her own right, no doubt building on her experiences abroad to co-manage

---

point. In this interview, McAdoo notes that the company had given 726 concerts in South Africa and over 3,000 in Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand.

[30] 'The Jubilee Singers. Orpheus is interviewed,' *The Star*, 17 September 1891.

[31] Abbott and Seroff, *Out of Sight*, pp. 139–40.

[32] Ibid., pp. 140–43.

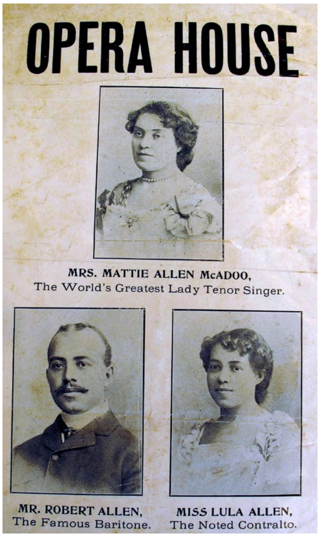

OPERA HOUSE
MRS. MATTIE ALLEN McADOO,
The World's Greatest Lady Tenor Singer.
MR. ROBERT ALLEN,
The Famous Baritone.
MISS LULA ALLEN,
The Noted Contralto.

Fig. 33.15 Broadside advertisement for Opera House performance by Mattie McAdoo and her brother Robert Allen and sister Lula Allen. Note the surname has changed from Allan to Allen. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

the concert company while adjusting to changing cultural norms and new personalities. Her estate notes an exchange receipt (dated 10 April 1901) from the London, Paris & American Bank for $27,622.60 (close to approx. $700,000 today). She owned many rental properties in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts, invested in several commercial interests including an Australian gold dredging company in New South Wales, insurance companies and land, while providing loans to friends and community members (at times, holding stock share certificates as collateral).[33]

Mattie was publically identified as a 'race woman' due to her focused efforts to identify and support causes that presented clear and immediate benefits to African Americans. As a woman, she believed that she could play a significant role in improving the lives of African Americans. She was well aware of the negative impact of racism and sexism yet she was not held hostage by these factors. She consciously accepted her role as a leader in her family and the international community at large.

---

[33] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Diaries, Mattie McAdoo, 1915, box 3, folder 38. This area of McAdoo's life is the subject of my further research.

Mattie's diaries and day planners indicate that she maintained an active community, political and social life and further support her identity as a 'race woman':[34]

- 4 January 1915 she marks 'My Sweetheart's birthday' [fifteen years after his death];
- 9 February 1915 she notes, 'My son's birthday. I feel very joyous for some reason, been singing + dancing all morn[ing]…'
- On Sunday, 14 March 1915 she attended a meeting at the Tremont Theatre, Boston by the Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government; speakers included Mr Butler R. Wilson, director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People;
- she notes the 18 April 1915 protests supported by more than 3,000 African Americans led by African American publisher, William Monroe Trotter against the white supremacist propagandist film, 'Birth of a Nation';
- Sunday, 25 April 1915, 'Dr. Crothers had a meeting at his church', [where he spoke on 'The Need of a Better Understanding of the Negro Problem in the North.'];
- Sunday, 30 May 1915, 'I went to hear Dr. DuBois. He was simply splendid as he is always. Faneuil Hall was crowded…'.

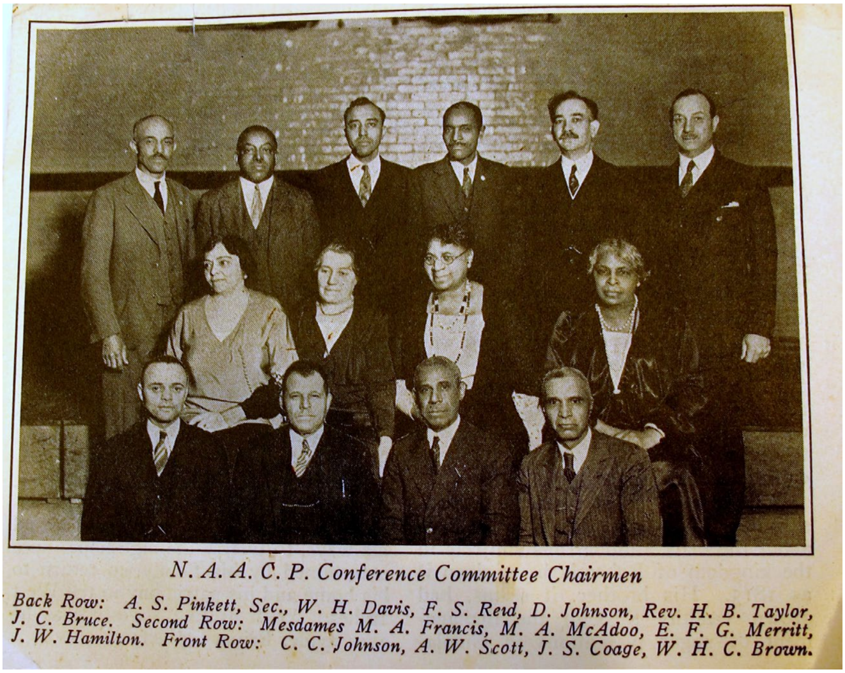
*The Boston Record* noted, 'Mrs. Mattie McAdoo, one of the best known colored educators, and reputed to be the wealthiest woman of her race in this country, has started on her seventh trip round the world. Ten years ago she came from far-off Antipodes to educate her son in this city. He has completed his studies, and with his mother will tour the world. They will go to Sydney, Australia, via Vancouver, and thence round the world.'[35] Her phonebook contained the numbers for Dorothy Porter, scholar and longtime librarian of Howard University; the artist and Howard University scholar and professor Dr. James Porter; pioneering biochemist, Dr. Herbert Scurlock, and the Scurlock Photography Studio, owned and operated by his brother Addison N. Scurlock.[36]

---

[34] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Diaries, Mattie McAdoo, 1915, box 3, folder 38.

[35] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers.

Mattie worked tirelessly to help to improve the quality of life of her fellow African Americans. She became an advocate for educational, economic, social and political reforms. She supported causes centering on racial equality and progress (see Fig. 33.16). Towards the end of her life, Mattie was the General Secretary for the Phyllis Wheatley Young Women's Christian Association of Washington, D.C. from 1921 until her death on 7 August 1936.[37] The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA was started by forward-thinking African-American women to provide a space for 'colored' women and girls for housing, training, and self-improvement. It was named after Phyllis Wheatley (1753–84), who was one of the first professional poets and writers in the US.



*N. A. A. C. P. Conference Committee Chairmen*

*Back Row: A. S. Pinkett, Sec., W. H. Davis, F. S. Reid, D. Johnson, Rev. H. B. Taylor, J. C. Bruce. Second Row: Mesdames M. A. Francis, M. A. McAdoo, E. F. G. Merritt, J. W. Hamilton. Front Row: C. C. Johnson, A. W. Scott, J. S. Coage, W. H. C. Brown.*

Fig. 33.16 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Conference Committee Chairmen. Mattie A. McAdoo, second row, second from left. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain.

---

[36] Ibid.

[37] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Phyllis Wheatley YMCA contract, box 3, folder 42.

McAdoo's obituary identifies her as a 'Race Woman,' noting, 'Mrs. McAdoo was well known as a fighter for the Negro's rights. She was a member of the Interracial Committee of the Federal Council of Churches, a member of the Executive and Race Relations Committees of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and an active worker in the Community Chest (an important local charity providing relief to less fortunate residents of Washington, D.C.)'[38] (see Fig. 33.16.)

At her funeral, Rev Halley B. Taylor described Mattie as, 'never too busy to aid the race'.[39] Those honoring her life were varied: 'Persons from all walks of life, colored and white […] fellow YWCA workers, school teachers, lawyers, physicians, an ex-Judge, laymen and young women, who had been schooled in the Young Women's Christian Association under her, present.'[40] Howard University professor and visual artist, Dr. James Porter was a pallbearer.

The experiences of Mattie Allen McAdoo, a woman of African descent, highlight her contribution as an active participant and cultural producer in the transnational history and development of African diaspora culture. Her story enriches the scholarly as well as conventional understandings of the public contributions of women of African descent to the history of travel and migration, performance, and activism in the diaspora. Mattie successfully navigated her roles as wife, mother, performer and African-American woman during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During her migration from a student and musical prodigy in Ohio and a teacher in Washington, DC, to her travels as an international performer and to her return to the US as 'race woman', she did something, became something and she made a name!

---

[38] Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Clippings related to death of Mattie McAdoo, ca. 1936, box 3, folder 41, '[Mrs. McAdoo] Served Here as Executive: Traveled as Jubilee Singer; Leaves Son and Two Sisters'.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

# Bibliography

'A Letter from South Africa: Black Laws in the Orange Free State in Africa,' n.d., published in *Southern Workman*, 19 November 1890, p. 120, reprinted in Josephine Wright, 'Orpheus Myron McAdoo: Singer, Impresario', *The Black Perspective in Music*, 4:3 (1976), 320–27, https://www.doi.org/10.2307/1214541.

'A Phenomenal Vocalist', *Cleveland Gazette*, 4 July 1891.

'A Wedding in Transvaal', *Cleveland Gazette*, 10 January 1891.

'Amusements. Jubilee Singers', *The Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette*, 28 January 1896.

'[Mrs. McAdoo] Served Here 15 Years as Executive: Traveled as Jubilee Singer; Leaves Son and Two Sisters', Clippings related to death of Mattie McAdoo, ca. 1936, box 3, folder 41, Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

'Orpheus and His Lyre, On a Big Tour. Interview with Mr. McAdoo', *Weekly Edition*, 14 November 1896.

'The Jubilee Singers. Orpheus is interviewed', *The Star*, 17 September 1891.

'The Jubilee Singers', *The Australian Christian World*, 30 June 1892, p. 5.

'The Jubilee Singers', *The Teadock Register*, 17 April 1896.

'The Jubilee Singers', *The Wynberg Times*, 13 July 1895.

Abbott, Lynn and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight*: *The Rise of African American Popular Music 1889–1895* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002).

Campbell, James, 'Models and Metaphors: Industrial Education in the United States and South Africa', in Ran Greenstein (ed.), *Comparative Perspectives on South Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998), pp. 90–134, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26252-6_4

Djata, Sundiata A. *Blacks at the Net*: *Black Achievement in the History of Tennis, Volume II* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.46-0961

Erlmann, Veit, *African Stars*: *Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), https://doi.org/10.2307/221022

—, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195123678.001.0001

Ohio Memory, 'African Americans in Ohio', https://www.ohiomemory.org

Thelwell, Chinua Akimaro, '"Modernizing" Hybridity: McAdoo's Jubilee Singers, McAdoo's Minstrels, and Racial Uplift Politics in South Africa, 1890–1898', *The Journal of South African and American Studies,* 15:1 (2014), 3–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2013.864169

Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith (eds.), *Pictures and Progress*: *Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394563

Whiteoak, John, 'A Good Black Music Story?: Black American Stars in Australian Musical Entertainment Before "Jazz"', in Stephen Loy, Julie Richwood and Samantha Bennett (eds.), *Popular Music, Stars and Stardom* (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2018), pp. 37–54, https://doi.org/10.22459/pmss.06.2018.03

Whiteoak, John, *Playing Ad Lib*: *Improvisatory Music in Australia, 1836–1970* (Sydney: Currency Press 1999), pp. 116–34, https://doi.org/10.1558/prbt.v4i4.28713

Yale University, Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

# 34. ‘I Don’t Pay Those Borders No Mind At All’: Audley E. Moore (‘Queen Mother’ Moore) — Grassroots Global Traveler and Activist

*Sharon Harley*

In this chapter I shall explore the Pan-Africanist work in the US and abroad of leftist, working-class African American activist Audley ‘Queen Mother’ Moore. I first met Moore at the 1970 ‘Atlanta Black Power Conference’. I knew little about her at the time, except as an iconic Black Power and Nationalist leader of the Black Reparations movement. In later years, guided by a desire to explore multiple migration frames and to move beyond the small circle of college-educated middle-class US Pan-Africanists previously studied, I enlarged my migration/diaspora focus to incorporate the thinking, activism and travels of prominent working-class activist Queen Mother Moore.[1] How, for example, did

---

[1] See, for instance, Sharon Harley, ‘Mary Church Terrell: Genteel Militant’ in Leon F. Litwack and August Meier (eds.), *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 307–21 and Sharon Harley, ‘Anna J. Cooper: A Voice for Black Women’, in Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (eds.), *The Afro-American Woman*: *Struggles and Images* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1978; reprint Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1997), pp. 87–96.

© 2019 Sharon Harley, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.34

Moore discuss class (one's education, occupation, family background, status, and income) and its impact on the global travel, political thinking, and cultural engagements of US-based twentieth-century Pan-Africanist women, and, in turn, how did her ideas and movements effect our understanding of Pan-Africanism and Black women' global migration?[2] How did Moore's work and interests connect with the long-established Black US nationalist traditions?[3]

In his impressive biography of another member of this group, Shirley Graham Du Bois,[4] entitled *Race Woman*: *The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois*, historian Gerald Horne offers a rich account of Du Bois' leftist, Pan-Africanist, and Communist leanings and travels that are nearly comparable to Audley Moore — however, he, like a number of scholars writing on this topic, makes no mention of Moore.[5]

---

[2] Anna Julia Cooper, part of an earlier generation of Pan-African intellectuals along with fellow Oberlin College graduates Mary Church Terrell and Ida Alexander Gibbs Hunt, had attended and occasionally delivered talks at Pan-African meetings in Europe in the early twentieth century, at the invitation of fellow US Pan-Africanist W. E. B. Du Bois. In 1900, Cooper traveled to London to deliver a speech entitled 'The Negro Problem in America,' at the first Pan-African Conference and was elected a member of its Executive Committee. Hunt attended and served in an official capacity at the meetings of the First African Congress in Paris in 1919, and, the second conference, also in Paris, in 1921. At the London meeting of the Congress, in 1923, she delivered a paper titled 'The Coloured Races and the League of Nations.'

[3] See Sharon Harley, 'Race Women: Cultural Productions and Radical Labor Politics', in Sharon Harley (ed.), *Women's Labor in the Global Economy*: *Speaking in Multiple Voices* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 9–27.

[4] Biographies of these women appear in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, edited by Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982) but few leftist or working class Pan-Africanist Black women, like Shirley Graham Du Bois and Audley Moore, appear. A biographical sketch of one leftist global traveler who served as a Russian resident-in-exile Eslanda Cardozo Goode Robeson, appears; her prominent family background may have contributed to her inclusion. Moreover, the multi-lingual and global traveler Terrell, unlike Robinson, Graham Du Bois and Moore, also attended and delivered speeches at predominantly white women's domestic and international meetings including the International Congress of Women and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. See Stephanie Y. Evans, 'African American Women Scholars and International Research: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper's Legacy of Study Abroad', *Frontiers*: *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 18 (2009), 77–100.

[5] [5] Thanks to the recent work of Ula Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*: *The Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2002); Carole Boyce Davies' *Left of Karl Marx*: *The Political Life of Black Communist* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Erik McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*: *Black Women, American Communism and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke

Until recently, there were far fewer written accounts of working-class female activism and global travels, and fewer autobiographical texts written by the less socially prominent women activists compared to those by and about educated middle-class women. Yet working-class women were there, working diligently for racial and social justice in the world — traveling across the US and the Atlantic Ocean to deliver talks, attend meetings, and promote woman's causes in Africa, Europe, and, occasionally, in Asia. One such figure was Audley Moore, the focus of this essay. In keeping with the African and the diasporan cultural linkages and philosophies she espoused, Moore urged people to fight and pray for 'the freedom of Africans everywhere at home and abroad.'[6] She attended Kwame Nkrumah's memorial services in Guinea and Ghana, in 1972, respectively. While in Ghana, the Ashanti people honored her with the title by which she would become known: 'Queen Mother.'

In this essay I will explore how class influenced the political vision, global travels, cultural imaginings, and representations of a Black woman. Many scholars who write about the complex nexus of these

---

University Press, 2011) and especially historian Ashley Farmer and McDuffie, we know far more about Audley Moore's life-long dedication to Pan-Africanist/Black nationalist liberation struggle and her radical diaspora philosophy. See Farmer' *Remaking Black Power*: *How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017) and her 'Mothers of Pan-Africanism: Audley Moore and Dara Abubakari,' in the special issue of *Women*, *Gender*, *and Families of Color*, 4 (Fall 2016), 274–95; also Farmer, 'Reframing African American Women's Grassroots Organizing: Audley Moore and the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women, 1957–1963,' *The Journal of African American History*, 101:1–2 (Winter-Spring 2016), 69–96; and McDuffie, '"I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, But I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize our People": The Diasporic Radicalism of Queen Mother Audley Moore and the Origins of Black Power', *African and Black Diaspora*: *An International Journal*, 3 (2010), 181–95 (p. 183). As these scholars and others document, Moore was not alone as a left-leaning grassroots Pan Africanist whose global travel and political/cultural engagements extended from Harlem and elsewhere in the US to the Soviet Union, China, Africa, and back. See for instance, Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*: *Communism and African Americans*, *1919–1936* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998) and Keisha Blain, *To Set the World on Fire*: *Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). The recent work of Claudrena Harold has exposed the failure of radical leftists during the 1920s and 1930s and contemporary scholars to acknowledge the political and intellectual sophistication of working class — see her *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South*, *1918–1942* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[6] See Farmer, 'Reframing African American Woman's Grassroots Organizing,' p. 93.

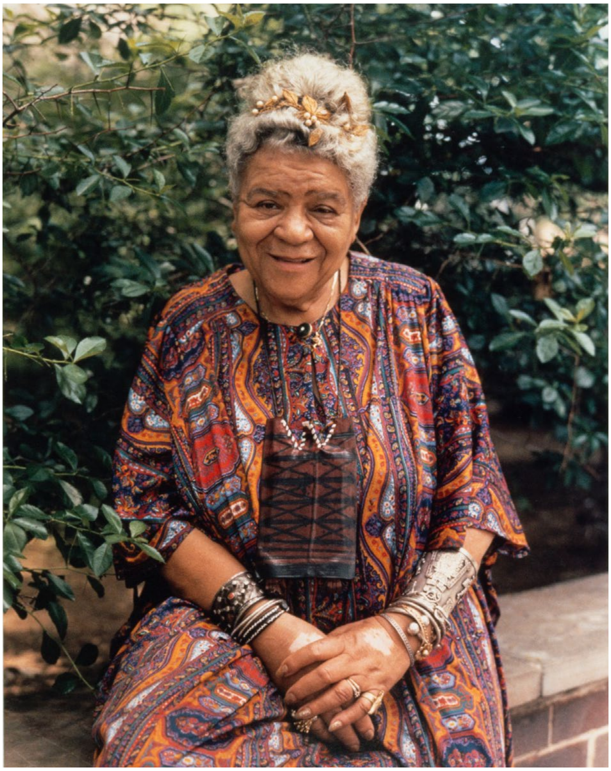


Fig. 34.1 Audley Moore. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

experiences and perspectives, as related to the Black global and US woman's experiences in the twentieth century, make no mention of Moore. This essay explores the strategies and intellectual frameworks she employed in her Pan-Africanist thinking and activism. In doing so, I seek to broaden the understanding of her work in particular, and Black women's class- and identity-related engagements with global, political and cultural work more generally. This project exposes the tremendous loss to Pan-African historical and cultural narratives due to the historical obfuscation of women, particularly working-class Black women, from the work of global and migration scholars. This essay seeks to offer a critical account of how gender and class influenced Black women's' physical, political, and ideological travels in the US and abroad. Fortunately, there are a series of oral interviews and media appearances with Audley Moore, in which she recounts her life experiences, political experiences and global travels.[7]

Born on 27 July 1898 in New Iberia, Louisiana, Audley Eloise Moore experienced the personal pain and humiliation of life in Jim Crow Louisiana at an early age. Exacerbated by knowing that one of her grandfathers had been lynched and a great-grandmother raped, the death of her father when she was in elementary school was a blow that might have fostered Moore's resolve to create a strong independent life. Her mother had died when Audley was born, so she was orphaned early. Alone, Audley assumed financial and parental responsibility for her two younger sisters, requiring her to end her education at the fourth grade level. It was wartime, so she relocated with her siblings to New Orleans in search of employment. She worked as a hairdresser after graduating from the Poro hairdressing program, and as domestic service worker. Like so many Black people across the US, during the First World War and especially during the inter-war 1920s and 1930s, she was drawn to the Black Nationalist movement, African and diaspora liberation, and the self-determinist ideology of Black Jamaican Marcus Garvey, under the aegis of his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) established in 1914. While in New Orleans, Moore became active in the local UNIA chapter, organized in 1920 by a small group of local women. Its membership was mostly made up of working-class women and men. It grew exponentially, with reportedly more than 2,000 members six months after its founding. In response to Louisiana's long and infamous history of racial segregation and trauma, a record number of chapters blossomed in the state. Moore and her sisters relocated to California and Illinois before eventually settling in Harlem, New York City, in the 1920s — the epicenter of the Garvey movement and the new home of Black US, African and Caribbean diasporan populations.

In an interview published in a 1973 issue of the *Black Scholar*, Moore reflected on Garvey's visual, spiritual, and political lure to her and other

---

[7] See transcript of Cheryl Townsend Gilkes interview with Moore for the Black Women Oral History (BWOH) Project at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University's Schlesinger Library; 'Queen Mother Moore,' *The Black Scholar* 4:6/7 (March-April 1973), 47–55 (p. 51); a 1981 interview in the Oral History of the American Left: Racial Histories Collection at the Tamiment Library at NYU; Audley, 'Queen Mother' Moore Interview (1985), posted by AfroMarxist, 29 April 2018, https://youtu.be/AQHixAItcIg

Louisiana Blacks, proclaiming: 'He brought something very beautiful to us — Africa for the Africans. That was our inheritance. Africa for the Africans at home and abroad. That we were somebody. [...] That we had a right to be restored to our proper selves.'[8] Noting peripherally a socioeconomic dimension to her recollections of her struggles and early motivation to become a political activist, Moore announced before an admiring audience at the 1980 Wayne State University symposium, 'Tribute to the Revolutionary Legacy of African Women': 'It was not abject poverty that drove [her] to the struggle, but a burning desire for freedom' on the US and world stages. This 'burning desire' would continue lifelong as a driving force for Moore's involvement with new Black nationalist/Pan-Africanist arenas and movements.[9]

The UNIA experience was a microcosm of what women encountered as they joined, led, and worked within national organizations that aimed to achieve racial and social justice in the US and internationally. Historian Ula Taylor and others have documented that while in separate entities within the male-led UNIA organization, women conspicuously served in key leadership positions (albeit not with the same level of influence and power) in this Black-Nationalist-based global organization. There were female presidents and vice-presidents of the women's division and heads of the Black Cross Nurses in the US and the Caribbean. Undeniably, migration and movement were key elements of the UNIA and Black liberation organizations, including the Universal African Black Cross Nurses auxiliary. Founded in 1921 by UNIA Vice President Henrietta Vinton Davis, this Black diaspora women's grassroots organization provided healthcare services and nursing training for Blacks in Harlem and other US cities as well as to members in Belize, Nova Scotia, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago. While compartmentalized and not necessarily progressive, Black women's global activism, community engagement, and leadership within the UNIA was not lost on Moore or other Black US UNIA women activists. She asserted that the UNIA 'always had a Lady President along with our President General, and everybody looked up to the women that Garvey celebrated with deepest respect.'[10]

---

[8] 'Queen Mother Moore', p. 51.

[9] See transcript of Cheryl Townsend Gilkes interview with Moore for the Black Women Oral History (BWOH) Project at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University's Schlesinger Library.

[10] Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*; see transcript of Cheryl Townsend Gilkes interview with Moore for the Black Women Oral History (BWOH) Project at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University's Schlesinger Library.

Over time, Moore's global interests extended beyond the UNIA to other international political movements, including the Communist Party of the USA (CP), and she was not alone. Other Black political activists were drawn to both the CP and UNIA, despite their opposing ideological positions on race and culture. In the 1930s and 1940s many Black people across the world were discouraged by the dire economic situation created by the Great Depression and the Second World War. In the US, as the Garvey movement waned and anti-Black groups were growing, the CP attracted more and more working-class US Garveyites, Africans and diasporan peoples globally into its international orbit. A plethora of Black women activists, writers, poets and playwrights, including Shirley Graham and W. E. B. Du Bois, traveled to the Soviet Union. A few permanently moved and became resident there.

In her diaspora engagements, first as a Garveyite; then in the 1930s and the 1940s, as a member of the International Labor Defense and the Communist Party, USA; and much later, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, as she traveled across the US and to various African nations as an independent woman; Moore denounced anti-Black racism and colonial domination. In the 1930s, Moore's communist affiliation overlapped with her grassroots campaigns for domestic workers' and renters' rights in New York City, and for African liberation (most notably, in opposition to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia). Her outlook was based upon her public declaration that 'the Communists were the only ones interested in my revolutionary rights.' Most of the activists Moore traveled with made short-term visits abroad to attend and participate in Pan-African conferences and congresses. They appear not to have been as profoundly influenced by their subsequent political or cultural engagements with African liberation and Pan-African causes in in the US and abroad as Moore, who maintained the strong ideological and activist principles she had begun to develop as a young woman in Louisiana.

Working-class and poor Black women who may not have always possessed the financial means to travel globally, nor the social connections with prominent Pan-Africanist male leaders that would enable them to receive invitations to speak at pre-1950s Pan-African conventions, nonetheless, fully embraced and understood their diaspora activism on a global scale. Moore's example demonstrates that awareness. When she left the Communist Party, Moore moved back to New Orleans and, in 1950, she joined the Sons and Daughters of Ethiopia. Seven years later, she co-founded and served as president (occasionally noted in the organization's literature as 'Committee Chair') of the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women, a small local organization that fought against the unjust execution of Black men who had been falsely charged with raping white women; it was also devoted to welfare rights and community assistance.

The peripatetic Moore traveled across the US, maintaining a global Pan-Africanist mindset all the while. When she returned to Harlem in 1964, she became president of The World Federation of African People; its goal was to establish a Black nation in the US that, according to Moore, would be 'the only place in the US where Americans of African descent will be really free.'[11] Surprisingly, the place Moore selected as the site of the Federation's separate and safe haven for Black folks was none other than the Catskill Mountains, in the southeastern region of the state of New York. She purchased land there to build an all-Black town that she envisioned would attract Black folks from around the globe.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Moore attended and spoke at numerous Black Power and African liberation meetings. In March 1968 she helped to form the all-Black Republic of New Africa, and became more fully engaged in the reparations movement. Having brought the reparations issue before the United Nations and other international human rights organizations in 1957 and again in 1959, Moore and others sought to draw broad-based attention to African and African-descended peoples' demands for economic compensation and public reprimands for the involuntary migration, enslavement, and physical and sexual violations of Black bodies. The Reparations movement, as historian Martha Bondi rightfully proclaims, helped to 'revive Black-led global anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist projects, and […] radically intervene[d] in the discourse of globalization.'[12] Rather than a revival, at least for Moore, however, it was part and parcel of a decades-long and continuous global African liberation engagement and philosophy.

Over her long life as an Black Nationalist activist and thinker, Moore's solutions to centuries of Black enslavement and oppression ranged from the formation of independent all-Black country in the US to demands for reparations (in the amount of 200 billion dollars) for centuries of economic, political and human oppression. In 1963, she helped to establish the Reparations Committee of Descendants of US Slaves, calling for repayment of earned wages and benefits from the current American government to the subsequent generations of living Black people whose ancestors had been enslaved in the US. Recognizing the desire on the part of some African Americans to move to Africa, the Reparations Committee also demanded compensation for them as well as for those who wished to remain in the US. She advocated for prisoners' rights and racial justice as part of her Ethiopian Women's Association platform in the late 1950s; the organization continued in the 1960s and 1970s. Moore's dedicated attention to the criminal justice system was not lost on Black prison populations and others who admired her for her struggles 'all around the Black world.' In 1973, she was invited to give a speech at the New York's Greenhaven Correctional Facility.'[13]

---

[11] See Audley A. Moore, Why Reparations? Reparations is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves (Los Angeles: Reparations Committee Inc. 1963), 'Queen Mother Moore', p. 51. Martha Biondi's quote appears in her essay 'The Rise of the Reparations Movement', *Radical History Review*, 87 (Fall 2003), 5–18.

[12] Ibid.

Throughout out her political activist life, Moore viewed segregation and anti-Black racism in the US, and global colonial denomination in Africa and the Caribbean, as intertwining sites of oppression, indeed, as two sides of the same coin. In keeping with their Pan-African sentiments a number of African Americans were influenced by her, and decided to relocate to the continent of Africa — but not Moore. She moved to Philadelphia, where she enlarged her reparations movement by calling not for a 'Back to Africa' movement but rather for the United States to be divided into 'separate Euro-American and African-descendent states' and for the United States government to pay 'reparations to the African-descendent government in the amount of five hundred trillion dollars.'[14]

No longer in the Catskills, Moore and her cohort of other Black nationalists worked to establish the 'New Republic of Afrika,' a separate nation of Black citizens that would be comprised of five Southern states: Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. The newly formed nation would be supported by reparations money. As a nod to her global vision and travels, Moore was appointed the New Republic's Minister of Foreign Relations and Culture. At its 1969 meeting in Detroit, she became the organization's vice president.[15]

---

[13] 'Queen Mother Moore', p. 51.

[14] See Cheryl Gilkes interview with Audley (Queen Mother) Moore, BWOH, Schlesinger Library.

Although it never materialized, the New Republic of Afrika reflected Moore's deeply held and persistent global Pan-Africanist thinking and activism, resulting in her becoming an iconic Pan-Africanist global citizen in the US and in Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s. I was among her admirers and was honored to meet her for the first time at the Black Power Conference hosted in Atlanta, Georgia in 1970, and attended by Amiri Baraka, Louis Farrakhan and Julian Bond along with hundreds of other civil rights movement activists.

While never a major figure in feminist organizations as such, with the exception of the short-lived Sojourners for Truth and Justice, Moore lived her life as a self-determined feminist and activist within largely Black male patriarchal spaces and movements. In them, she inextricably linked Black feminism and Black liberation struggles. Clearly serving as an example that women should no longer be confined to supporter roles or to that of the occasional speaker in public or private political or leadership activities, Moore averred that Black women, whether born in the US, on the African continent, or elsewhere in its diaspora, were essential to the development of a Pan-African Alliance and to women's global unity. Within intellectual and political contexts Moore was greatly admired, both as emblematic of Black women's grassroots activism and in her constant movement and engagement as a 'life-long activist' and champion for global citizenship at home (US) and abroad in Africa or its diaspora. She often accepted invitations to be among the featured speakers at African and African-American political gatherings (some of these were women's gatherings, but they were predominantly male), including the 1995 Million Man March.[16]

---

[15] Ibid.

[16] In his study of the 'Sojourners for Truth and Justice,' a progressive Black feminists' organization that was formed in 1951 with a social justice agenda, historian Erik McDuffie says the Sojourners fully recognized 'the intersectional, systemic nature of African American women's oppression and understood their struggle for dignity and freedom in global terms.' See McDuffie, 'A "New Freedom Movement of Negro Women": Sojourning for Truth, Justice, and Human Rights during the Early Cold War,' *Radical History Review*, 101 (2008), 82. Also consult McDuffie *Sojourning for Freedom*. Moore was not alone; as McDuffie, Carole Boyce Davies and a few other scholars have documented, there were other Black women activists whose global travel and political/cultural engagements extended from Harlem and elsewhere

Some contemporary feminists have questioned Moore's feminist credentials, based upon her appearance at the Million Man March and her failure to publically critique and criticize Black patriarchy. This evaluation has been made despite the fact that Moore for decades brought not only the 'Woman's Question,' but female engagement to diasporic groups through her life-long activism and speeches. There was little doubt that she clearly believed women should and did play critical roles in Black nation-building and Black Nationalist struggles. In addition to attending ceremonies and delivering speeches at women's meetings in various West African nations, a consistent part of Moore's long history of global vision and activism was her renewed attempts to establish an all-Black homeland in the US, a nation in which she would be one of many Black women (and men) leaders.

Audley E. Moore, Queen Mother Moore, a woman who migrated around the world, taking her Pan-Africanist and activist engagement across the US and back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean, was greatly admired for her courage, dedication, and commitment to African liberation and Black Nationalist causes. For that, she deserves serious scholarly attention. I join Ashley Farmer, Erik McDuffie, Carole Boyce Davies, Keisha Blain and others, all speaking out against the historical erasure of Moore. There are so many other activist women in the fine scholarship that focuses on Pan-Africanism, leftist internationalism, and migration studies; Moore belongs among that group. The New York University's Florence workshop in 2017, from which this volume grew, provided a much-needed counter-narrative to the body of dominant male-centered movement and immigration histories and visual representations, locally and globally. This essay, like the organizers of and participants at the Florence meeting, aligns with Moore's assertion that we, like her, 'don't pay those borders no mind at all' when framing our visions of who can serve as examples for activism and political engagement.

---

in the US to the Soviet Union, China, Africa and back. See, for instance, Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*: and Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*: *Communism and African Americans, 1919–1936* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998).

# Bibliography

'Queen Mother Moore', *The Black Scholar*, 5 (March-April 1973), 47–55.

AfroMarxist, 'Audley 'Queen Mother' Moore Interview (1985)', YouTube, 29 April 2018, https://youtu.be/AQHixAItcIg

Biondi, M., 'The Rise of the Reparations Movement', *Radical History Review Issue*, 87 (Fall 2003), 5–18.

Blain, Keisha, *To Set the World on Fire*: *Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2018).

Davies, Carole Boyce, *Left of Karl Marx*: *The Political Life of Black Communist* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Evans, Stephanie Y., 'African American Women Scholars and International Research: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper's Legacy of Study Abroad', *Frontiers*: *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 18 (2009), 77–100.

Farmer, Ashley D., 'Mothers of Pan-Africanism: Audley Moore and Dara Abubakari', *Women*, *Gender*, *and Families of Color*, 4 (Fall 2016), 274–95.

—, 'Reframing African American Women's Grassroots Organizing: Audley Moore and the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women, 1957–1963,' *The Journal of African American History*, 101:1–2 (Winter-Spring 2016), 69–96.

—, *Remaking Black Power*: *How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

Harley, Sharon, 'Race Women: Cultural Productions and Radical Labor Politics', in Sharon Harley (ed.), *Women's Labor in the Global Economy*: *Speaking in Multiple Voices* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 9–27.

—, 'Mary Church Terrell: Genteel Militant', in Leon F. Litwack and August Meier (eds.), *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 307–21

—, 'Anna J. Cooper: A Voice for Black Women', in Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (eds.), *The Afro-American Woman*: *Struggles and Images* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1978; reprint Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1997), pp. 87–96.

Harold, Claudrena, *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918–1942* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Horne, Gerald, *Race Woman*: *The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

Logan, Rayford W. and Michael R. Winston (eds.), *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982).

McDuffie, Erik, *Sojourning for Freedom*: *Black Women*, *American Communism and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

—, '"I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, but I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize our People": The Diasporic Radicalism of Queen Mother Audley Moore and the Origins of Black Power', *African and Black Diaspora*: *An International Journal*, 3 (2010), 181–95.

—, 'Sojourners for Truth and Justice,' in his, '"A New Freedom Movement of Negro Women": Sojourning for Truth, Justice, and Human Rights during the Early Cold War,' *Radical History Review*, 101 (2008), 82.

Moore, Audley A., 'The Black Scholar Interviews: Queen Mother Moore.' The Black Scholar 4:6/7 (1973), 47–55, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41163797

—, *Why Reparations*? *Reparations is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves* (Los Angeles: Repreations Committee Inc., 1963).

Solomon, Mark, *The Cry Was Unity*: *Communism and African Americans, 1919–1936* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998).

Taylor, Ula Y., *The Veiled Garvey*: *The Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002).

# 35. Löis Mailou Jones in the World

## *Cheryl Finley*

My essay concerns the work of the African-American painter, designer, and educator Löis Mailou Jones, and how travel and migration influenced her life as an artist, including her aesthetic choices, formal practice, theoretical understanding and pedagogical philosophy. Jones was a lifelong educator and her travel, indeed her *migration* to France and later to Haiti was essential to her worldview and aesthetic practice. She had studios in each of those countries, which she visited frequently for long periods, in addition to her studios in Washington, D.C. and on the island of Martha's Vineyard in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. In addition to Europe and the Caribbean, Africa was a central focus of Jones' oeuvre, figuring in her pattern of travel and migration as well as in her paintings from the early 1970s onwards. The essay that follows will be framed by the artist's use of the mask as a visual and symbolic trope to connect with Africa and her African roots, and then to Haiti and a larger African diaspora. This chapter stems from an earlier essay, 'The Mask as Muse: the Influence of African Art on the Life and Career of Löis Mailou Jones,' written for the 2009 retrospective exhibition *Löis Mailou Jones*: *A Life in Vibrant Color*, curated by Carla M. Hanzal for the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina.[1]

---

[1] Cheryl Finley, 'The Mask as Muse: The Influence of African Art on the Life and Career of Löis Mailou Jones,' in Carla M. Hanzel (ed.), *Löis Mailou Jones*: *A Life in*

© 2019 Cheryl Finley, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.35

A 1983 photograph of Loïs Mailou Jones taken in her studio by the famed Scurlock brothers of Washington, D.C. shows the artist in her element, surrounded by images, objects and pieces of history that fueled the fire of her creative energy. Masks peer out from nearly every corner of the room, in animal form, in African ceremonial art, and in framed paintings and reproductions of her own work. A glimpse of her vast library of art books is visible on the right side of the photograph, along with some paintbrushes, pencils, a wooden anatomical model and a poster for the documentary 'Fifty Years of My Art' about Jones's half-century of painting. A photograph of her late husband, the Haitian graphic designer Louis Verginaud Pierre-Noel, peeks out from behind a sconce on the adjacent wall just below a large cow's skull. Reminders of her training in Paris and subsequent frequent sojourns there include a postcard of the tourist icon Sacre Coeur in front of the bookshelf among her paint brushes, a poster for her critically acclaimed solo show at the Galerie Soulanges in Paris in 1966, and her 1938 oil painting *Le Model* on the back wall. Behind her, a formal black and white portrait from the 1950s projects the same energy and *joie de vivre* as Jones as she smiles proudly for the camera. With three paintbrushes in hand, the artist seems eager to paint another boldly colored work filled with African-inspired masks and repeating design motifs.

Two of Jones's vibrant works in colorful acrylic from her *Africa Series* are prominently displayed in the Scurlock photograph: *Damballah* (1980) is on the easel behind her and *Symbols d'Afrique* (1980) is to her left.[2] Both paintings are tightly designed using a linear grid in which recurring African masks, icons and patterns are systematically placed. In a 1984 interview with artist and critic Evangeline J. Montgomery, Jones described the direction of her work: 'I am pushing, more or less in

---

*Vibrant Color* (Charlotte: Mint Museum of Art, 2009), pp. 5–73. The exhibition was on view at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina from November 14, 2009 through February 27, 2010 and traveled to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. from October 9, 2010 through January 9, 2011, among other venues.

[2] The vast majority of the works from Jones's *Africa Series* were painted in Haiti and inspired by her trips to Africa in 1970, 1972 and 1976, or observations of African cultural and religious practices in Haiti. A handwritten index card from the artist's archive lists twenty-one paintings belonging to her *Africa Series*, beginning with *Les Fétiches* (1937) and ending with *Surinamia* (1982). LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 52, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

the direction of symbolism, African symbolism and Haitian symbolism, color and design.'[3] In *Damballah,* named after the Haitian Vodun god of creation, a large Afikpo Ibo mask is clipped by a brightly colored panel of Haitian street vendors marching with wares for sale atop headburdens. To the left, a richly patterned Kakilamba snake in green, blue, black and orange provides a visual reference to Damballah, also known as the serpent god. Jones chose to show Damballah during a spiritual possession, as he is slithering on the ground and revealing his serpentine tongue. *Symbols d'Afrique* is richly patterned with a mixture of alternating masks, textile designs and Adinkra symbols of West African Ashanti origin.[4] As Jones once explained, 'Oftimes I combine motifs from various regions in Africa, which result in a composition which tends to unify Africa.'[5] Both paintings show Jones's longstanding commitment to working with the mask. They also illustrate her strong afrocentric leaning at this late stage in her career, with the repeated use of African symbols and choice of bold colors and patterning. But this was not a recent innovation in her practice. Rather, it was present in her work from the very beginning.

## The Early Years

Early in her training at the High School of Practical Arts in Boston (1919–23), Jones was 'introduced to Africa through creating the masks with Ripley Studios.'[6] This apprenticeship enabled the young artist to apply her budding knowledge of design to the performing arts, specifically dance, when she was asked to assist with fashioning masks and costumes for the Ted Shawn School of Dance.[7] Always a thorough and inquisitive researcher, Jones went back to the original sources and studied traditional mask forms from Africa. This experience would influence the way Jones approached many of the innovative endeavors she embarked upon in the coming decades, including teaching the creative application of design as well as styling the look of her own canvases.

---

[3] Evangeline J. Montgomery interview with Loïs Mailou Jones, 4 April 1984, p. 31. LMJP/MSRC, box 215–19, folder 15.

[4] West African symbols known as Adinkra are of Ashanti origin dating back to the seventeenth century and can be found printed on cloth, pottery, walls and popular logos in Ghana, Ivory Coast and Togo. Originally developed as decorative motifs for fabrics worn in ceremonies honoring the dead, the meaning of the word Adinkra is 'goodbye' and the symbols printed on mourners' clothing would have expressed the qualities of the deceased. Each Adinkra symbol has a unique name and meaning derived either from a proverb, a historical event, human attitude, animal behavior, plant life, forms and shapes of inanimate and man-made objects.

[5] Writings by Loïs Mailou Jones, speeches on note cards, 1960s-1970s, LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 52.

[6] Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Loïs Mailou Jones* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994), p. 6. Grace Ripley, a professor at the Rhode Island School of Design, was a renowned New England costume designer.

The mask as a sculptural form added volume and three-dimensionality to the way in which Jones saw the world, not to mention how she approached portraiture. The charcoal drawing *Negro Youth* (1929) depicts a pensive young man in profile. His thoughtful gaze is accentuated by the artist's clever use of light and shading, giving a sculptural appearance to the young man's chiseled profile. Light washes his face, while his ear and neck are left in shadow projecting depth and contemplation. As the artist Faith Ringgold once said, *Negro Youth* 'expressed Loïs's talent for portraiture and forecasts her feeling for the mask, which would become a major force in her art from the sixties on.'[8] This soft and engaging portrait of one of her students at Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, NC, where she taught from 1928 to 1930, won an Honorable Mention at the Harmon Foundation exhibition in New York in 1930. Jones joined the art department at Howard University in 1930, where she would work for nearly fifty years as an artist, educator and mentor with a career spanning the New Negro Arts Movement of the 1920s and 1930s and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

In another early, notable work, *The Ascent of Ethiopia* (1932), the profile is again utilized by Jones to depict the central figure of Ethiopia (Ancient Africa) in the bold, richly hued mask of an Egyptian pharaoh in full headdress. Smaller, almost flat figures ascending the staircase of a burgeoning 'New Negro' consciousness, indeed of culture itself — of 'art, drama and music' — also appear in profile, as do two stylized African masks representing the yin and the yang of theatre arts. This much-discussed work owes a stylistic debt to the New Negro Arts Movement muralist Aaron Douglas, known for his flat 'Africanized' profiles and radiating radio waves, as well as the sculptor Meta Warrick Fuller, to whose bronze *Ethiopia Awakening* (1914) Jones's work pays homage. *The Ascent of Ethiopia*, which was shown at the culminating Harmon Foundation exhibition in New York in 1933, celebrated the racial pride and artistic flourishing of the Harlem Renaissance.

---

[7] Ibid., p. 6. Ted Shawn (1891–1972) was a pioneering choreographer of early American modern dance. He is known for establishing the Denishawn School of Dance in Los Angeles in 1914 (with Ruth St. Denis, his wife and dance partner of many years), where he devised a popular technique of music visualization for modern dance and trained, among others, Martha Graham. Shawn is also credited with organizing the Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers after separating from his wife in 1930, and launching Jacob's Pillow, a popular dance school, theatre and retreat in Becket, New York.

[8] Faith Ringgold, untitled essay honoring Loïs Mailou Jones's fifty years in art, 23 September 1985, p. 3, LMJP/MSRC, box 215–19, folder 14.

In 1934, Jones spent the summer at Columbia University in New York, where she studied 'masks from non-Western cultures, including Native American, Eskimo, and African ethnic groups,' according to her first biographer Tritobia Hayes Benjamin.[9] It was also there that she first met the Haitian graphic designer Louis Verginaud Pierre-Noel, who would become her husband nearly twenty years later. Just up the street in Harlem, Aaron Douglas was working on his renowned series of murals *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934) for the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York Public Library at 135th Street and Lenox Avenue (now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), where regular art exhibitions, dramatic performances and cultural events were held. There, among other Black intellectuals, she would meet the renowned bibliophile Arthur Schomburg with whom she would later work on the *Bulletin of Negro History*.

Not too far from the library at 306 West 141st Street, an artists' salon called the 306 Group had emerged the year before at the studio of Charles Alston. The salon included sculptor Augusta Savage, painters Aaron Douglas, Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence, among others. Savage, who had returned to New York after studying in Paris on a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, ran the Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts, which would become the influential Harlem Community Arts Center in 1935 under the Federal Art Project. The city was abuzz with the visual and performing arts and Jones would harness the fruits of her studies at Columbia and her interactions with artists and educators to participate in this creative moment.

---

[9] Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Loïs Mailou Jones*, p. 125.

While there, she worked with Asadata Dafora, the celebrated choreographer, drummer, composer and performance artist from Sierra Leone, who was stirring up the modern dance world by introducing a ground-breaking performance style that blended traditional African dance with drumming and theatre.[10] Dafora's most notable work was a dance opera called *Kykunkor* (or *Witch Woman*), to which Jones contributed her design expertise. According to Maureen Needham, *Kykunkor* was 'the first opera presented in the United States with authentic African dances and music, performed in an African tongue by a mainly African-born cast.'[11] Jones played an instrumental role in creating the ceremonial look of the performance when she designed the dancers' headdresses and assisted with the costuming. The mask as a moving form — *as danced* — or, to borrow a phrase from art historian Robert Farris Thompson, as 'African art in motion,' came to life for Jones in the revolutionary choreography and percussive drumming of Dafora's 'dance drama.' The popularity of his particular brand of modern African performance art was carried on the coattails of vaudeville, European Modernism, jazz and the New Negro Arts Movement, and paved the way for exquisite new styles in modern American dance pioneered by choreographers Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus. Jones's time in New York that summer shaped the dramatic ways she portrayed the mask, beginning with her most well-known painting, *Les Fétiches* (1938).

## Paris

A 1938 photograph of Jones in her skylit Paris studio shows the artist at work before an easel surrounded by paintings she made while studying at the Académie Julian. Pictured among them is *Les Fetiches*, displayed on the right. Painted in a post-Cubist, post-Primitivist manner, that work shows five highly stylized African masks in frenzied movement, as if part of a ceremonial masquerade. Dramatically placed before a black backdrop, the masks converge and overlap at different angles, creating a sense of depth and excitement. While in Paris, Jones frequented the Musée d'Homme and other museums, galleries and marketplaces, where she studied the substantial collections of African and ethnographic art on display, and later was inspired to paint *Les Fetiches*.[12]

---

[10] Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Loïs Mailou Jones*, p. 125. Born in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Asadata Dafora (1890–1965) immigrated to New York in 1929 after living in Europe for nearly twenty years. After receiving critical acclaim for *Kykunkor*, Dafora's Shogola Oloba group of African performers became the African Dance Troupe of the Federal Theatre Project in Harlem in 1935. See http://www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/biographies/dafora.html

[11] Maureen Needham, '*Kykunkor, or the Witch Woman*: An African Opera in America, 1934' in Thomas F. DeFrantz (ed.), *Dancing Many Drums*: *Excavations in African American Dance* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), pp. 233–66 (p. 233).

The masks in *Les Fétiches* reference specific examples from different cultural groups in Africa. The striped mask is styled after a Songye Kifwebe mask from Central Africa. The large mask in the center with raffia pieces is drawn from a Guru Dan mask from West Africa. The impact of her earlier design work in dance and theatre for Shawn and Dafora was synthesized in this powerful painting.

Upon her return from Paris in the fall of 1938, Jones resumed her teaching position at Howard University, where New Negro Arts Movement theorist Alain Locke urged her to consider themes of African heritage, social injustice and race pride in her painting. But this idea was already fresh in her mind. As Kinshasha Holman Conwill has remarked on the significance of Jones's first year Paris, 'Her realization of French admiration for African art, and her increased understanding of African sculpture's significance in the development of modern art, boosted her pride in her African heritage.'[13]

## The Children's Page

From 1937 to 1942, Jones was on the editorial board of the *Negro History Bulletin*, published by Carter G. Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in Washington, D.C.[14] Founded in 1930, the bulletin's purpose was 'to inculcate an appreciation of the past of the Negro' for a general audience and school-aged children. Each volume featured a special theme, such as the 'Negro in Foreign Lands,' whose 1940–41 topic was intended 'to broaden the scope of the usual treatment of the Negro in the schools' to include the treatment of race in Africa, Asia, Europe, the West Indies, Latin America, Canada, and Australia.'[15] Jones introduced the Children's Page in the November 1940 issue, an activity page where schoolchildren were encouraged to color an illustration or design she had drawn or to engage in a constructive art-making project aimed at teaching Black history creatively.[16] The first Children's Page was undoubtedly inspired by her lifelong study of African ceremonial arts and classical sculpture, particularly the mask. Jones also designed 'a Picture to Color,' depicting various scenes from Black life, including *An African Village*, or important historical figures like *Toussaint L'Overture*.[17]

---

[12] Charles H. Rowell, 'An Interview with Loïs Mailou Jones,' *Callaloo*, 12:2 (1989), 357–78, http://kathmanduk2.wordpress.com/2008/04/18/from-the-archives-an-interview-with-lois-mailou-jones/

[13] Kinshasha Holman Conwill, *Explorations in the City of Light*: *African American Artists in the City of Ligh*t (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1996), p. 47.

[14] Dr Carter G. Woodson's Associated Publishers, founded in Washington, D.C., in 1921, were responsible for the publication and distribution of books on Black topics that were passed over by mainstream publishers. Woodson also pioneered Negro History Week in 1926 (now Black History Month). See Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Loïs Mailou Jones*, p. 45.

## Haiti

Without a doubt, Jones's 1953 marriage to Louis Verginaud Pierre-Noel transformed both her life and her art, producing a clear change in the style of her painting and choice of subject matter. Jones first traveled to Haiti in 1954 at the invitation of President Paul E. Magliore, who commissioned her to produce a series of paintings depicting Haiti's people and landscape. During this first trip, she stayed for several months and taught at the Centre d'Art while its founder DeWitt Peters was on leave, and at the Foyer des Arts Plastiques. According to Jones, 'The teaching experience at the Centre d'Art put me in touch with the leading artists in Haiti, and I was able to work with them. I found, however, that they were not interested in any training at all. They did not want to know anything about drawing from a model or about structure, or color theory. They were interested in meeting me as a person, a fellow artist, and in watching me as I taught the younger group of Haitians.'[18] At the culmination of her first visit to Haiti, she exhibited forty-two paintings created in Paris and in Port-au-Prince called *Oeuvres de Löis Mailou Jones Pierre-Noel*, at the behest of the first lady of Haiti, Madame Magliore. Her first paintings in Haiti still showed signs of her European training and included street scenes and images of neighborhoods and the docks in a soft palette.

---

[15] *The Negro History Bulletin*, 4:1 (1940), p. 2.
[16] *The Negro History Bulletin*, 4:2 (1940), p. 34.
[17] See, for example, ibid., pp. 36, 86.
[18] Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Loïs Mailou Jones*, p. 77.

Over the next thirty years, Jones frequently lectured, taught and painted in Haiti, where her palette had changed by the 1960s, quickly soaking up the rays of bright sunshine and the vibrant presence of African culture in the marketplace, in the faces of people, and in the spirituality of their religious practices and rituals. Paintings produced there were more geometrical, almost cubist, yet abstract with flat, hard edges and hot colors that boldly claimed the proud history of Haiti as the first independent African nation in the West. Jones found a spiritual home in Haiti, where she felt close to Africa. As she once remarked, 'The art of Africa is lived in the daily life of the people of Haiti.'[19] Many of her works painted there in the 1960s shared a sense of movement with African dance, religious processions and ritual practices.

Symbols such as the ideographic writing of the ceremonial rites of Vodun and related masking traditions made their way into some of the more abstract paintings that Jones created in Haiti, like *Vévé Voudou II* (1962) and *Vévé Voudou III* (1963). A critic writing in the *Washington Post* observed, 'Loïs Mailou Jones is moving from an impressionist technique to one with strongly accented patterns [...] "Voudou" is an oil collage in a sophisticated cubist manner.'[20] Jones's background in design, combined with her innate sensibility for the texture and weight of fabric, produced such rhythmic and colorful paintings as *Les Vendeuses de Tissus* (1961) and *Street Vendors, Haiti* (1978). Both works project the perpetual motion of commerce through the draping of fabric, the movement of vendors, and the balancing of head burdens. Jones's first Haitian paintings received rave reviews in her 1966 solo exhibition at Galerie Soulanges in Paris, where they were noted for their verve, abundance of color and cubist style.[21]

---

[19] Loïs Mailou Jones, 'The African Influence on Afro-American Art,' unpublished lecture given at the International Culture and Development Colloquium on the occasion of President Leopold Sedar Senghor's 70th Birthday in Dakar, Senegal, October 1976, p. 15, LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 46.

[20] Leslie Judd Portner, *The Washington Post*, 1968.

[21] Jacques Michel, *Le Monde*, 11 February 1966.

# Pedagogy

During the Black Arts Movement, as art historian Richard J. Powell has observed, 'Many artists whose careers extended back to the 1930s and 1940s resurfaced with a renewed sense of racial solidarity and political insurgency. Painters Loïs Mailou Jones and John Biggers, and sculptor and printmaker Elizabeth Catlett all aligned themselves with the younger generation of Black artists, creating works that underscored their shared interest in African design sensibilities, the Black figure, and the continuing struggle for civil rights.'[22]

Jones believed that teaching the visual arts and design was an 'interdisciplinary' affair well before that phrase came into popular parlance in the academy. She was at the forefront of designing and implementing Black Studies curricula in the visual arts. In a paper titled, 'The Correlation of Visual Arts and Design with Music and Drama,' she urged other Black educators:

> The rising importance of Black Studies in American education offers a challenge to the Black Visual Arts and Design, Black Music and Black Drama to serve as a correlated cultural focal point in the planning of a new curriculum. The three areas should strive together in developing an understanding of the Arts and emotional growth in our Black students.[23]

She argued that the 'traditional African forms of art, which have always incorporated drama, music and a form of design' could be harnessed to draw upon Black heritage 'in creating projects and "happenings"' that 'not only tend to humanize the environment, but result in establishing the Black man's identity which is so firmly established in the roots of his ancestors.'[24] With this statement she effectively married traditional African plastic and performing arts with one of the popular performance art forms of the day, 'happenings,' to suggest an art practice with the social agenda of the Black Arts Movement: strengthening Black identity.

---

[22] Richard J. Powell, 'Black Arts Movement, Abstraction and Beyond' in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (eds.), *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[23] Loïs Jones Pierre-Noel, 'The Correlation of Visual Arts and Design with Music and Drama,' in *Black Arts in Today's Curriculum* (Greensboro: Six Institutions' Consortium, 1971), pp. 9–13 (p. 9). LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 36.

[24] Ibid., p. 10.

She further asserted that the planned spontaneity that made happenings all the rage in the contemporary art world of the 1960s and 1970s had been an important element in African performance arts all along.

## The Black Arts Movement

When the Black Arts Movement began in earnest in the mid-1960s with 'Black Pride,' 'Black is Beautiful,' and 'Black Power' as popular slogans, Jones, along with her students and other professors at Howard University, didn't miss a beat. As she stated in her class notes now on file at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University,

> The Black Arts Movement was realized by members of the art faculty at H.U. Prof. James Wells, James Porter and I. We were pioneers in introducing the movement among our students, Elizabeth Catlett, Malkia, Delilah Pierce and others. With the assassination of Martin Luther King the Black Arts Movement launched on an intensified momentum, which resulted in nationwide presentations of 'Black Art Shows.' Black artists were determined to establish their identity and to offer to the black community an art which reflected customs, traditions and the beauty of black people. Black owned galleries throughout the nation were established, galleries which offered the black artist exposure and a market for his work. As a result of this intensified movement, black businesses emerged as patrons of the arts.[25]

Jones's special contribution to the Black Arts Movement was her longstanding dedication to the art of classical and contemporary Africa and its diaspora, particularly in Haiti and the United States. Seizing the vibrant moment of heightened Black consciousness, Jones designed an extensive three-part research project in 1968 called 'The Black Visual Arts' to document the contemporary African diaspora art of Haiti, Africa and the United States in interviews, photographs and slides. Funded by Howard University, Jones traveled to Haiti in 1968; eleven African nations in 1970; and nine African nations in 1972. She amassed a collection of more than 1,000 slides and scores of hours of interviews with contemporary artists. As she explained, 'The slides will be used for

---

25 Class notes on the Black Arts Movement, pp. 11 and 12, Loïs Mailou Jones, [n.d.] LMJP/MSRC, illustrated in Thomas C. Battle and Donna M. Wells, *Legacy*: *Treasures of Black History, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2005), p. 191.

lectures, to show the students, the faculties, the community and anyone in the United States […] what is really being done by Black artists all over the world.'[26] Jones was impressed with the art schools that she visited, including the School of Fine and Applied Arts in Khartoum, Sudan, the artists of the Oshogbo School in the Yoruba region of Nigeria and the Manufacture Nationale de Tapisserie in Thiès, Senegal. As an African-American cultural ambassador in Africa, Jones thrived on artistic exchange and arranged to lecture on the simmering Black Arts Movement and the history of African-American art in many of the countries she visited. She believed that, 'there should be an exchange of works between African artists and Afro-American artists […] and vice-versa.'[27] Upon her return to the United States, she shared the fruits of her research by organizing exhibitions, lecturing, teaching new techniques, and by making the research materials she amassed available to her students and others. And here, I'd like to acknowledge for anyone interested in further reading on this period the excellent essay by Lindsay Twa, 'Developing Diasporic Dialogues: James A. Porter and Löis Mailou Jones Pierre-Noel, and the writing of Haitian Art History,' published in the January 2015 issue of *Gradhiva,* which discusses the significance of the pioneering research programs of Jones and Porter in thinking about a genealogy of Haitian art history.[28]

It was the fusion of experiences that Jones gained as an artist/educator during the Black Arts Movement and as an artist/researcher in Haiti and Africa that produced the new and dynamic look of her canvases from the 1970s onward. 'Many of my works with an African theme and African motifs were actually created in Haiti. Some of my most creative compositions, for which I researched African icons, patterns, masks and sculptures were actually done in my Haitian studio.'[29] Jones painted *Haiti Demain* in response to the social, economic and political strife following the failed Duvalier regime. The painting indicts the government and references the mass exodus of Haitian migrants on unstable boats and the greed and corruption of the government. But her practical training as a designer and her belief in the mask's expressive qualities remained foundational to the new look she crafted. She drew upon these experiences to write an important position paper titled 'The African Influence on Afro-American Art,' which she presented at the International Culture and Development Colloquium held in Dakar, Senegal on the occasion of the seventieth birthday of President Leopold Senghor in October 1976. In that address, she declared,

---

[26] Loïs Mailou Jones quoted in Cecilia Oyekola, 'Art is Her Life,' *Interlink* (Lagos, Nigeria: Nusa Publishers, October-December 1970), 28. LMJP/MSRC, box 215–19, folder 6.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Lindsay Twa, 'Developing Diasporic Dialogues: James A. Porter, Loïs Mailou Jones Pierre-Noël and the Writing of Haitian Art History,' *Gradhiva*, 21 (2015), 48–75, https://journals.openedition.org/gradhiva/2933

[29] Löis Mailou Jones, LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 46.

> The influence of African Art permeates the entire contemporary Black art scene […] In art, in music, in literature, Black Americans are returning to their African roots and utilizing this heritage as the basis for their artistic and political expression in the United States.[30]

At that meeting, she presented President Senghor with her painting, *Hommage au Président Leopold Sedar Senghor*, commissioned by Howard University President James Cheek. Notable in that work, tightly designed to include a collage of classical African motifs, historical images and a photo-realist portrait of Senghor, was a small illustration of a preeminent *lieux de memoire* in African American culture: the 'door of no return' at the *Maison des Esclaves* at Gorée Island in Senegal.[31] She declared, 'The major influence of my current work is still African in origin and I am certain that this trip will renew and enrich my inspiration.'[32]

## Africa and the World

Jones's trips to Africa in 1970 and 1972 'provided opportunity to get a clearer picture of the various ways in which African art has influenced the works of the Afro-American artists.' She recalled, 'In Africa, I was able to see examples of the ancestral arts in their original settings and in the museums and galleries […]. It was a rich experience that I will never forget.'[33] The subsequent paintings that Jones produced upon her return from Africa had a distinct and innovative look. She adopted a new approach to figuration, often incorporating photo-realist portraits with stylized African masks, sculptural icons and Adinkra symbols. As the artist explained, 'Each time I made a study of African design, I found the imagery and motifs so inspiring that I've had to utilize them in a sort of combination in creating a work.'[34] In *Homage to Dahomey* (1971), Jones drew stylized profiles of repeating Antelope or Chiwara masks along with other design motifs, animals and the supreme Adinkra symbol pictured in the form of a bulls-eye — Adinkrahene, meaning greatness, charisma and leadership. Bright colors of orange and gold separated by bold black diagonal lines and bright blue accents set off the dramatic canvas to recall the appliqué tradition of Dahomean wall hangings dating from the seventeenth century.

---

[30] Idem, 'The African Influence on Afro-American Art,' p. 2, LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 46.

[31] See Cheryl Finley, 'The Door of (No) Return,' *Common-Place*, 1:4 (2001), [n.p.], http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/finley

[32] Loïs Mailou Jones, 'The African Influence on Afro-American Art,' p. 4, LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 46.

[33] Ibid., p. 12.

*Ubi Girl from Tai Region* (1972) shows the head of a young female initiate painted with white and red markings symbolizing protection, superimposed on the huge profile of a heddle pulley from the Ivory Coast and repeating outlines of masks and designs from Zaire. Similarly, the acrylic collage *Moon Masque* (1971), which was exhibited at FESTAC in Nigeria in 1977, has at its center a white-faced Kwele mask from Zaire flanked by the profiles of two young men and textile designs from Ethiopia. Jones's use of design elements from different African regions was no mistake. Rather, this innovative choice showed the artist exercising a form of aesthetic interdisciplinarity that united seemingly disparate aspects of the composition. Each of these works hints at Jones's understanding of the psychological meaning of the mask. As she once said, 'The mask, in fact, dominates the Afro-American interest in African art. This is not surprising since the nature of the mask is so well adapted to artistic development.'[35] Other African-American artists during this period, including Romare Bearden, Jeff Donaldson, Faith Ringgold, Elizabeth Catlett, Ed Love and Napoleon Henderson, among others, showed a fascination with the African mask. Bearden often incorporated snippets of African masks from magazines in his signature collages of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Village of Yo* (1964). Even Ringgold's soft sculptures like *Faith and the Brown Children* (1968) referenced the African mask in motion.

---

[34] Loïs Mailou Jones quoted in Mary C. Butler, 'American Artist Develops New Technique Using African Designs,' *Africa Feature* (US Information Service, February 1973), p. 2. LMJP/MSRC, box 215–19, folder 2. Jones's pencil and ink drawings of Adinkra symbols, African masks, portraits and performances are in her archive at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center, LMJP/MSRC, box 215–15, folder 10.

[35] Loïs Mailou Jones, 'The African Influence on Afro-American Art,' p. 9. LMJP/MSRC, box 215–18, folder 46.

## Conclusion

It was the mask that drew Löis Mailou Jones more than anything to create works that envisioned a multiplicity of Black experiences. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the *Africa Series*, her last significant body of work produced in Haiti and Washington in the 1970s and 1980s. Around the same time that the Scurlock studio portrait was taken, Jones made a list of twenty-one works in her *Africa Series*. A careful perusal of that list, handwritten on an index card, reveals the depth of her longing for Africa and how she catalogued her work towards the end of her career.

At the top of the chronological list is *Les Fetiches*, painted from her study of African masks in Paris galleries and museums in 1937–38. The paintings completed in 1971 and 1972 respectively were inspired by her first two trips to Africa in 1970 and 1972 under the auspices of her Black Visual Arts grant from Howard University. Works like *Congo Dance Mask* (1972) and *Guli Mask* (1972) reference specific ceremonial masks, while *Magic of Nigeria* (1971) is a fanciful combination of masks of her own creation. *Homage to Oshogbo* (1971) and *Ode to Kinshasha* (1972) employ mixed media collage to place flat abstract masks within geometric patterns. Paintings completed later reference subsequent trips to Africa in 1976 and 1977, as well as regular sojourns to Haiti and research trips in the Caribbean and Suriname around the same time.

Travel to Haiti and Africa no doubt had a major impact on Jones's content and method. One can easily observe how her paintings from the 1970s onward bring back into play her early direction as a textile designer. Many of these vibrantly colored works rely on carefully positioned symbols, masks, animals or portraits that repeat at a syncopated rate to form polyrhythmic compositions. Others, however, take on a more conceptual appearance like *Symbols du Suriname* (1982). The paintings of her *Africa Series*, with their high gloss and dramatic color arrangements, challenged popular Western notions of contemporary art, including abstraction, Minimalism and Pop. To be sure, she was influenced by Jeff

Donaldson's Afri-Cobra Group, a collective of artists founded in 1968 who advocated the use of highly polished reflective surfaces and bright bold colors that projected the beauty of Black people. But other influences included the popularity of psychedelic, metallic and fluorescent colors of the space age made available to artists through the novelty of acrylic paint and polymer paint, which, according to art historian Kellie Jones, not only dried faster but offered new color possibilities.[36]

The Scurlock studio portrait, moreover, provides a visual dimension to the handwritten list, becoming a photographic document of her *Africa Series*. The image shows *Damballah* and *Symbols d'Afrique* (discussed earlier) prominently displayed, while a small reproduction of her celebrated *Moon Masque* (1971) is visible on the easel behind her. Africa was a lifelong source of inspiration and pride for Löis Mailou Jones. Historians like Woodson and Schomburg, intellectuals like Du Bois and Locke, dancers like Dafora and Primus, and artists like Fuller and Donaldson reinforced her unwavering commitment to Africa, its art and its heritage. She dedicated her life to raising the visibility of Black artists in America, Africa and Haiti, and did so despite barriers that she often faced as a woman artist of color. With a career buttressed by the two major movements in African American art of the twentieth century — the New Negro Arts Movement and the Black Arts Movement — Jones's unique Black perspective was often viewed through the mask, a symbol of classical African art and a signifier of Black identity.

---

[36] Kellie Jones, *Energy/Experimentation*: *Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006), p. 15.

# Bibliography

Battle, Thomas C. and Donna M. Wells, *Legacy*: *Treasures of Black History, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2005).

Benjamin, Tritobia Hayes, *The Life and Art of Loïs Mailou Jones* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994).

Conwill, Kinshasha Holman, *Explorations in the City of Light*: *African American Artists in the City of Light* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1996).

Finley, Cheryl, 'The Mask as Muse: The Influence of African Art on the Life and Career of Löis Mailou Jones,' in Carla M. Hanzel (ed.), *Löis Mailou Jones*: *A Life in Vibrant Color* (Charlotte: Mint Museum of Art, 2009), pp. 5–73.

—, 'The Door of (No) Return,' *Common-Place*, 1:4 (2001), [n.p.], http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/finley

Kellie, *Energy/Experimentation*: *Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem), 2006.

Moorland-Spingarn Research Library, Howard University, Washington, D.C., Loïs Mailou Jones Pierre-Noel Papers, LMJP/MSRC.

Needham, Maureen, '*Kykunkor, or the Witch Woman*: An African Opera in America, 1934', in Thomas F. DeFrantz (ed.), *Dancing Many Drums*: *Excavations in African American Dance* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), pp. 233–66.

Powell, Richard J., 'Black Arts Movement, Abstraction and Beyond', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (eds.), *Africana*: *The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2005).

Rowell, Charles H., 'An Interview with Loïs Mailou Jones,' *Callaloo*, 12:2 (1989), 357–78.

# PART EIGHT

# EMOTIONAL CARTOGRAPHY: TRACING THE PERSONAL

# 36. The Ones Who Leave... the Ones Who Are Left: Guyanese Migration Story

## *Grace Aneiza Ali*

There are two spectrums of the migration arc: *the ones who leave and the ones who are left*. The act of migration is an act of reciprocity — to leave a place we recognise that we must leave others behind. Too often though, those who are leaving eclipse the narratives of the ones who are left behind. I find myself often caught in this liminal space between those who leave and those who (must) remain because for many years this was my story, and for many years before that, it was my mother's story.

In 1995, my family migrated from Guyana to the United States. We became part of what seemed like a mythical diaspora. Over one million Guyanese citizens now live in global metropolises like New York City (where they are the fifth largest immigrant group),[1] London, and Toronto, while the country itself has a population of around 760,000. In other words, my homeland is one where more people live outside its borders than within it. In 2015, Guyana celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence from the British. The last five decades, however, have

---

[1] Arun Peter Lobo and Joseph J. Salvo, *The Newest New Yorker, 2013 Edition: Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population* (New York: New York City Department of City Planning, 2013), p. 20.

© 2019 Grace Aneiza Ali, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.36

been defined by an extraordinary exodus of its citizens. In fact, this small country has one of the world's highest out-migration rates.[2]

Making the journey with us when we left were a handful of photographs chronicling our life. Owning photographs was an act of privilege; they stood among our most valuable possessions. There were no negatives, no jpegs, no double copies, just the originals. Decades later, these photographs serve as a tangible connection to a homeland left behind. Many of them are taken at Guyana's airport during the 1980s and 1990s when we often bade farewell to yet another family member leaving. Movement and transition were the constants in our lives. Airports became sites for family reunions. Before I nervously boarded my first plane at fourteen years old, a one-way flight bound for New York's JFK airport, I had long resented planes as the violent machines that fragmented families. Before my mother boarded that same flight at thirty-nine years old with her three children in tow, she had in the years prior, witnessed her brothers and sisters all leave Guyana one by one. By nineteen years old, a cycle of poverty and the final straw, the loss of both of her parents within a few short years of each other, ushered in a series of constant departures. Beginning in the 1970s, her six siblings joined the mass exodus of Guyanese leaving Guyana. They first left for neighboring Caribbean islands, then later Canada and the United States, through student visas, work visas, marriage visas — whatever it took. During the three decades that my mother spent waiting for our family's visas and papers to be vetted by two governments, Guyana and the United States, she watched the ones she loved the most leave her country and leave her, multiple times over.

Migration is *the defining movement of our time* — for both the ones who leave and the ones who are left. Few of us remain untouched by its sweeping narrative. Guyanese people have long known this as it has been the single most important narrative of our country. A perfect storm of post-colonial crises — entrenched poverty, political corruption, repressive government regimes, racial violence, lack of education, unemployment, economic depression, and worse of them

---

[2] Guyana's emigration rate is among the highest in the world; more than 55% of its citizens reside abroad.
Central Intelligence Agency, *The CIA World Factbook 2017* (Cia.gov, 2017), https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gy.html

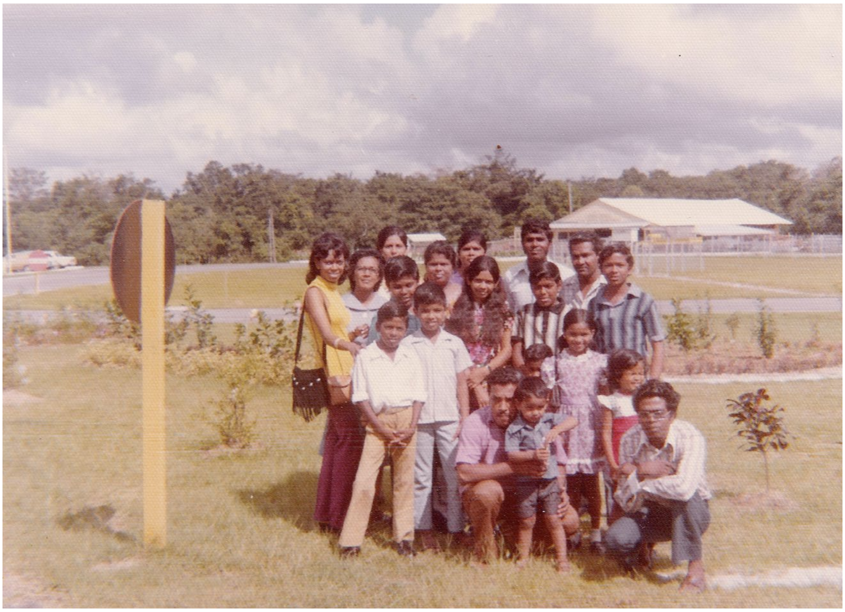


Fig. 36.1 My mother Ingrid (third row, center) poses with her siblings and extended family at Timehri International Airport, Guyana in the mid-1970s, as she bade farewell to a sister who was leaving for Barbados. © Ali-Persaud family collection. Courtesy of Grace Aneiza Ali, CC BY 4.0.

all, a withering away of hope for our country — are among the reasons why we leave Guyana.

The BBC Radio series 'Neither Here Nor There' dedicated one of its episodes to the presence of the Guyanese community in the United States, examining how their American experience has impacted their identities.[3] Sharing that more Guyanese now live in the Tri-State Area (New York City, New Jersey, and Connecticut) than in Guyana itself, host David Dabydeen, the Guyanese-born writer who also left his homeland, remarked that Guyana 'is a disappearing nation' that has 'to an unrivalled degree, exported its people' over the last five decades. Dominque Hunter, an emerging artist living in and working in Guyana, echoes a similar sentiment, sharing with me that from a very young age the Guyanese citizen is indoctrinated with an urgent call for departure. 'Our greatest aspiration should be to leave,' she says, 'There is an expectation once you have reached a certain age: pack what you can and leave'.[4] What a spectacular thing for any citizen of any place to grapple with — to be, from birth, dispossessed of one's own land.

---

[3] 'A Disappearing Nation', *Neither There Nor Here*, BBC Radio 4, 28 February 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08gmtx1

Perhaps if there is a bright side to this culture of departure is the centrality of women. The red thread woven throughout Guyana's migration stories is the driving force of Guyanese women. Prior to the 1960s, it was traditionally men from the Anglophone Caribbean who were the first in their families to migrate. In 1960, that dominance began to shift as the United States, United Kingdom and Canada looked to the Caribbean as a source for blue collar, healthcare and domestic workers. Since that time, it has been Caribbean women who have led the movement from their homeland to new lands. In her essay, 'Of Islands and Other Mothers,' examining the emergence of Guyanese as the fifth largest immigrant group in New York City, Guyanese-American writer Gaiutra Bahadur centers women:

> Caribbean women participate in the labor force at higher rates than women from other [immigrant] groups. On average, they earn less than their countrymen and they may be less visible, because they work inside homes, as nannies or housekeepers or health care aides. For many [Caribbean] countries, the migration out was led by women, who then sponsored family members, including husbands and sons, to come to America.[5]

This dominance is certainly the case in New York where Guyanese women outnumber men — the male/female ratio is 79 per 100 among Guyanese immigrants.[6] Caribbean women's migration also opened up a new kind of agency for women that had been previously held by men. Beginning in the 1960s, Caribbean women were increasingly regarded as 'principal aliens' — granting them the ability to begin the application process to sponsor their family members. In tandem, Guyanese women, after becoming legal residents or naturalized citizens, aggressively took on the charge of sponsoring their family members to join them in their new countries.[7]

---

[4] Artist statement submitted by Dominque Hunter for her digital collage work, *We Meet Here, I to XII* (2017) featured in the group exhibition 'Liminal Space' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali, at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), New York, on view 17 June 2017 to 30 November 2017.

[5] Gaiutra Bahadur, 'Of Islands and Other Mothers', in Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Shapiro (eds.), *Nonstop Metropolis*: *A New York City Atlas* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 77–85 (p. 81).

[6] Arun Peter Lobo and Joseph J. Salvo, *The Newest New Yorker, 2013 Edition*, p. 20.

The photographic medium has historically played a critical, and often problematic, role in how as a society we *see* and *do not see* the Black and brown bodies that cross international borders. That precious 1970s photograph of my young mother flanked by her family at Guyana's airport became an important catalyst for my curatorial practice as I have focused on the relationship and responsibility that photography bears in representing our migration narratives. Each day, more women than ever from all over this world get on planes and boats and ships and makeshift rafts, while many simply walk, to cross borders.[8] Are they merely fleeing? Or are they embarking on an incredibly brave and heroic journey to be in charge of their own destiny, to believe in the notion that they are free to move about the world? That 1970s photograph is a reminder for me of the grit it took for my mother to enact her own agency.

My investment in the multiple and complicated stories embedded in that one image has led me to the brilliant work of the following four women of Guyanese heritage with whom I have had the privilege to collaborate in the exhibitions I have curated — Keisha Scarville, Christie Neptune, Erika DeFreitas, and Khadija Benn. Their work has moved me in deeply personal ways for its intimate and thoughtful use of photography as a medium to tell Guyanese women's stories. These four artists utilize portraiture in their artistic practices as medium, object, archival language and documentary reporting, to explore the nuanced migration experiences of Guyanese women. To further deepen this relationship between photography and migration, these four artists embed in their practices innovative use of archival images, mine their family albums, and explicate private letters from their personal archives. The journeys of these treasured objects across the Atlantic Ocean leads us to meditate on what shifts occur in the migration narrative when photographs and family archives transcend geographic borders. Through their engagement with these images, the artists unpack global realities of migration, tease out symbols of decay and loss, and avoid trappings of nostalgia by envisioning avenues out of displacement and dislocation. And equally compellingly, their work speaks to who and what gets left, what survives and what is mourned, both the tangible and intangible things, in acts of migration.

---

[7] In New York City, in particular, it is the Guyanese community, more than any other immigrant group, that utilizes family sponsorship visas to bring to the United States other members of their family. However, a 2017 *New York Times* article reported that they 'could lose the most from a new federal effort to cut legal immigration in half'. See Vivian Wang, 'In Little Guyana, Proposed Cuts to Family Immigration Weigh Heavily', *New York Times*, 11 August 2017.

[8] The World Economic Forum reported that by 2016, 'Women will comprise more than half the world's 232 million migrants for the first time. A growing proportion of these women will migrate independently and as breadwinners for their families', See Khalid Koser, '10 Migration Trends to Look out for in 2016', *World Economic Forum*, 18 December 2015, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/12/10-migration-trends-to-look-out-for-in-2016/

Scarville, DeFreitas, Neptune and Benn are part of a younger generation of women of Guyanese heritage who reflect the contemporary reality of the Guyanese citizen — women living in Guyana, as well as those living in the country's largest diasporic nodes, New York City and Toronto. Some of them return to Guyana often, and some rarely. Yet, being the daughters of Guyanese mothers remains at the core of their identities. In an essay on the literature of Caribbean women writers Paule Marshall and Jamaica Kincaid, literary scholar Kattian Barnwell threads the connection between the phrases 'motherlands' and 'otherlands'. She writes:

> *Motherland* may be variously defined as place of birth, 'land' or home of the mother, the site of the self. Conversely, *other-land* refers to the site where each character experiences alienation and 'othering,' the place of exile.[9]

Scarville, DeFreitas, and Neptune directly invoke the relationship between mothers and daughters in their work. They engage the tensions between the place of birth and the space of othering through the voyages undertaken by their mothers who were born in Guyana, and themselves as daughters, who were born in the United States and Canada. Benn, who is based in Guyana, occupies the opposite end of the migration arc, documenting the Amerindian mothers and grandmothers living in Guyana, who after witnessing their families fractured by migration, bear the burden to keep those fragile bonds connected. What these four artists have in common is that in turning to portraiture to tell the narratives of Guyanese women's migration, they each explore the issue I am deeply concerned with — the toll migration enacts on our families.

---

[9] Kattian Barnwell, 'Motherlands and Other Lands: Home and Exile in Jamaica Kincaid's "Lucy" and Paule Marshall's "Praisesong for the Widow"', *Caribbean Studies*, 27 (1994), 451–54 (p. 452).

## Keisha Scarville

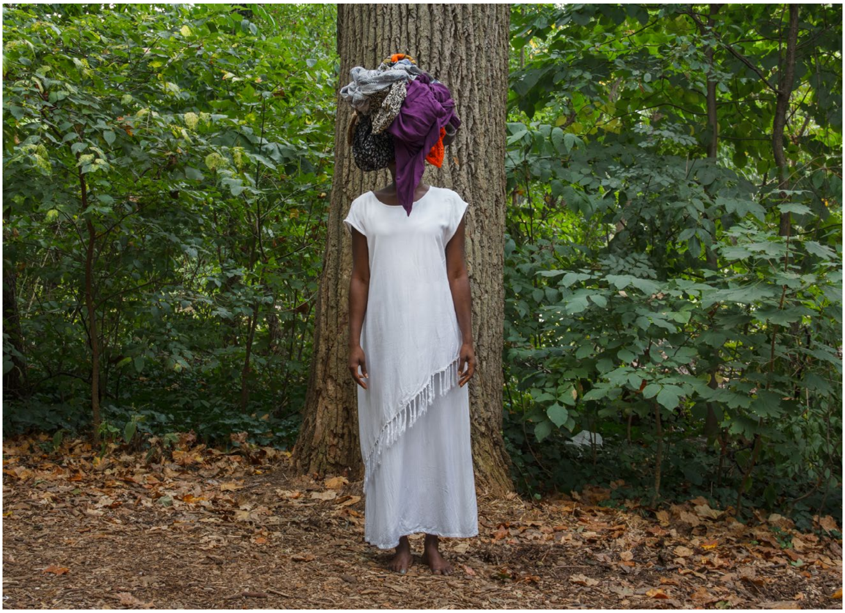


Fig. 36.2 Keisha Scarville, 'Untitled #1', from the series 'Mama's Clothes', 2015. © Keisha Scarville, CC BY 4.0.

Born in New York to a Guyanese father and mother, the artist Keisha Scarville spent her childhood raised in a Brooklyn community where her parents migrated and settled. In the 1960s, during a notorious politically volatile decade that saw Guyana gain its independence from the British, Scarville's mother found her way to New York where she took on new roles: an immigrant in the United States, a young Black woman witnessing America's civil rights era, a wife and mother. Essentially, she left one volatile country for another. In those early years, she returned to Guyana often, taking a young Scarville back with her. However, as time passed, those visits became less frequent and Guyana lived mostly as a mythical motherland for the artist. Scarville writes about the dissonance her Guyanese-born mother experienced as she tried to reconcile life as an immigrant in the United States:

> Though my mother chose to migrate to the United States, she maintained a connection to the land of her birth, firmly planting one foot under a tamarind tree in Buxton and the other, rooted on the rooftop of an apartment building in Flatbush, Brooklyn. In recounting her experiences when she arrived in the United States, she often discussed the first sensation of real cold, the strange taste of American chicken, and overcoming the embedded alienation of this place.[10]

In 2015, the artist's mother passed away. Scarville became a daughter who had not only lost a mother, but also her deepest and most tangible connection to her mother's homeland and her ancestral home. While grappling with this loss, the artist began to work on 'Mama's Clothes' (2015), a collection of self-portraits photographed in her mother's place of birth, Buxton (Guyana) and her neighborhood in Flatbush, Brooklyn (Guyana). Scarville says:

> The death of my mother left me with a sense of displacement and an internal fracturing. I started to realize that an element I regarded as home — my mother's body — was now missing. In her place were all that she accumulated as an American. My mother's closets overflowed with bright colors, strong prints, and long flowing fabrics. When I was a little girl, I would often play dress up in my mother's clothes and imagine the day I would fill her dresses and assert my body as a woman.[11]

Scarville drapes and layers her body in her mother's clothing, as well as fashioning masks and veils out of them to cover her face and head. It is a face often obscured. In submerging her body within her mother's clothes, Scarville marries both time and space — two generations, two homelands, and the complexities in between.

The insertion of her body in the photograph simultaneously speaks to Scarville's role as both subject and performer. Dressed in her 'mama's clothes' her body roams between the lush, organic landscapes of Buxton and Brooklyn, symbolically performing the act of migration her

---

[10] Artist statement submitted by Keisha Scarville for her portraiture series 'Mama's Clothes' (2015) featured in the group exhibition 'Liminal Space' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali, at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), New York, on view 17 June 2017 to 30 November 2017.

[11] Ibid.

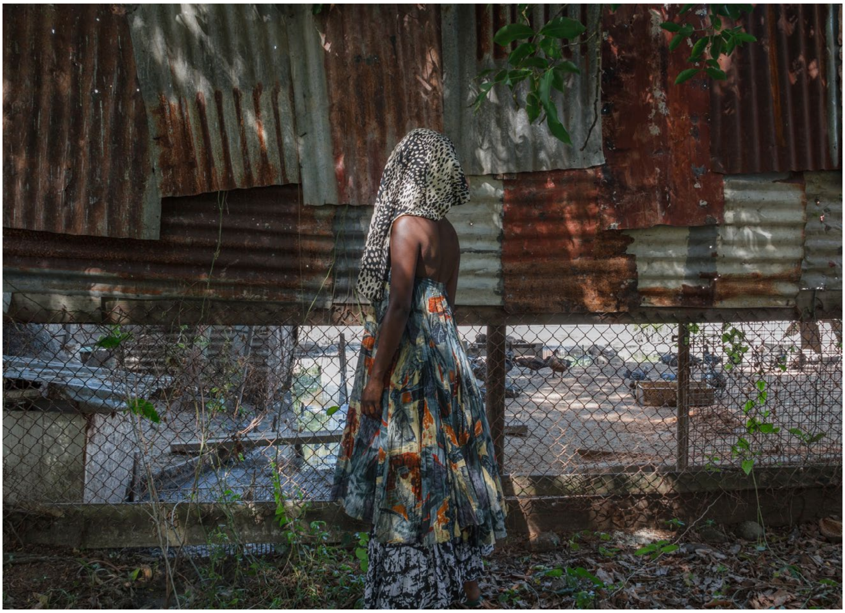


Fig. 36.3 Keisha Scarville, 'Untitled #5', from the series 'Mama's Clothes', 2016. © Keisha Scarville, CC BY 4.0.

mother once embarked on. In 'Mama's Clothes', migration and death are inextricably linked. Scarville notes: 'I wanted to ease the anxiety of separation by conjuring her presence within the photographic realm. I allowed the assemblage of clothes to drip off my body as though it were a residual, surrogate skin'.[12]

## Erika DeFreitas

While Scarville mines the relationship with her mother, the artist Erika DeFreitas weaves together the relationships between her grandmother to her mother to herself. The practice of the Toronto-based artist is steeped in process, gesture, performance, and documentation. DeFreitas's grandmother sold cakes out of a humble home in Newton, British Guiana in the late 1950s. She also taught classes in cake décor to neighborhood women, reflecting the craft as one of building community. DeFreitas's grandmother never left Guyana, but her creative practice as a baker transcended its borders. She passed down the practice to

---

[12] Ibid.

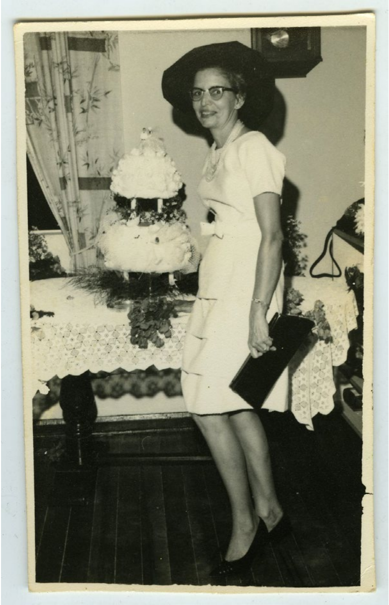


Fig. 36.4 Erika DeFreitas's grandmother Angela DeFreitas pictured in British Guiana with a wedding cake she made and decorated, ca. late 1960s. © DeFreitas Family Collection, Courtesy of Erika Defreitas, CC BY 4.0.

DeFreitas's mother who migrated to Canada in 1970, and in turn, taught the Canadian-born artist the intricacies of icing cakes. It is this sacred act of passing on a closely held family craft through three generations of DeFreitas women, and across two continents, which forms DeFreitas's portraiture series titled 'The Impossible Speech Act' (2007).

In this work (Fig. 5), rooted in maternal histories, DeFreitas's mother is both subject and collaborator (the artist's mother is pictured on the left, the artist is on the right). To produce 'The Impossible Speech Act', DeFreitas generously mined her family archives — albums and letters written between Guyana and Canada — and drew on the oral teachings of her grandmother. Together, mother and daughter took turns in a series of documented performative actions, both poetic and playful, to hand-fashion face masks out of green, yellow, and purple icing. From start to finish, the photographic series slowly unveils the meticulous detail, labor, time, and artistry embedded in the process of masking a bare face with these sculptural objects of flowers and leaves. The diptych featured here is the final portrait in the process.

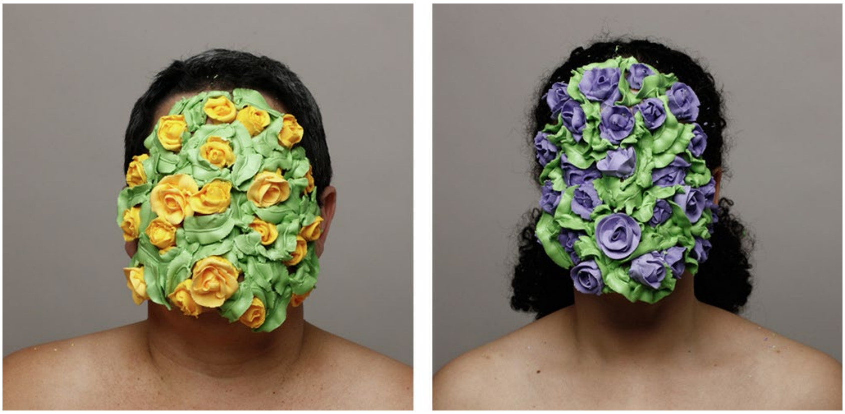


Fig. 36.5 Erika DeFreitas, 'The Impossible Speech Act', 2007. © Erika DeFreitas, CC BY 4.0.

The artist's use of icing as material and process is symbolic. She notes, 'historically icing was created with two purposes: to be decorative and to preserve'.[13] However, DeFreitas's chosen symbol of preservation becomes one of irony. Like the masks made of her mother's clothing in Scarville's 'Mama's Clothes', the icing masks in DeFreitas's work inevitably lead to an absence of the faces, their complete erasure. And, as the fragile material that it is, the icing itself disappears. 'The masks did not become a substitute object in each of our image,' says DeFreitas, 'they melted from the heat emitted from our bodies, the flowers and leaves eroding, sliding slowly down our faces […] a reminder of the persistence of impermanence.'[14] The work leaves us to ponder the question: Even when we commit to preserving a homeland's memories, rites and traditions, how do we navigate the inevitable loss that pervades? DeFreitas's 'The Impossible Speech Act' and Scarville's 'Mama's Clothes' are poignant examples of how, as daughters of Guyana, we constantly reach to our mothers and grandmothers as collaborators in our art — as we do in our lives.

---

[13] Artist statement submitted by Erika DeFreitas for her portraiture series 'The Impossible Speech Act' (2007) featured in the group exhibition 'Un | Fixed Homeland' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali, at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, Newark, New Jersey, on view 17 July 2016 to 23 September 2016.

[14] Ibid.

## Christie Neptune

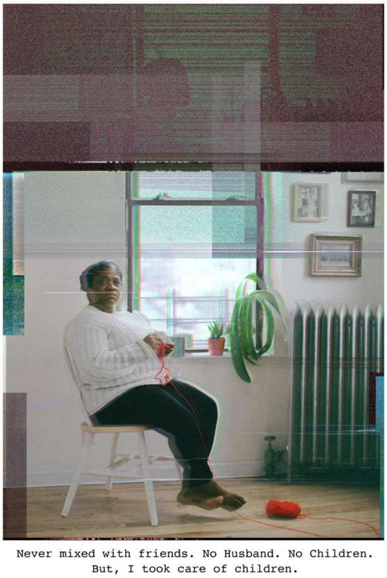

Never mixed with friends. No Husband. No Children.
But, I took care of children.

Fig. 36.6 Christie Neptune, *Memories from Yonder* (2015). © Christie Neptune, CC BY 4.0.

In this deeply personal and autobiographical work, American-born artist Christie Neptune mines childhood memories of her mother, a Guyanese immigrant in New York, and her love of crocheting — a craft popular among Guyanese women and passed down through generations. Like DeFreitas's sacred act of passing on a closely held family craft between generations of Guyanese women, so too does Neptune. She notes the cultural importance of the craft:

> The art of crocheting is a popular recreational activity amongst Guyanese women. The act serves as a prophetic mode of maintaining home and family. On the eve of new life, the women crochet blankets for the burgeoning mother; pillows and table runners for wives to be; and hats, scarves and socks for the winter. For most, crocheting is a way of life; an intergenerational activity woven into a myriad of traditions. My great grandmother taught the art of crocheting to her daughters; and my grandmother taught it to my mother.[15]

---

[15] Artist statement submitted by Christie Neptune for her mixed-media installation, *Memories from Yonder* (2015) featured in the group exhibition 'Liminal Space'

For Neptune, the art of crocheting becomes a metaphor for the necessary acts of unfurling a life in a past land to construct a new life in a new land. Invoking her own subjectivity as a first-generation Guyanese-American, Neptune presents visual and textual narratives from a conversation with Ebora Calder (b. 1925, Georgetown, Guyana), a Guyanese immigrant and elder, who like the artist's mother, migrated to New York in the late 1950s. Calder represents a generation of Guyanese women who in the past sixty years have been part of the mass migration from Guyana to New York City. In the 1950s and into the early 1970s, Guyanese began migrating to America in greater numbers than ever before. At the same time the United States was in the midst of a nursing shortage. This need for nurses and other roles in the health care industry, one traditionally dominated by women, propelled more Guyanese women to migrate to the United States to take on those jobs. Underpaid or often paid under the table, Guyanese women were also often steeped in an invisible workforce as private household workers — nannies, housekeepers, and home care aides.[16] This is Ebora Calder's story, a woman who upon arriving in New York, worked as a home care aide until her retirement.

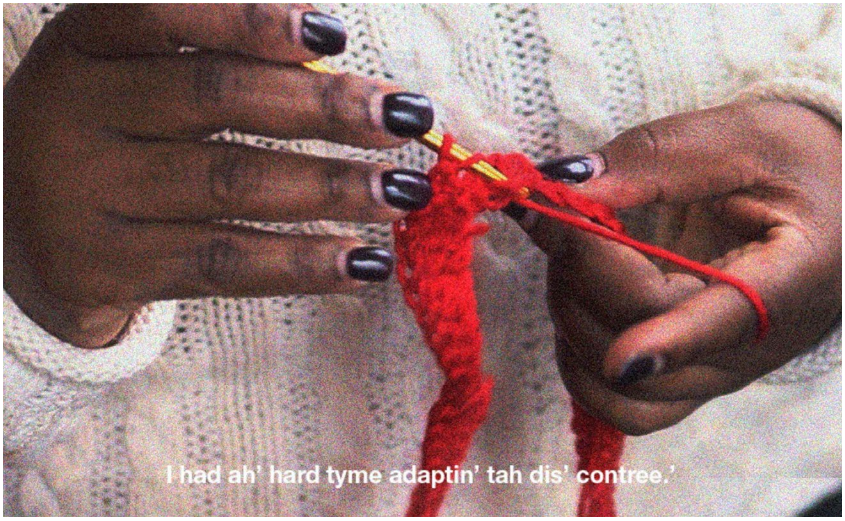

I had ah' hard tyme adaptin' tah dis' contree.'

Fig. 36.7 Christie Neptune, video stills from *Memories from Yonder* (2015). © Christie Neptune, CC BY 4.0.

---

curated by Grace Aneiza Ali, at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), New York, on view 17 June 2017 to 30 November 2017.

[16] Bahadur, 'Of Islands and Other Mothers', p. 81.

In the diptych and video still pictured in Figures 6 and 7 respectively, Neptune relies on two portrait photographs of Calder, taken in the Brooklyn Gardens Senior Center, where she now lives. The images have been rendered distorted, obscured, and mirrored with text captioning Calder's words transcribed in both American English and Guyanese Patois. In both photograph and video, Calder is depicted in the slow, methodical, rhythmic act of crocheting a red bundle of yarn. The amorphous object she is making is unknown. 'The gesture serves as a symbolic weaving of the two cultural spheres,' states Neptune, 'to reconcile the surmounting pressures of maintaining tradition whilst immersed in an Americanized culture'.[17]

## Khadija Benn

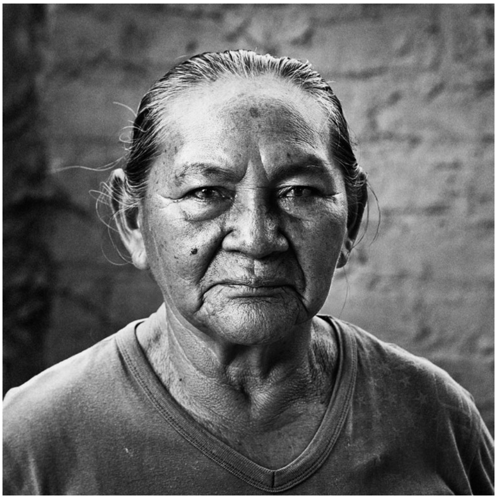


Fig. 36.8 Anastacia Winters (b. 1947), lives in Lethem, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo (Region Nine), Guyana. Khadija Benn, *Anastacia Winters* from the series 'Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women', 2017. © Khadija Benn, CC BY 4.0.

Based in Guyana, Khadija Benn's training as a cartographer and her work as a geospatial analyst producing maps for the country's remote

---

[17] Artist statement submitted by Christie Neptune for her mixed-media installation, *Memories from Yonder* (2015) featured in the group exhibition 'Liminal Space' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali, at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), New York, on view 17 June 2017 to 30 November 2017.

Amazon regions, informs much of her photography practice and leads her across the country to places where most Guyanese rarely have access to or ever see in their lifetimes. Guyana's first peoples, the Amerindians, have called these regions home since the eighteenth century. In tandem, Benn's photography practice confronts the underlying histories that have created these complex spaces and aims to counter the contemporary framing of them as exotic. Relying on her intimate knowledge of these regions and the relationships she's nurtured over the years with the families who live there, Benn's documentary portraiture series, 'Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women' (2017) features stunning black and white portraits of elder Amerindian women who have called these communities home since the 1930s. These are the faces of Amerindian women the world rarely sees. Benn notes:

> The narratives of those who choose *not* to migrate are seldom explored. This rings especially true for Guyana's indigenous peoples. Many have witnessed their loved ones, particularly their children and grandchildren, leave for neighboring Venezuela and Brazil, or the Caribbean islands, the United States and Canada. Yet, they often remain.[18]

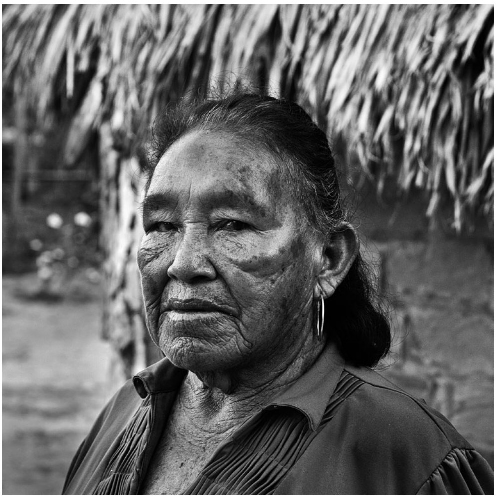


Fig. 36.9 Mickilina Simon (b. 1938), Tabatinga, Lethem, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo (Region Nine), Guyana. Khadija Benn, *Mickilina Simon* from the series 'Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women', 2017. © Khadija Benn, CC BY 4.0.

---

[18] Artist statement submitted by Khadija Benn for the portraiture series, 'Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women' (2017). Unpublished statement: received in correspondence with the artist.

However, as Benn's lens reveal, these are not portraits of invisibility. These elder women have witnessed Guyana evolve from a colonized British territory, to an independent state, to a nation struggling to carve out its identity on the world stage, to a country now drained by its citizens departing. They have also been the ones most impacted by serious economic downturns over the past decades where the decline of bauxite mining coupled with little access to education beyond primary school and lack of employment have left these communities with few or no choices to thrive. And so, many do the only thing they can do — they leave. Benn writes:

> As I spoke with these women, they affectionately recalled family members long gone abroad. Our conversations revealed their unique perceptions of time and space — the length of time gone by since their loved ones migrated was immaterial. Many also did not perceive relatives living in the neighboring countries, such as Brazil and Venezuela, as having settled 'abroad.' Amerindians have traditionally considered these international borders as fluid.[19]

While migration swirls around them, while their children go back and forth between Guyana and their newfound lands, many of these women have never left Guyana, some have never left the villages they were born in, and some have no desire to leave.

For the millions of us who have left one country for another fueled by choice or trauma, sustaining those fragile threads to a homeland is a process at once fraught, disruptive, and ever evolving. We also know that when we have left others behind in places that are beautiful, yet materially impoverished like my Guyana, we have a tremendous responsibility to the ones who are left. These four artists remind us how critical it is that we hear their stories.

---

[19] Ibid.

# Bibliography

'A Disappearing Nation', *Neither There Nor Here*, BBC Radio 4, 28 February 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08gmtx1

Bahadur, Gaiutra, 'Of Islands and Other Mothers', in Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Shapiro (eds.), *Nonstop Metropolis*: *A New York City Atlas* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 77–85.

Barnwell, Kattian, 'Motherlands and Other Lands: Home and Exile in Jamaica Kincaid's "Lucy" and Paule Marshall's "Praisesong for the Widow"', *Caribbean Studies*, 27 (1994), 451–54.

Benn, Khadija, 'Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women' (2017).

DeFreitas, Erika, 'The Impossible Speech Act' (2007), exhibited in 'Un |Fixed Homeland' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali, at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, Newark, New Jersey (17 July–23 September 2016).

Hunter, Dominque, *We Meet Here, I to XII* (2017), exhibited at 'Liminal Space' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali, at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), New York (17 June–30 November 2017).

Koser, Khalid, '10 Migration Trends to Look out for in 2016', *World Economic Forum*, 18 December 2015, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/12/10-migration-trends-to-look-out-for-in-2016/

Lobo, Arun Peter and Joseph J. Salvo, *The Newest New Yorker, 2013 Edition*: *Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population* (New York: New York City Department of City Planning, 2013).

Neptune, Christie, *Memories from Yonder* (2015) featured in the group exhibition 'Liminal Space' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali.

Scarville, Keisha, 'Mama's Clothes' (2015), exhibited in 'Liminal Space' curated by Grace Aneiza Ali.

*The CIA World Factbook 2017* (Cia.gov, 2017), https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gy.html

Wang, Vivian, 'In Little Guyana, Proposed Cuts to Family Immigration Weigh Heavily', *New York Times*, 11 August 2017.

# 37. The Acton Photograph Archive: Between Representation and Re-Interpretation

## *Alessandra Capodacqua*

This chapter revolves around the significant presence of photographs of women in the Acton Photograph Archive, and how these photographs are not only a mere reproduction of the person represented, but also convey intriguing information about the period, the fashion, and life styles in general. Also, they give us some insight into the customs, conventions and traditions that represented the norm in those years.[1]

I argue that we should look at these photographs from a different point of view: they are three-dimensional material objects, and as such they are subject to the process of wear and tear, which adds an interesting further level of interpretation. Photographs travel across social, political, cultural and historical contexts and transmit captivating information and subtexts related to these different times.

The photographic images preserved in Villa La Pietra date from around 1870 to 1994; there are approximately 16,700 items (positives, negatives, and images on glass) that were organized and indexed

---

[1] This chapter is based on the presentation I gave at Villa La Pietra in Florence during the workshop on Women & Migrations, June 2017.

© 2019 Alessandra Capodacqua, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.37

between 2002 and 2005 and have become the Acton Photograph Archive. This family archive did not come down to us in an organized way: the images found in Villa La Pietra had been stored by the Acton family in albums, in drawers, in hat boxes, in cupboards, or mixed up with correspondence. Alta Macadam, the archivist who organized the Acton Photograph Archive (see Fig. 37.1), had the hard task of creating a system that could reflect not only a chronological order, but also a sort of ecosystem in which information on the verso of the photographs would add meaning to the family history.[2]

THE ACTON PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVE
Research and Conservation at Villa La Pietra
3
Villa La Pietra
New York University

Fig. 37.1 *The Acton Photograph Archive*: *Research and Conservation at Villa La Pietra 3*, cover image. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

The archive includes family photographs and photographs of the interior and garden of Villa La Pietra, and it documents the years ranging from the beginning of the twentieth century, when the villa was purchased by Hortense Mitchell Acton and Arthur Acton, up to the time of the death of Sir Harold, Hortense and Arthur's son, in 1994.

---

[2] For more information about the archive, see *The Acton Photograph Archive*, booklet produced by New York University, 2010.

The archive contains several photographs of women, mostly Acton family friends, and I felt the impulse to reflect on the lives these women lived. As a photographer myself, I have focused in my artwork on the relevance portraiture has in defining gender difference. The thoughts I share in this chapter are driven by my emotional reaction to these images of women from the Acton Photograph Archive. We are all well aware that society and culture create gender roles, and these roles are settled as ideal or appropriate for a person of that specific gender. This is the perspective from which I am presenting my investigation on and reaction to the Acton Photograph Archive.

Another preliminary note: to the best of my knowledge, all the photographs included in the presentation were made by men. Portrait studios were generally run by men and the history of photography has seen very few women rise to fame between the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Women would learn the how-to of photography because they were married to male pioneers or had close relationships with the families of these pioneers. The earliest women photographers opened their studios in Northern Europe, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, and Sweden from the 1840s. The first studios run by women in New York City opened in the 1890s.

We must acknowledge the fact that the Acton Photograph Archive is aligned with the standards of portrait photography in those years, and women were represented as symbols of beauty and purity. However, we will see that quite often the gaze of these women conveys different messages, because their expression could not be controlled by the photographer the way it would be controlled by a painter, for instance.

A photo archive is generally created out of a photo collection and refers to any archive of photographs, from film and print preservation of vintage photography to stock photography. However, archives should not be considered only as places of conservation; in fact they represent an ecosystem that is never totally neutral and that is always changing. Moreover, photographs are three-dimensional objects: they have a peculiar physicality; they present traces of handling and use; they had a previous life; and they circulated in social, political and private environments, like family collections. As I stated before, the Acton Photograph Archive is a family archive and did not come to us in an organized way: the images have been organized in order to reflect and add meaning to the family history.

Roland Barthes said that there is a story behind every photograph, and sometimes more than one.[3] Considering this insight, I decided to look at the images to interpret the subtext they seem to (or may) convey.

The photograph of Cora Antinori (see Fig. 37.2) was found with a letter with no date to Harold Acton from Cora's brother. It was addressed from Palazzo Antinori. What triggered my interest in this photograph was this letter without a date. There is more than one story behind every photograph. The idea that comes from looking at such a beautiful, mysterious image generates new ideas.

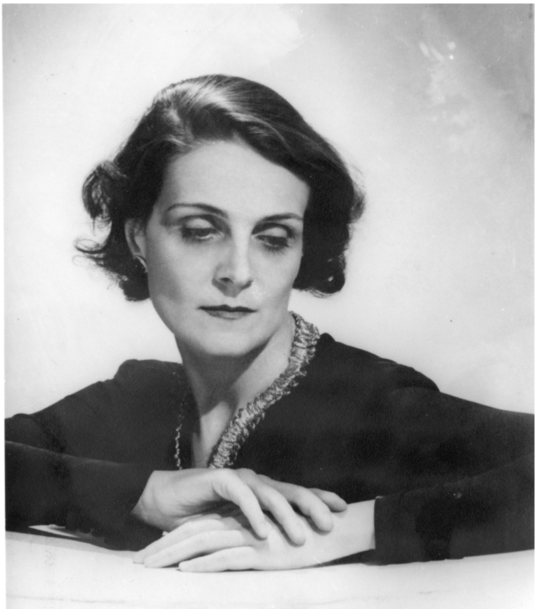


Fig. 37.2 Cora Antinori, undated. Photograph found with an undated letter to Harold Acton addressed from Palazzo Antinori from her brother. Archival Series Number I.A.4.2.-18. recto. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

---

[3] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*: *Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), pp. 99–100. 'The Photograph justifies this desire, even if it does not satisfy it: I can have the fond hope of discovering truth only because Photography's *noeme* is precisely *that-has-been*, and because I live in the illusion that it suffices to clean the surface of the image in order to accede to *what is behind*: to scrutinize means to turn the photograph over, to enter into the paper's depth, to reach its other side (what is hidden is for us Westerners more 'true' than what is visible).

Photographs often come as matted or mounted prints, so they are not only reproductions of the persons or events represented in them, they acquire the status of three-dimensional material objects. As such they are subject to the processes of normal deterioration or damage; they are used, handled, mounted, stamped and classified. One image that is not reproduced here is mounted on a green mat with the signature of Pierre Choumoff.[4] It shows an unidentified elegant woman with a strong profile and a gaze that reaches out beyond the limits of the image: a powerful representation of a woman who is not intimidated, but looks somewhere out of the frame, to some unknown event or person.

The Acton Photograph Archive mostly includes portraits taken by professionals or well-off amateurs recording high-status social activities of the wealthier classes. The recording of personal milestones, family celebrations, work or leisure activities, social conditions, or using photographs as calling cards became commonplace in the nineteenth century and after.

In the following photographs (see Figs. 37.3 and 37.4), Rosa Lanza di Scalea is dressed up in Persian costume for the fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costumes given at Villa Schifanoia in 1914 by Lewis Einstein, an American diplomat and historian.[5] She was wearing a dress designed by Paul Poiret[6] of Paris.

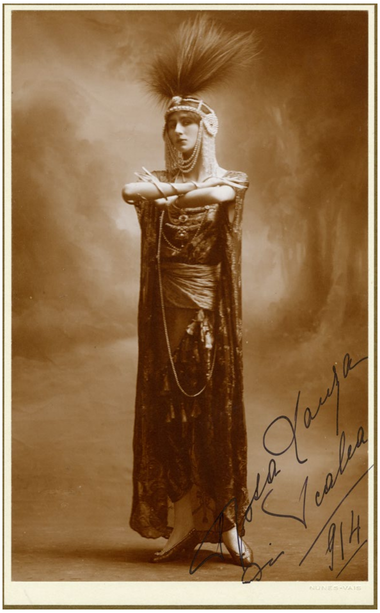
---

Alas, however hard I look, I discover nothing: if I enlarge, I see nothing but the grain of the paper: I undo the image for the sake of its substance; and if I do not enlarge, if I content myself with scrutinizing, I obtain this sole knowledge, long since possessed at first glance: that this indeed has been: the turn of the screw had produced nothing. In front of the Winter Garden Photograph I am a bad dreamer who vainly holds out his arms toward the possession of the image; I am Golaud exclaiming 'Misery of my life!' because he will never know Melisande's truth (Melisande does not conceal, but she does not speak. Such is the Photograph: it cannot *say* what it lets us see.'

[4] Pierre Choumoff was a French-Russian portrait photographer from Belarus who worked in a photography studio in Paris and died in Poland in 1936. He was quite famous as a portraitist, and some of his most famous clients, among others, were Albert Einstein, Igor Stravinsky, Serge Prokofiev. His portraits were imbued above all with the personality of his client. He would adapt his photographic technique accordingly, as a painter would do. He said of photographs that it is only a matter of understanding through an intuitive and psychological effort what is characteristic of the person to be grasped.

[5] Lewis Einstein was a career diplomat stationed in Constantinople during World War I and would serve as an important witness to the Armenian Genocide.

[6] Paul Poiret (1879–1944) was a leading French fashion designer, a famous and influential couturier during the first two decades of the twentieth century.



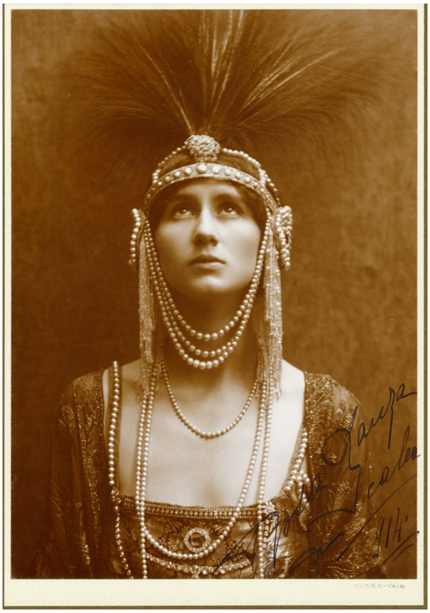


Fig. 37.3 (left) Rosa Lanza di Scalea, dressed in Persian costume for the fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costumes [designed by Paul Poiret of Paris] given by [the US Ambassador/consul] Lewis Einstein at Villa Schifanoia 1914. Signed and dated on the recto. Photographs by Mario Nunes Vais. Archival Series Number I.A.4.2.-folder23a.-100a. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

Fig. 37.4 (right) Rosa Lanza di Scalea, dressed in Persian costume for the fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costumes [designed by Paul Poiret of Paris] given by [the US Ambassador/consul] Lewis Einstein at Villa Schifanoia 1914. Signed and dated on the recto. Photographs by Mario Nunes Vais. Archival Series Number I.A.4.2.-folder23a.-100c. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

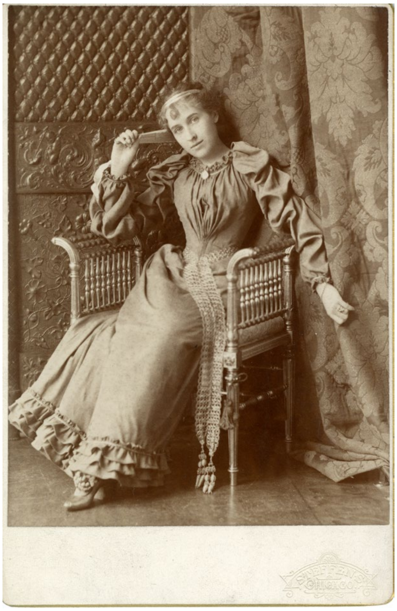
These photographs were made by Mario Nunes Vais.[7] In my opinion, even though the pose can vary according to context and other factors, we can say in essence, following Brian Roberts in his essay 'Photographic

---

[7] Mario Nunes Vais, was a well-educated and elegant man who lived in Florence at the turn of the century (1856–1932). He was not a professional photographer and considered his work a hobby. For about forty years he realized more than sixty-thousand photographs. Attentive and curious about the world around him, he was able through his photographs to portray the society of his time, without limitations and always inspired by his strong artistic sense.

Portraits: Narrative and Memory', that we 'show ourselves in a "pose", but we also hide behind a pose'.[8]

The dedication annotated on the verso of a cabinet card photograph[9] by Steffens, Chicago of Louise Crawford (see Fig. 37.5), 'Yours while Louise Crawford, July 2nd 1891', drew my attention after I saw another image of Crawford (see Fig. 37.6) in her wedding dress before marrying Mr Bates in Chicago. If you compare the two images and you take a superficial look at the beautiful dresses, her poses and the positions of her body, you see wealth. However, the two images carry a strong difference. In Figure 6 I see sadness, being lost in her thoughts, or maybe just a sense of an unknown and unpredictable future.



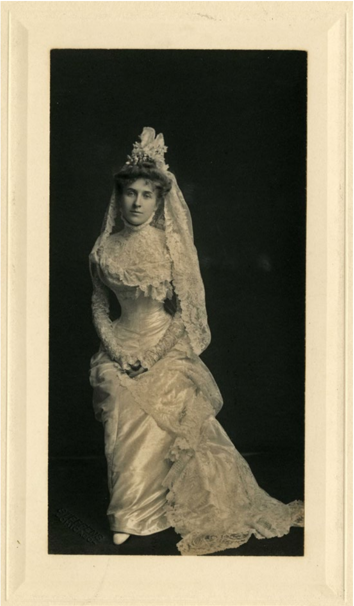


Fig. 37.5 Louise Crawford, 1891, cabinet card. Photo by Steffens, Chicago. Annotated on the verso 'Yours while Louise Crawford, July 2nd '91'. Archival Series Number I.B.3.5.-2.-recto. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

Fig. 37.6 Louise Bates, née Crawford, in her wedding dress ca. 1890s. Archival Series Number I.B.3.5.51.-6. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

---

[8] Brian Roberts, 'Photographic Portraits: Narrative and Memory', *FQS Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung / FQS Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12:2 (2011), n.p., https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.2.1680; http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1680/3203.

[9] First introduced in the 1860s, cabinet card photographs were similar to *cartes-de-visites*, only larger.

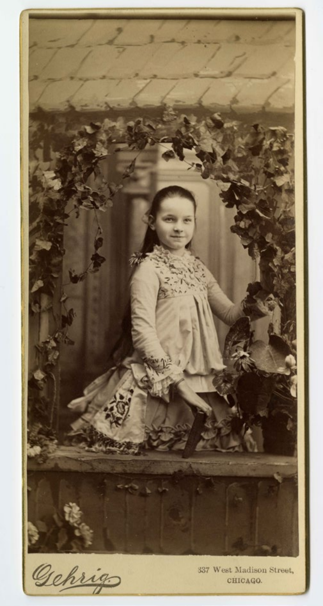
A cabinet card, not reproduced in this chapter, taken at Main, a photographic studio on Lenox Ave, New York, portrays Agnes Meyer with an annotation on the back by Arthur Acton. This triggered questions about who the photographer was and what s/he wanted to represent, what kind of relationship s/he had with his or her subject. Taking into consideration annotations and the deterioration of the image, which indicated use and handling, I felt like an archaeologist in front of an unexpected, yet hard-to-decipher story. We look at a representation of someone and then we have to re-interpret it.

Another example of a photograph that raises questions of interpretation is a cabinet card taken by Steffens in Chicago that portrays a young Hortense Mitchell Acton. The card is not reproduced here, however it is even more intriguing to me because on the back it bears the mark of a photo transfer, caused by chemical action and compression. It was probably kept squeezed in a box full of photographs. To me this card raises questions about why the two cards were stacked together: what was the relationship between Hortense and the unidentified girl whose image is faintly imprinted in the back of the cabinet card?

In the last series of images, I would like to conclude by making an excursus through Hortense Mitchell Acton's life, from being pictured as a child in Chicago in a cabinet card photo by Gehrig, Chicago (see Fig. 37.7), to an elegant woman photographed in Florence in front of Villa La Pietra, the place she so strongly desired and acquired in 1907, after having rented it for several years (see Figs. 37.8 and 37.9).

---

Measuring approximately four inches by six inches and mounted on cardstock (similar to cardboard), cabinet card photos got their name from their — they were just the right size to be displayed on a cabinet. Although some cabinet cards depicting landscapes can be found, most featured Victorian-era portraits of individuals or families — it was popular to mail cabinet cards to friends and family living abroad. Early cabinet cards were sepia-toned; in later years, the majority of them were printed in black and white. Many cabinet cards feature the name and location of the photographer printed on the front of the card underneath the picture. Some have fancy back-marks advertising the photographer (this trend increased towards the end of the century when advertising became commonplace), whereas some have no markings at all. Cabinet cards reached their peak of popularity in the 1870s through the 1890s. They continued to be made into the 1900s, albeit less frequently. With the introduction of the real photo postcard in the early twentieth century, cabinet cards fell almost completely out of favor in the US, and only managed to hang on for a little longer in Europe (Source: *Collectors Weekly* http://www.collectorsweekly.com/photographs/cabinet-cards).



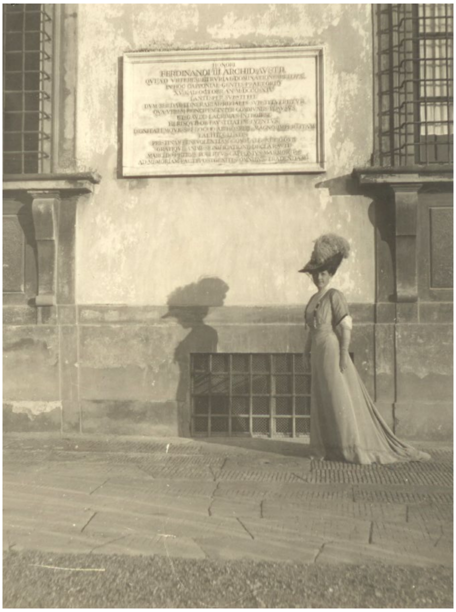


Fig. 37.7 (left) Hortense Mitchell Acton as a child, ca. 1870. Cabinet card photo by Gehrig, Chicago. Archival Series Number I.B.1.3.-64.recto. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

Fig. 37.8 (right) Hortense Mitchell Acton outside Villa La Pietra ca. 1903. Archival Series Number I.B.1.3.-103. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

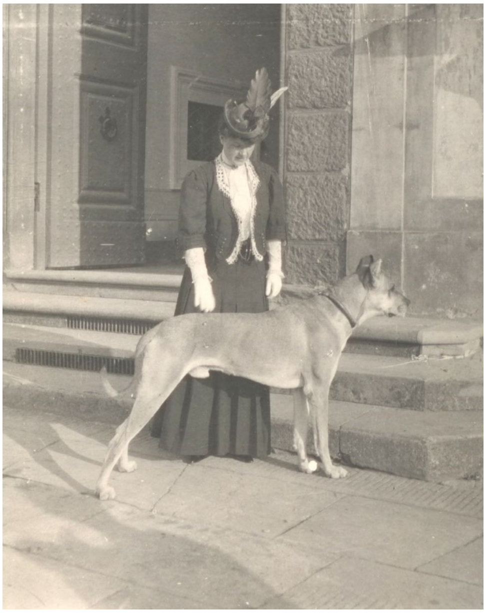


Fig. 37.9 Hortense Mitchell Acton outside Villa La Pietra with the dog Caesar 1903. Archival Series Number I.B.1.3.-105. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

Hortense poses outside Villa La Pietra (see Fig. 37.8): the composition of the photograph is quite notable, with carefully framed shadow that creates a well-thought-out balance. Hortense is with the dog Caesar (see Fig. 37.9), and we also notice the presence of the photographer here, through the before-mentioned projected shadow.

There are three more photographs taking us through Hortense's life that caught my attention, and that are not reproduced in this chapter.

The first image shows Hortense in Red Cross Uniform in 1915. This is one of the photographs for which the negative has been found. There are contrasting elements in this photograph, as Hortense is wearing the Red Cross uniform while knitting and sitting in her beautiful garden at Villa La Pietra. These elements are in tension: the idea of being committed to the Red Cross is at odds with the luxury of the environment.

The second photograph shows Hortense in a studio portrait by Photographie Paris, 3 Place de la Madeleine. She is wearing a dress that is still preserved in Villa La Pietra and she stands in front of a mirror with a coronet of pearls adorning her head. She looks at the photographer, while holding a bouquet of flowers; this is a very classical pose in the photography of the time. The third photograph was made during the same photo session, but in this image the story goes in a different direction: the reflection in the mirror has been painted over, probably with dark ink, and only the reflection of Hortense's coronet of pearls can be seen. There is more research to be done on this image and the possible reasons why such significant alterations have been made to it.

During the same fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costume given by Lewis Einstein at Villa Schifanoia in 1914 at which we admired Rosa Lanza di Scalea wearing the beautiful dress designed by Poiret, photographer Mario Nunes Vais also took photographs of Hortense Mitchell Acton, also wearing a dress designed by Poiret (see Fig. 37.10), and Arthur Acton, her husband.

The last photograph to illustrate this excursion into the Acton Photograph Archive is a studio portrait of Hortense Mitchell Acton (see Fig. 37.11) signed by Baron de Meyer,[10] date unidentified, between the 1920s and the 1930s.

---

[10] Baron Adolf de Meyer worked for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. He had set a standard for elegance and style, however his style inspired by the pictorialism that informed many fashion photographs was considered old-fashioned by the 1930s, and he had to leave *Harper's Bazaar* in 1932. A master of fashion photography and society portraiture, he captured an elegant world that vanished with the onset of World

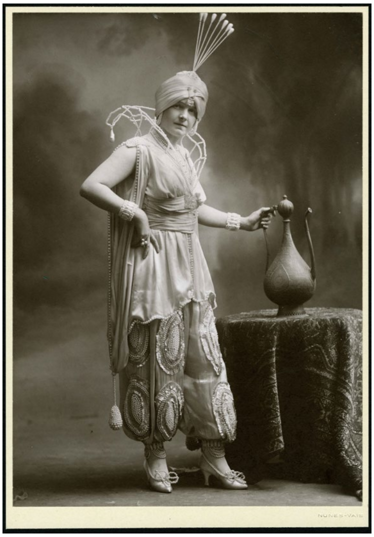


Fig. 37.10 Hortense Mitchell Acton dressed up in Persian costume for the fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costume [designed by Paul Poiret of Paris] given by [the US ambassador/consul] Lewis Einstein at Villa Schifanoia 1914. Photograph signed by Nunes Vais. Archival Series Number I.B.1.4.36.-18a. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

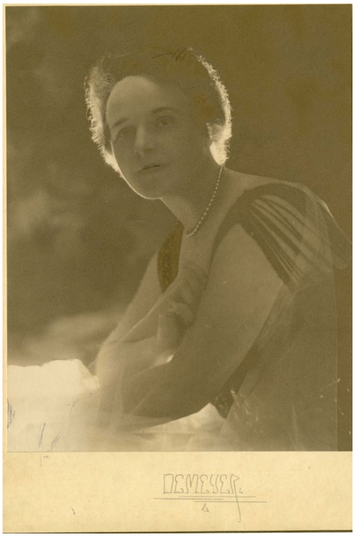


Fig. 37.11 Hortense Mitchell Acton, ca. 1920. Signed studio portraits by De Meyer. One of these was the original, which was removed from its frame in the Biblioteca in Villa La Pietra in June 2004 and replaced with a digital print. Archival Series Number I.B.1.4.42.-90. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence.

---

War Two. His sophisticated photographs, marked by an unconventional use of light, have become models for many contemporary fashion photographers. '[Baron de Meyer] was also a magical portrait photographer, employed by Vogue from 1913 to 1921, so gifted that Cecil Beaton dubbed him "the Debussy of photography."

In this portrait of Hortense, now a sophisticated lady, probably in her mid-fifties, she is steeped in light because the main source of illumination is behind her. This is one of the main characteristics of de Meyer's photographs, and was very rarely used by photographers in those years. Hortense's silhouette is strong and suggestive, her pose in contrast with her gaze, which makes her seem lost in thought as she focuses beyond the photographer's presence. She seems to convey a sense of herself that is 'well outside the constraint of earthly beings.'[11]

---

Where once fashion photography was stiff and awkward, he introduced dreamy, beautifully lit works, the better to flatter his clients…' Lynn Yaeger, 'Saluting Baron Adolph de Meyer, Vogue's First Staff Photographer', Vogue Online, 1 September 2015, http://www.vogue.com/article/adolph-de-meyer-birthday-vogue-photographer

[11] Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, *Fashion's Double*: *Representations of Fashion in Painting, Photography and Film* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 27.

# Bibliography

Baldwin, Gordon and Jürgens, Martin, *Looking at Photographs*: *A Guide to Technical Terms* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Publications, 2009).

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*: *Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981).

CW Collectors Weekly, *Cabinet Card Photographs*, *Overview*, https://www.collectorsweekly.com/photographs/cabinet-cards

Geczy, Adam and Vicki Karaminas, *Fashion's Double*: *Representations of Fashion in Painting, Photography and Film* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

Greenough, Sarah, et al., *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow*: *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Photography* (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1989).

Marien, Mary Warner, *Photography*: *A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2014).

Roberts, Brian, 'Photographic Portraits: Narrative and Memory', *FQS Forum*: *Qualitative Social Research* 12:2 (2011), n.p., http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1680/3203

Rosenblum, Naomi, *A History of Women Photographers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010).

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2008).

Szarkowski, John, *Photography Until Now* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989).

*The Acton Photograph Archive* (New York University, 2010).

Yaeger, Lynn, 'Saluting Baron Adolph de Meyer, Vogue's First Staff Photographer', Vogue Online, 1 September 2015, https://www.vogue.com/article/adolph-de-meyer-birthday-vogue-photographer

# 38. Reconciliations at Sea: Reclaiming the Lusophone Archipelago in Mónica de Miranda's Video Works

*M. Neelika Jayawardane*

Barthes conceived the photograph as a literal 'emanation of the referent', from which radiant energy from once-present 'real bod[ies], which w[ere] there' links observers in present time to beings who existed in the past.[1] He referenced, here, the way in which Sontag envisaged these radiations to be much like 'delayed rays' from the stars, emanating through space and time; these rays — carrying not just proof of life, but life itself — reach observers far removed from their moment and place of existence, forming what Barthes called 'a sort of umbilical cord' linking 'the body of the photographed thing' to our gaze.[2] Like ethnographic recordings of voices from the past, the material object of the photograph, and light — which he called a '*carnal medium*' — not only bring back the departed, but the milieu in which they lived out their lives. If the sonic conventions of the time are reproduced in voice recordings, photographs subtly convey the norms of personal posture and relationality to others, as well as the relationship between

---

[1] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*: *Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), pp. 80–81.

[2] Ibid., p. 81.

© 2019 M. Neelika Jayawardane, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.38

one person to another, and to the external world — social, economic, political worlds. This 'carnal medium' of light arrives at the doorstep of our present moment, bearing evidence of whether our loved ones' environments provided them with the stability necessary for sustenance, or made their lives precarious and unviable.

I suggest, in this essay that there is another facet with which we might engage when we look at photographs, especially when it comes to records of the past to which we have a personal attachment, those images containing narratives with which our own are inevitably entangled. This added dimension is especially palpable when the photographs are those through which immigrant, exiles, and otherwise dislocated persons make sense of their experiences of being 'out of place'. When we see a photograph with actors and landscapes significant to our personal emotional geographies, we imagine, sometimes, that they have power to help us recreate our own fantasies of belonging. Often, these compulsive and repetitive re-enactments are an attempt to recapture moments of compromised power and loss. Through memory and creative re-creation, we conjure up stage-play worlds in order not only to revisit but to recreate otherwise inaccessible scenes from the past. These worlds we reconstruct serve as material locations onto which we can project idealised versions of our personal history, re-enacting scenes of damaged pasts, wilfully inserting ourselves as actors onto the scene.

Reading Sontag reminds us that the pleasure we experience in taking and looking at photographs is indicative of our '[p]oignant longings for beauty […] for a redemption and celebration of the body'; however, we know, from her writing, that 'other, less liberating feelings are expressed as well,' including the '*compulsion* to photograph: to turn experience itself into a way of seeing'.[3] This desire to stage, distill, and record — an impulse that has become more obvious in this second decade of the 2000s than it was during Sontag's lifetime — has linkages to displaced persons' compulsive rituals of repetition. Whilst repetitions and revisitations of a task can be lauded as a conduit to a meditative state — part of the methodology of striving for completeness, for union with the task, and mindfulness — they can also be an indication of woundedness. Rather than a mindfulness and presence that lead to alleviation of anxiety, we (consciously or unconsciously) return ourselves to a damaged or unresolved past precisely because it is the source of anxiety. Yet, we often find that our repetitive returns offer no clarity, alleviation from pain, or understanding. Rather than allowing us to find release through acknowledgment, our rituals are re-enactments of trauma, directing the choices we make in life and making us return, obsessively, to the source of pain.

---

[3] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* [1977] (New York: Picador, 2001), p. 24.

If Barthes famously theorised that photographs have the uncanny ability to recall absent persons back to life, I — as a person currently living in another century, but intrinsically tied to the political and economic realities produced by the century in which Barthes' and Sontag's words were written — am interested in tracing the ways in which image repertoires work in our worlds, and how the discourses of transnationalism, migration, and displacement might be networked with their thoughts about photography. How might we, the remainders and reminders of the twentieth century's upheavals, regard images of now-inaccessible worlds? How might these images act as conduits to self-re-fashioning, as we attempt to recreate and insert ourselves into narratives of belonging that have become unavailable to us?

It is these frameworks — the ways in which we return to image-worlds in order to articulate dislocation, as well as to re-stage home and belonging — through which I want to respond to Luso-Angolana photographer and video artist Mónica de Miranda's photography and video work. The visual self-narratives that emerge out of her films, *An Ocean Between Us*, *Once Upon a Time*, and *Field Work*, in particular, become conduits to psychological and emotional explorations, wherein geographical travel, open oceanic vistas, 'middle passages' of canals connecting the ocean to rivers going inland, and tenders — boats used to transport goods and people to larger ships at harbours — are used as metaphors for precarious existences as postcolonial subjects, of life created in in-between spaces, of estrangement, as well as the powerful desire to recreate and reconstruct 'home' in the artist's own terms. In addition, de Miranda uses various cinematic techniques, including fractured narrative styles, three-screen installations that play the same narrative with slightly different timing, and soundscapes that recall both the freedom represented by the ocean and the technologies of the state that attempt to control migratory bodies — including radar and satellite sounds — to mirror dislocation, desire for boundless freedom, and the difficulties of economic and geographical mobility for many from the geopolitical Third World.

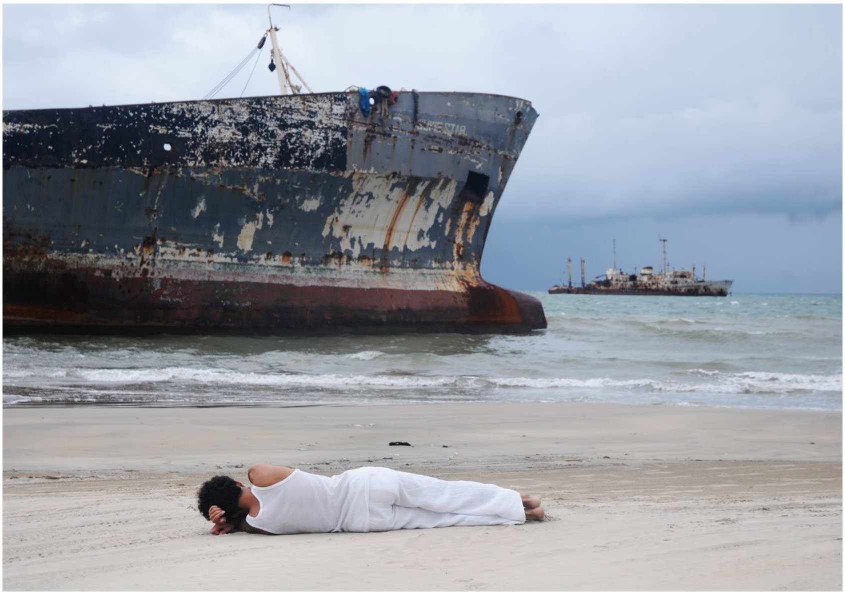


Fig. 38.1 Monica de Miranda, woman in front of a rusting ship. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

In my engagement with de Miranda's video works, our desire to relocate our diasporic bodies and experiences through return — to investigate the emotional cartography of an imprinted 'home' location, and to 'put to rest' the voices, smells, and image hauntings we experience but cannot consciously identify — is read through my own experiences of dislocation and attempts to navigate myself through to a 'homespace' using images, words, and thought. I know that sometimes, after much time lost at sea, we may find eventual acceptance of what seems unacceptable in the beginning — not to long for one nation or physical location to call home, but to find belonging in unbelonging, to feel not-incomplete within a state of flux and formlessness.

***

Among more privileged travellers, the act of photographing and the photographs themselves have long been used to narrate mobility, access, and power. But for the 'other', less powerful communities, photographs are evidence of their dislocation and fracture. At the same time, they also assure us of a once-stable history — evidence of belonging and of belongings, ordinary customs and rituals repeated, of banal moments recorded as part of the story of rootedness in a geographical and cultural location. Our collections of familial and familiar circles are conduits to self, even when they do not depict us directly. They help us re-establish familiarity, belonging, self, and connection to those who we are no longer able to contact, creating a bond between our capacity for visualising belonging and stability. These acts of looking are indicative of our psychological need for returning to pasts that are no longer physically or emotionally available. Yet we know that images are not stable — physically, they deteriorate; and conceptually, socially, and politically, they shift meaning, confounding those who wish for photographs to contain stable, documentary narratives or confirm the past that they know to be 'true'.

For those who came from families well-connected enough to networks of power and privilege — who had access to cameras, rolls of film, and even home movie-making equipment — there is an abundance of uncanny evidence, residuals of absent persons to whom we are narratively and genetically connected. We return to these images when we lose those in the images to death. Sometimes, we return to them during those instances when we lose our own tethering to our stable understanding of self. In mourning for a beloved other to whom we attached ourselves, and to recollect the beloved self — unmoored by pain — we return to our two-dimensional stockpiles that faithfully preserve worlds we can no longer access. For others, the photographic record is less abundant, or altogether absent. If there is a violent rupture in one's history, resulting in disruption to family attachments to home spaces, there will inevitably be an absence of images.

The resulting lacunae in family image banks also result in ruptures to our pathways of imaginary return, creating estrangements between genealogical contact zones. Whereas friends from more stable political and national narratives will look to family and national albums to locate themselves, those whose histories were violently interrupted will have the added burden of longing for what is regarded as a completely 'normative' twentieth century experience: layers of photographs, moving from sepia-toned, white-bordered and staged studio portraits to those taken at home using 35mm cameras and Polaroid Instamatics, each layer of images illuminating a family's movement through visual technologies of the last century. That separation from 'normative' narratives of modernity leaves us with an abundance of longing; we recreate returns, and build image banks that signify the contradictions of displacement — to establish belonging and right of return, and the impossibility of return.

Marianne Hirsch, in her seminal article, 'Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile' — detailing the ways in which traumatic memory is transmitted in families of those who survived the Holocaust and the effects of that 'received trauma' on the second generation — named the phenomenon 'postmemory'.[4] Hirsch explains that this transmitted trauma, as well as the alienation created by not having been present *there* — and thus unable to share the experiences that caused and created one's family's upheavals and suffering — produces powerful longings in the generation born to survivors, who long to be a part of a world to which it is impossible to return, partly because of temporal shifts, but also because that world has been physically destroyed.

> Children of survivors live at a further temporal and spatial remove from that decimated world. The distance separating them from the locus of origin is the radical break of unknowable and incomprehensible persecution; for those born after, it is a break impossible to bridge.[5]

Hirsch explains that despite the geographical and temporal distances that separate the next generation from their parents' 'decimated worlds,' the depth of trauma, 'mourning and memory [...] imparts [...] something akin to memory.'[6] This 'belated' generation grows up 'dominated by narratives that preceded their birth', with their own experiences and narratives being 'evacuated' by the experiences of their parents; yet, despite their intricate connections with their parents' trauma, they find that they are unable to fully understand the traumatic memories of their parents, or be able to recreate their worlds.[7]

---

[4] Hirsch first refers to the term 'post-memory' in 'Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory': Marianne Hirsch, 'Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory', *Discourse*: *Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 15:2: Special Issue: The Emotions, Gender, and the Politics of Subjectivity (1992–1993), 3–29.

[5] Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile', *Poetics Today* 17:4 (1996), 659–86 (p. 662).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

> Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.[8]

Hirsch points out that latter generations, who arrive post-trauma, are only able to access the 'voids' of disappeared worlds through creatively producing aesthetic works connecting their own longing to belong to what is, essentially, a received, and imagined version of the past; this hunger, she argues, produces 'diasporic aesthetics of temporal and spatial exile that needs simultaneously to rebuild and to mourn,' inventing in order to 'relocate' themselves in time and space.[9]

Here, I wish to emphasise that I am not equating the experiences of Holocaust survivors, and those of their children, with those of other displaced people of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; rather, I am attempting to note that there are fractured parallels, with varying degrees of separation, between the experiences of the 'post-memory' generation and the experiences of the children of other displaced people. This is especially true when it comes to their desire to insert themselves into their parents' worlds, a desire that is heightened by photographs depicting their parents' past lives. The children of postcolonial migrants — displaced as a result of 'ethnically-motivated' pogroms, systematic violence and state-sponsored brutality, and at other times from more difficult to identify structural and economic violence — similarly seek out visual evidence of the pasts that they cannot be a part of, but to which they feel powerfully connected. For the immigrant, the exile, and the displaced — whether that displacement is a result of economic, environmental, or violent political upheavals — repetitive returns to often idealised, lost locations, via images of family events in which they may not even have been old enough to be a part, is an act of circumnavigating the trauma of dislocation. Photographs and rarer collections of moving images become containers of emanations of the past, essential to narrating the condition of being post-violence, post-war, post-colonial.

Because of their desire to recreate the worlds they lost, postcolonial immigrants, refugees, exiles and asylum seekers are often accused of having '[t]oo deep an attachment to territoriality and locatedness';[10]

---

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 664.

[10] Griselda Pollock, 'Back to Africa: From Natal to Natal in the Locations of Memory', *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 5:1–2 (2006), 49–72 (p. 62).

this inability to move beyond 'nationalisms, essentialisms' is regarded as a negative characteristic associated with immigrants.[11] Attachments to territory and former identities produce unseemly fissures in their persons and identities when they relocate to new territories. These ruptures — material evidence of having been ejected violently, of not being able to mould the self into new social and physical geographies — prevent them from cultivating the desired native's seamlessness; this appearance of having little to no apparent breakage — an idealised characteristic in the 'native' — is what the second generation often attempts to mimic.

Visual theorist Griselda Pollock named this uncanny, inexplicable existence of another place within our memory '"natal memory" — that is, the imaginary sense of belonging created by the familiarity of the first places that we learn to know before we learn their geographical, historical or national identities.' Pollock suggests that although our conscious persons may not be able to identify the significance of a particular location to our being, 'places, colours, smells, geology, vistas' survive in us; it is 'often unrecognized memory of place and space associated with where we are born [which we absorbed] without the fear of separation [...] Thus it marks our earliest and slow emergence into a sense not of place as a topographical landscape but of emplacement in a phenomenological world.' Because this imprinting is something that came into existence prior to our knowledge of and attachment to nation, 'natal memory' cannot, she argues, be associated with 'the locus of any kind of nationalism.' However, Pollock is cautious about over-romanticising our unconscious attachments, or pointing to natal memory as evidence of an 'essential' sort of belonging to a place; she points out,

> [...] when we learn that these deep impressions are in some sense, false, for they are not the grounds of a consolidated identity, but merely a contingency, the chance of being born there because of whatever vagaries of one's parents' political or economic migrancy, then a profound dislocation occurs within the psychic spaces furnished by visual and spatial memory. It is at this level of collision between knowledge and phenomenological sensation of the given world that the experience of dislocation is produced and can become thereby a motor or a topic for some other kind of working through: in analysis, writing or art.[12]

---

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

Thus, far from being a location of peaceful reflection and belonging, 'natal memory' is theorised 'as a source of uncanniness and anxiety,' and a form of imprinting that is formed when a rupture is experienced, or 'only when dislocation effects a caesura between emplacement and location.'[13] It is this 'uncanny anxiety' that creates fruitful collaborations — if, ultimately, never providing a complete sense of belonging, ease, and 'closure' — between diasporic artists, writers, and the locations that they were forced to leave behind as children. The caesura created by migration and displacement — the long pause between consciously present memories firmly attached to a location, and the unconscious desire to return to an often-unidentifiable place — becomes the motivation for producing work that attempts to create a tangible homespace, or to investigate our uncanny anxieties that are a result of dislocation.

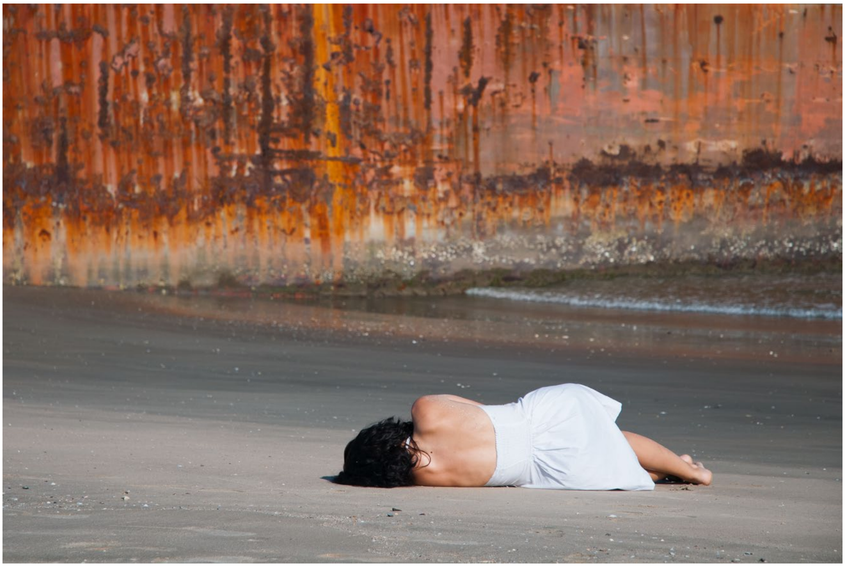


Fig. 38.2 Monica de Miranda, woman in front of a rusting ship (closeup). Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

***

Through her explorations of the Afro-Portuguese world, Mónica de Miranda's works reflect on the history of contact between Portugal and its archipelago of (former) colonies around the world, filtered through her own fictionalised narratives and experiences. Using a net cast widely along the Lusophone archipelago, de Miranda maps currents that carried bodies, ideas, and emotions, hinting at the fact that most who were in the way of the tidal wave of empire did not have the power to change or affect history. The resulting disruptions are reflected in the elusive, fragmented, and reconfigured narratives that emerge in her films, *Once Upon a Time* (2012), *An Ocean Between Us* (2013), and the research project leading to the installation 'Home Sweet, Sour Home' (2013). For each project, de Miranda revisited locations significant to her family's memory and her own search for belonging. Her films and installation work locate — through reflecting on personal and family narratives — the ways in which displacement, travel, and colonial and postcolonial violence on the body have triangulated across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, imbedded in the maps that determine physiological, psychological, and emotional makeup of her subjectivity. All three works are, in the artist's words, a 'search for home […] biographical work,' in which she places herself 'into the scene,' combining 'documentary work with fiction.'[14] Much like the works of the 'postmemory' generation of artists, who produced aesthetic works that were expressions of their longing to belong to disappeared and decimated worlds of their parents' memory, de Miranda, too, rebuilds a narrative for herself; her works are a form of contemplating loss, mourning, and recreating in order to 'relocate' herself in time and space.

---

[13] Ibid.

De Miranda's films operate in the tradition of works about exile, dislocation, and displacement, as well as the less politically fraught genre of travel. Her mode of narrative sits strategically between fiction and documentary, exceeding the possibilities permitted by realism in order to get as close as possible to a truth that eludes traditional documentary and autobiographical practices. Her films are, thus, imagined autobiographies that narrate her experiences of being out of place, as well as the possibilities opened up by the enriching processes of contact. Various figures — sexual and romantic attachments, as well as de Miranda's friends — who come in and out of frames also act as conduits to temporary homes, especially in the absence of the familiar, reflecting psychological and emotional considerations about the effects of being a product of amalgamation and erasure.

---

[14] From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.

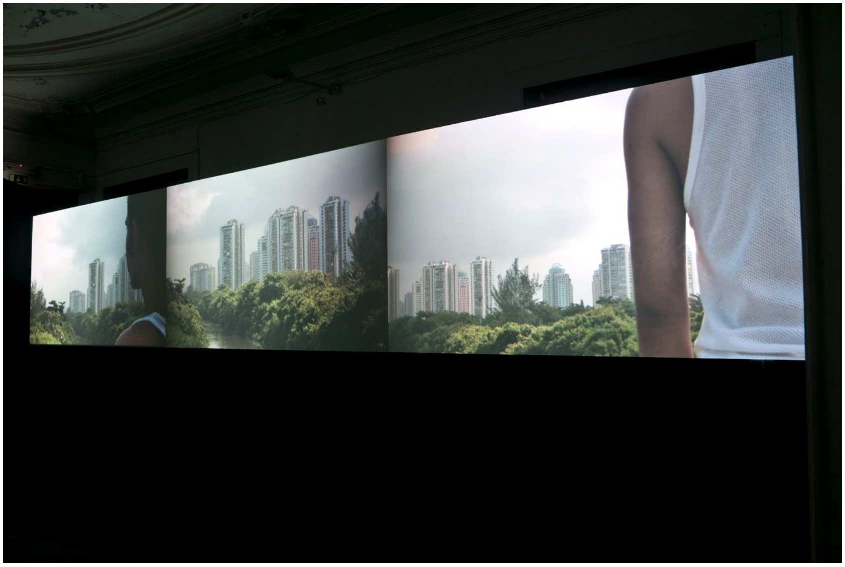


Fig. 38.3 Monica de Miranda, installation view of man looking at skyscrapers and greenery. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

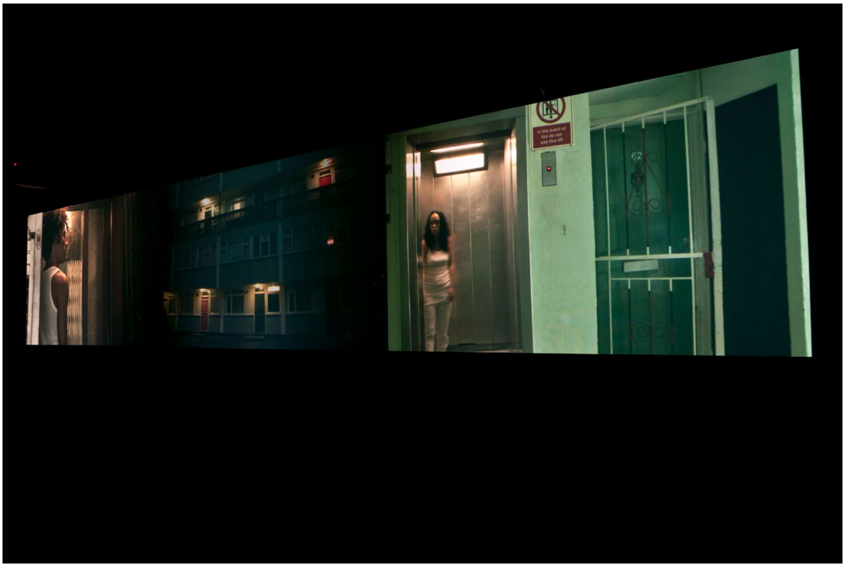


Fig. 38.4 Monica de Miranda, installation view of man and woman on boat. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

Her methodology begs an interpretation of her use of moving image technologies to mobilise her declarations of agency, arrival, and presence, wherein the camera becomes part of her investigations and her mobilisation and self-exploratory processes. Where image banks establishing family lineages and belonging to landscapes are scarce, she creates a film — a mobile set of tens of thousands of stills, themselves composed of unstable digital pixels — set at sea, with momentary anchorings and disembarkations on landscapes, only to return to a central narrative of dislocation. It is through the processes of filmmaking that she engages in reconstructing belonging and resituating her own identity, inserting her presence into a series of oceanic and landscapes, each of which were created through the momentum of the Portuguese colonial project. In *Once Upon a Time* (2013), *An Ocean Between Us* (2012), and 'Home Sweet, Sour Home' (2013), she revisits locations significant to 'memory and belonging'.

In her films, she relies almost solely on visual strategies to explore the significance of cityscapes, landscapes, and oceanic bodies to her project of remapping subjectivity and reconceptualising self through memory, imagined reconstruction, physical return, and creative production. *Once Upon a Time* offers the 'emotion of motion' in the form of a voyage, taking into account audience perceptions the visual elements of films, 'such as light, shade, textures, and colors that contribute to the comprehension of the filmic narrative.'[15] The strong presence of nostalgia, 'of a distant time, and a sense of disconnection to a space' — communicated using 'light, shade, textures and colors' — almost becomes an identifiable character.[16] De Miranda notes that her choices of 'chromatic and light arrangements are important for the creation of the narrative and the viewer's perception of the meanings and contents of the narrative.'[17] Together, these elements, along with her use of 'long shots and takes' reveal 'memory [as] an archive of images'.[18] They help us meditate on her experiences of navigating through personal spaces in which her family had once lived, or — in the absence of the physical home — the larger cultural and geographical environments they had occupied.

---

[15] Mónica de Miranda, 'Once Upon a Time', in her *Geography of Affections: Tales of Identity, Diaspora and Travel in the Work of Monica de Miranda*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Middlesex University, 2013, pp. 21–22, http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/13929/1/MdeMiranda_thesis.pdf

[16] Ibid., p. 22.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

In both films, the sea, itself a location of anxiety and the meditative acceptance of impermanence, having form and formlessness, at once life-giving, and life-destroying, is often a metaphor through which artists and writers engage with the presence of dualities. De Miranda notes that, for her, the 'ocean symbolically represents the unconscious desires, and the relationship represents the dualities within the self'.[19] In her films, the sea — the entity that separates Portugal and its former colonies, and also creates a platform for connecting disparate landscapes — is developed as a metaphor for liminality. This water — blue as it may be in de Miranda's imaginary — can also turn black with death; it is the body that permitted the voyages of colonial desire, camouflaging centuries of terror and swallowing so many African lives into anonymity. Yet, even as we recognise the sea as vast container of mourning that resonates with submerged narratives of painful separations and atrocity, de Miranda also regards it as a place in which one may find consolation, and even reconciliation.

'An Ocean Between Us' (2012), a high definition colour video with sound, is shown on a double split-screen. It is a narrative about migrants and immigration, caught in transitory, in-between spaces, and the nostalgia and longing created by being thus suspended between place and time. She writes that the film is 'geographical (hi)story-telling that tells my stories of immigration and personal histories of diaspora. It is an exploration of having to live in 'spaces of non-belonging and detachment'; she refers to these transit-spaces as 'no (wo)man's lands' where she found little refuge, which became 'a metaphor for my experience of immigration'.[20] It begins with the sounds of the harbour, before images appear. The first image is of a ship at sea, on the right screen; then, on the left screen, we see de Miranda in white, standing, facing the ship and the vastness of the ocean. After this, we see the interior of the ship, and a male figure in a white, tropical suit and a hat walking past shipping containers. Later, on the left screen, we see the man on a boat, as the anchor is lifted in the right screen facing the sea; the largeness of the waterscape frames his body. We see de Miranda, also on the boat, alone in the space of a cabin — the walls of which are plastered with photographic prints. She is asleep at a table laid out for a meal — her head on the white tablecloth. The man and a woman walk up and down the stairways inside the boat, which is anchored — de Miranda says — in a canal 'along the dock by the port of Lisbon, waiting for the "last call" to departure to Luanda [Angola]'.[21]

---

[19] Mónica de Miranda, 'An Ocean Between Us', in her *Geography of Affections*, p. 39.

[20] Ibid., p. 33.

Accompanying the long slow, shots of the boat, showing its two passengers as they stand facing the sea, or as they walk up and down staircases connecting the two stories of the boat, we hear sounds particular to a harbour. The soundscape of this film, in particular, is evocative of the 'acoustic traces of travelling and migration.'[22] On the top layer of sound, we hear boat engines, horns to warn other boats. But beneath those dominant sounds, we hear the sea, always present — so much so that it dominates the soundscape of the film. The boat, and the liminal space of the canal are the main locations of the film's narrative, as well as the two main metaphorical strategies de Miranda employs. The space of the boat, de Miranda theorises, is 'a discursive boundary; a subjective limit in the viewers' eyes, a dual interrogation of self as spectator and self on screen.'[23] She references Michel Foucault's words about the metaphorical power of boats, wherein he theorised the vessels as '"a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in, on itself and the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea."'[24]

---

[21] Ibid., p. 31.

[22] Ibid., p. 32.

[23] Ibid., p. 45.

[24] Foucault (1967: 47), quoted in Mónica de Miranda, 'An Ocean Between Us', in her *Geography of Affections*, p. 31.

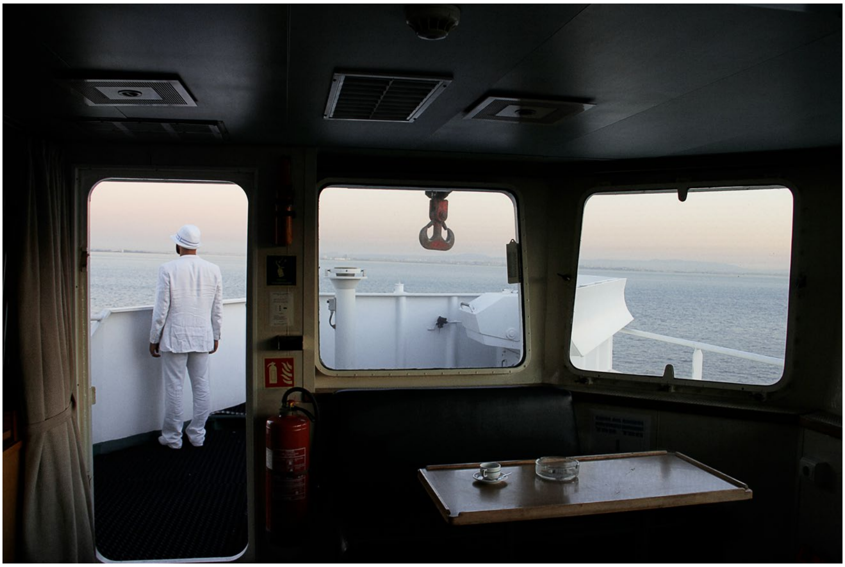


Fig. 38.5 Monica de Miranda, man on deck. Still from *An Ocean Between Us*, 2012. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

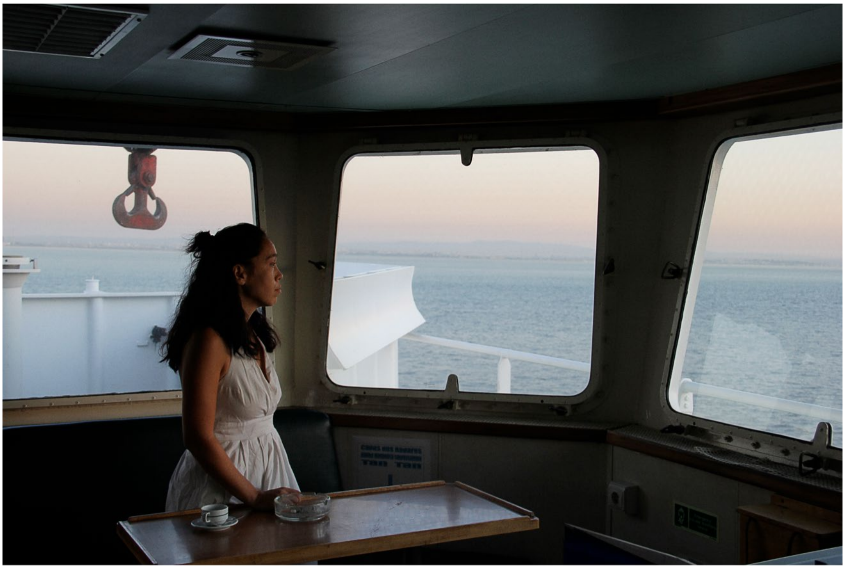


Fig. 38.6 Monica de Miranda, woman looking out from boat. Still from *An Ocean Between Us*, 2012. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

De Miranda specifies that the figure of the migrant is represented in the film by the meanderings of the couple — a man and a woman — both wearing white. They represents the colonial project's construction of the 'self' and 'other', resulting in postcolonial subjects who struggle to reconcile the presence of both self and other within them.[25] She writes that they are also, "companions [who] never meet physically as they are unconscious expressions, a love story and an inner relationship of the self".[26]We see these "companions" in frame after frame, situated in this liminal location of the canal — as well as the intersection of sea-faring history and the territories on which Portugal continues to maintain a footprint. They are both stationary and mobile, traversing in-between zones — anchored in the waterway between harbour and sea, the spaces of staircases connecting one story of the boat to another, and the spaces in-between each other. Yet the figures are not without power or agency; because some observers may recognise that the female figure is de Miranda, they may also realise that she is also the primary investigator and explorer, directing the narrative. De Miranda emphasizes, however, that in 'An Ocean Between Us', the actors "turn their backs to the camera" and guide us towards imagining a way of looking that is absent of an external gaze; instead, the "search is interior", outside of time and "a recognizable location or a territory".[27]

The installation 'Home Sweet, Sour Home' explores her memories of her maternal family's homes in Angola — as well as other homes in which they resided, however temporarily, in various locations in the Lusophone world, including Luanda, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and Mindelo, as well as in London, where the artist completed her university education. De Miranda 're-created', through her imagination and through the act of drawing representational sketches of the houses and interiors, guided by stories she was told about those spaces; that this was an exercise in re-creation, of making 'memory maps' was especially apt for her mother's and grandmother's houses in Angola, which she never inhabited, and of which she therefore did not have first-hand knowledge.

Her 'journey home' began with her re-enacting her revisitation of each house or apartment building in which she and her mother and grandmother lived; she attempted to actually find some of these homes, going to each country and city, tracking down addresses. Some, she says, were easy to find; others no longer existed — demolished, and replaced by a new building. Because of those disappearances, she had to 'recreate spaces' that resembled the architecture of the time, in line with her mother and grandmother's stories. Then, she began the process of making architectural sketches of the interiors.

---

[25] From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.

[26] Mónica de Miranda, 'An Ocean Between Us', in her *Geography of Affections*, p. 41.

[27] Ibid., p. 43.

> Because the houses were represented through my memory, they were projections made of affections, where some of the proportions of the drawings were influenced by my relationships with the people with whom I shared the house. Some rooms in the work are larger than they are in reality, other rooms do not have doors or windows. I include corridors that do not connect rooms to one another, and represent fragmented places that symbolize fragmented relationships lost in space and time. These places codified in a language that was too personal and emotional, needed translation, therefore I contracted some architects to redraw my houses and translate them into architecture sketches, so I could understand the projection of my own emotions contained through the house drawings in a more rational way.[28]

Altogether, she had twenty-five 'maps' of houses, including 'squats, to temporary accommodations […] family houses and hostels with addresses in Angola, Brazil, Portugal and the UK.'[29] These maps, rather than being to actual scale, 'are architectural projections of [her] memories of the houses [she] passed through between childhood to adulthood […] [they] symbolise struggles and conquests, insecurities and securities, absences and presences, oscillating between feelings of belonging and exclusion.' De Miranda tells me, in a conversation,

> My mother's homes […] I don't remember or know what they looked like; I only know them through my grandmother's stories. Bringing this out of memory was cathartic; drawing them involved connecting with the unconscious, coupled with the archetypal idea of a house. What I came up with, in my drawings, were emotional spaces; the rooms were often bigger or smaller than reality. They tell a lot about immigration, and my struggles to belong and find home.[30]

---

[28] Mónica de Miranda, 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', in her *Geography of Affections*, pp. 55–56.

[29] Ibid., p. 53.

[30] From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.

She understood, through this exercise, that the 'imagined home' is an emotional location, a 'place of affections that exist as a powerful evocative space.'[31]

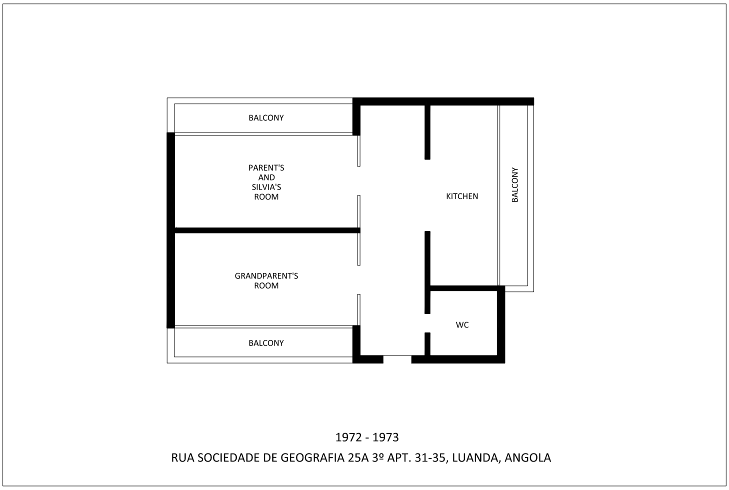

BALCONY
PARENT'S AND SILVIA'S ROOM
KITCHEN
BALCONY
GRANDPARENT'S ROOM
WC
BALCONY
1972 - 1973
RUA SOCIEDADE DE GEOGRAFIA 25A 3º APT. 31-35, LUANDA, ANGOLA

Fig. 38.7 Monica de Miranda, Luanda. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

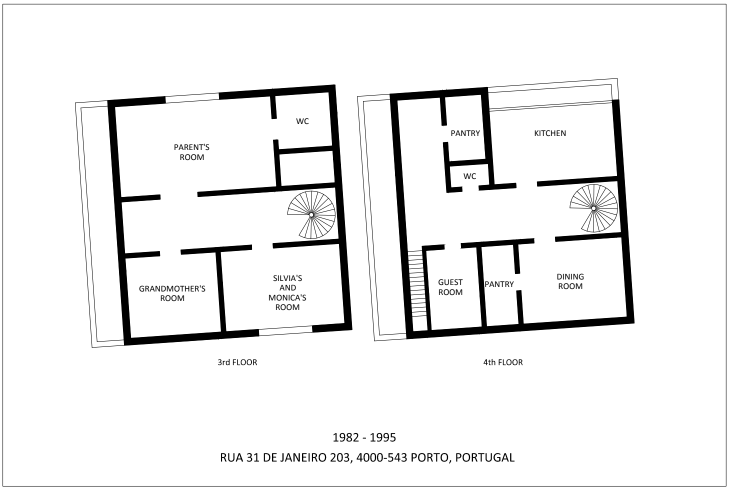

WC
PARENT'S ROOM
GRANDMOTHER'S ROOM
SILVIA'S AND MONICA'S ROOM
3rd FLOOR
PANTRY
KITCHEN
WC
GUEST ROOM
PANTRY
DINING ROOM
4th FLOOR
1982 - 1995
RUA 31 DE JANEIRO 203, 4000-543 PORTO, PORTUGAL

Fig. 38.8 Monica de Miranda, Portugal. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

---

[31] Mónica de Miranda, 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', in her *Geography of Affections*, p. 53.

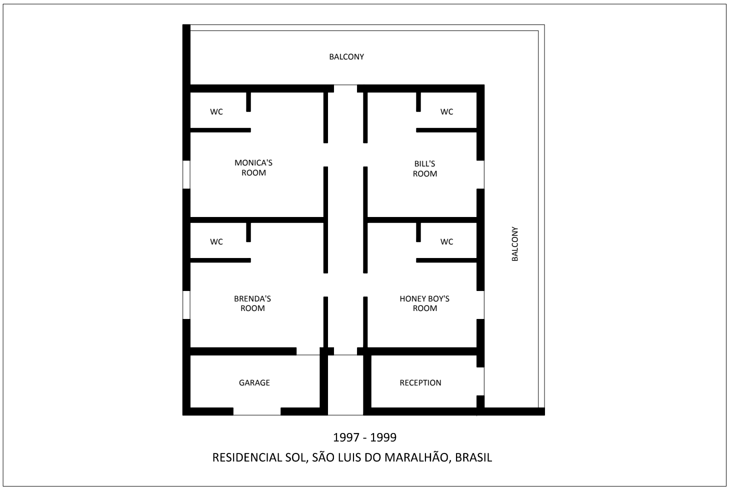

BALCONY
WC
WC
MONICA'S ROOM
BILL'S ROOM
WC
WC
BALCONY
BRENDA'S ROOM
HONEY BOY'S ROOM
GARAGE
RECEPTION
1997 - 1999
RESIDENCIAL SOL, SÃO LUIS DO MARALHÃO, BRASIL

Fig. 38.9 Monica de Miranda, Brazil. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

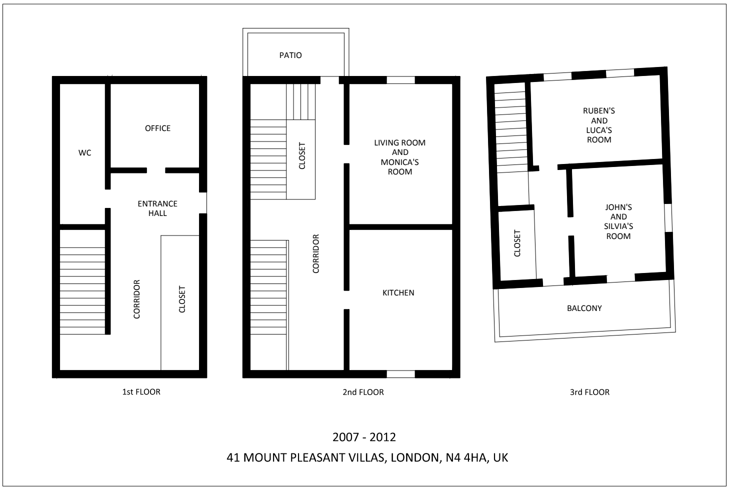

PATIO
WC
OFFICE
ENTRANCE HALL
CORRIDOR
CLOSET
CLOSET
CORRIDOR
LIVING ROOM AND MONICA'S ROOM
KITCHEN
RUBEN'S AND LUCA'S ROOM
JOHN'S AND SILVIA'S ROOM
CLOSET
BALCONY
1st FLOOR
2nd FLOOR
3rd FLOOR
2007 - 2012
41 MOUNT PLEASANT VILLAS, LONDON, N4 4HA, UK

Fig. 38.10 Monica de Miranda, London. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

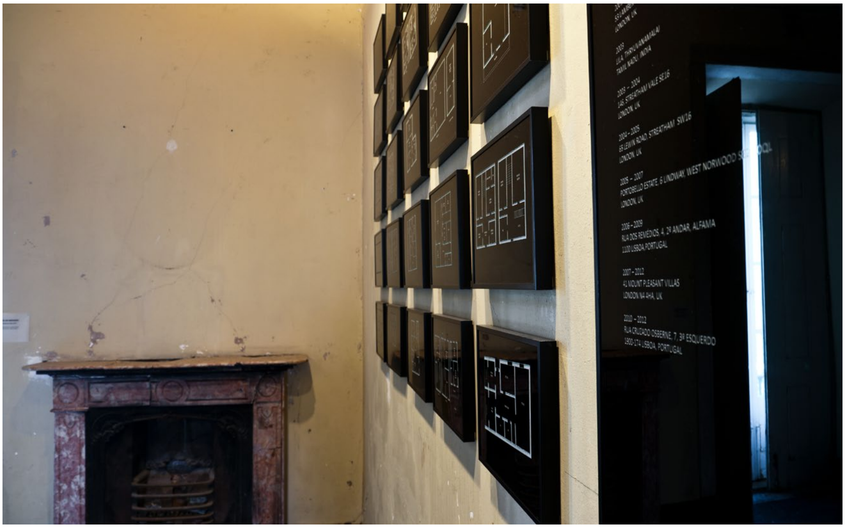


Fig. 38.11 Monica de Miranda, installation view. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

The houses that she ended up re-presenting, she realised, 'are archetypes, remnants of memory that mark life events […] such as: birth, death and separation from parents, initiation, marriage and divorce. The transition from childhood to adulthood was registered here through a change of address and country of residence and a drastic change of accommodation (when we moved from a family home to a squat).'[32] In attempting to trace and recreate 'home' through these imagined returns, she attempts to 'return to lost origins' and document her own memories, overlapped as they are with her mother's and grandmother's, as well as her 'own personal myths and fantasies'; our 'notions of home and family' she found, through her research, 'are a place of arrival and departure, a place of intersection, a place of rest, a commonplace but also a place of struggle and uncertainty.'[33]

***

---

[32] Ibid., p. 59.

[33] Ibid., p. 51.

*Once Upon a Time* is a three-channel, high definition colour video work with sound; the triptych installation creates a three-dimensional effect, with each screen streaming disconnected narratives that are, nonetheless, interconnected, pushing the narrative forward. The narrative begins with images of an airfield, a plane landing, and a control tower. Then we see a docked ferryboat, out of which passengers stream, rushing to their destinations. It is only after these images of arrival that we see de Miranda, in a white dress, standing at the seashore of an unnamed city, the silhouette of a mountain looming in the dark, against the backdrop of palms waving in the blustery night wind, the lights of the city pinpricks in the background. The embracing warmth and the moisture in the air are palpable. At times, her face is superimposed against the lights — they become stars in the black sky. Then, against a montage of scenes showing roadways and rushing vehicles, in the screen on the right-hand side we see a man, wearing a simple white undershirt and a white 'plantation hat' with a black band — the costumery of the tropics — facing us. His image fades, and we see more cars rushing, and his figure walking into distance in the middle screen. The montage of shots we see next are of the interior of a building; on one screen we see the man standing, facing an open-shuttered window, out of which early morning light streams into a dark interior. On the far right screen, we see de Miranda, standing against another window — this time, with no shutters — revealing a green land rising up to an escarpment, and a blue morning sky. The middle screen continues to show a long shot of a darkened roadway — speeding past from the interior of a vehicle; as the montages on the other two other screens fade, we continue to see the speeding roadway, conveying the sense of a continuing journey. Much of the remainder of the film contains a variety of interiors, showing de Miranda, other male companions, and her daughter as they sleep, awaken, walk through the space, and stand at windows to look out at the vistas before them, interspersed with sounds of speeding motor vehicles. At others, we see montages of greenery, horses being put through training, and even wild antelope — with de Miranda standing before them, observing. She wears white, and stands motionless, even as rain begins to fall. Another montage shows her on the centre screen, lying on the sand with her daughter lying on her stomach, whilst the two screens on the right and left show mirrored reflections of the sea breaking against the shore; in the next montage, we see her again on the seashore — but this time, she is alone, walking, then lying on the sand, facing the ocean. Before her, great, hulking ships list a little in the sea within reaching distance, rusting in the salt. This montage, in particular, indicates the ways in which memories we cannot call our own often hulk in our horizon, rusting, ever-present, powerful.

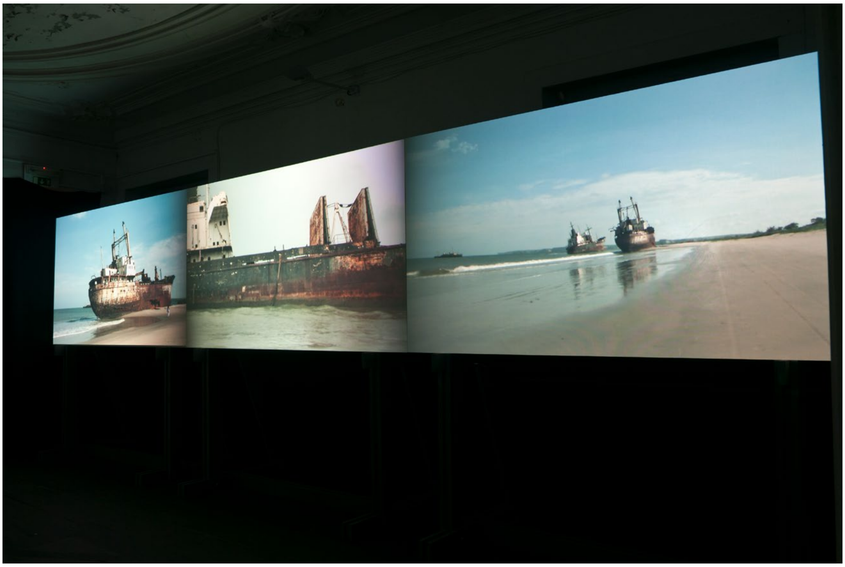


Fig. 38.12 Monica de Miranda, installation view of three frames of rusting ships. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

*Once Upon a Time* allows de Miranda to explore a different fantasy — to accomplish, as though in a 'fairytale,' the object of finding home. The film's structure is based on archetypes of the fairy tale and the 'hero's journey' that mirror our psychic impulse to journey towards self-discovery, indicating our desire 'for personal growth and transformation'.[34] However, she reminds us that her work also 'engages with lived experiences and personal memories' where she is able to explores her 'inner fears and desires [using dark undertones conveyed by] forests, seas, abandoned buildings, shipwrecks, journeys through the wilderness' that symbolise her psychological states, her unconscious, her 'fears or repressed feelings.'[35] Because these are 'stories that [she] performed through the enactment of [her] life stories,' the film is an expression of her own 'collective unconscious' and her own quest for 'courage or for a sense of home', of being in the Lusophone diaspora and trying to find belonging.[36] It was a project that took three years, a time when she did not have much money in hand; she describes the feeling of making autobiographical work, especially from a precarious position, as process of unclothing oneself: 'I was very naked, in a way […] It's my story.'[37]

---

[34] Mónica de Miranda, 'An Ocean Between Us', in her *Geography of Affections*, p. 34

[35] Ibid., pp. 34–35.

The narrative structure of *Once Upon a Time*, she notes, meanders 'between cities, houses, airports and roads, private rooms, family houses, hotels, places of private life, in places of my own memories but simultaneously set also in those "nonplaces" belonging to no one.'[38] She was able to revisit places in which she had once lived, or where her family had set roots: Portugal (where she was born, and lived till she was nineteen); Brazil (where some of her family had migrated; and Luanda, Angola (where her maternal family had its roots). The making of the film allowed de Miranda to make herself present, be in the flesh in locations that extended the territory of Portugal — a trans-oceanic territory over which the small Iberian country continues to cast a long shadow, and over which her own history is mapped. The process of filming — of returning to locations in which her family has made 'home', however transitionary and precarious these homes may have been — itself becomes a tool of investigation; using the 'play of time-space compression' intrinsic to film-narrative structures, she creates metaphors of movement, flow, dislocation that echo her geographical displacements and lack of access to standard notions of belonging and locatedness for all diasporic people.[39] The process of making films — as well as the narrative conveyed by the film and the material body of the film itself — thus allows her to use references to transitory spaces to 'recreate a "third space", a space that is related to concepts of landscape, territory and home defined through a self made fairy tale.'[40]

***

---

[36] Ibid., p. 34.

[37] From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.

[38] Mónica de Miranda, 'Once Upon a Time', in her *Geography of Affections*, p. 19.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

De Miranda's video work and stills form an unusual arc that warrants methodological attention to the complex ways in which she uses visual vocabulary to address the persistence of uncanny reminders and reminders of past encounters, and the ways in which these 'remainders' continue to make themselves present in both Portugal and its colonies. Portugal casts a shadow over a spectrum of the world, with large landmasses and islands becoming colonial possessions in what became Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde Islands in Africa, Brazil in South America, as well as a slew of islands, smaller territories, and coastal cities in South Asia — Goa in India, Colombo in Sri Lanka, and Macao in China, among dozens of others. In each of these locations, the Portuguese disrupted existing trade linkages, monopolising sea routes. In de Miranda's works, we see traces of the restless journeys that the Portuguese began making five centuries ago, resulting in amalgamated subjectivities onto whom these journeys of conquest continue to be superimposed. Sometimes we realise that this history imprints itself on zones of contact and conquest in ordinary and ubiquitous ways; at others, it brands them in more painful ways.

Despite the thread that speaks to powerlessness in the face of power, her work still positions the agency of the photographer at the centre of the narrative. She interweaves the larger discussion about migration of both people and practices with her own intimate experiences of being an in-between person — geographically and genetically speaking — in the world that unfolded.

If map making and navigation cultures were essential for fuelling imperial drives, de Miranda, too, becomes skilled at mapping and navigating not only physical landscapes and seaways, but the less charted territories of Lusophone subjects — and her own — interior selves. She explores the unfamiliar and the estranged, wilfully inserting all that is perceived as 'other' about herself — and the strange other within herself — into landscapes that do not quite recognise her as part of its definition of self. She deconstructs a relationship that was initiated and subsequently based on unequal power structures and violence, but also remakes that world into something approachable, as a landscape of experiences into which she can insert herself and make familiar.

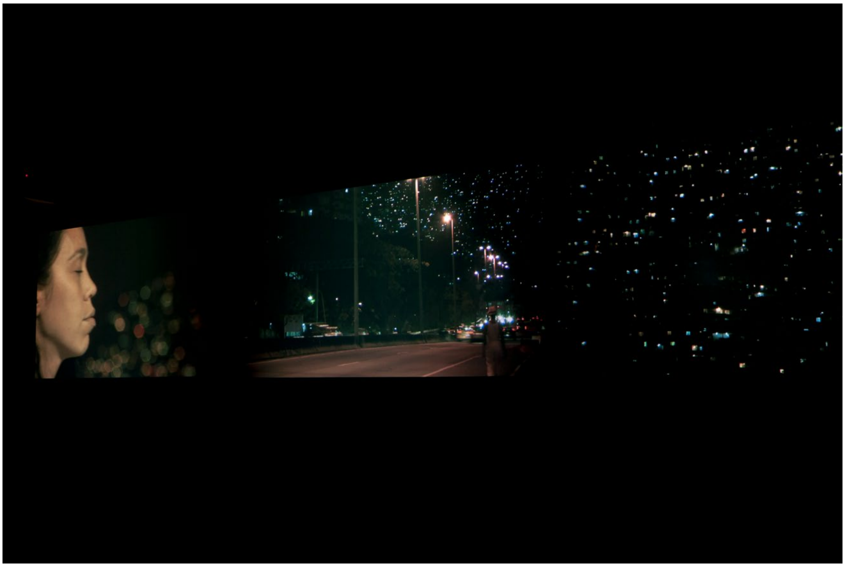


Fig. 38.13 Monica de Miranda, Monica, city lights. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

On the surface, her work is a conversation about identity and belonging. In her video works, especially, the personal overlaps with colonialism and subsequent globalisation. But they also speak to the attempt to reconcile a history that is not altogether palatable, honouring fantasies and desires for unification that all who have experienced violent interruptions to their bodies and psyches undoubtedly imagine at some point in their lives. De Miranda's interest in exploring the 'self' and 'other' imbedded within her person, the existence of a shadow person within her that follows her, is an important part of these narratives; a continuous thread of conversation about the existence of shadow selves — and reconciling those shadows with the self that one recognises and presents to the public — is imbedded into the structure of the stories. She uses the technology necessary for creating moving image works to converse with that shadow person, to bring 'him' to the present, and into the same spaces as she currently exists. These shadowy others who follow each other in the various landscapes appear in the form of female and male figures — beautiful, young people wearing white, gliding between doorways and windows of sea-facing apartments, and stepping up and down stairways connecting stories of large cargo vessels at sea.

***

When I look at de Miranda photographs, I see a visual reflection of all the ambivalence I experience as I attempt to tidy up my own memories of travel, migration, displacement, and attachment to things that are no longer there. Sometimes, I refuse reconciliation — theories about hybridity and the rich spaces of possibility created by liminal zones seem too glib, only available to the privileged immigrant.

Sometimes the nature of mourning renders us unable to look at images — either because death, destruction, and distance has made their subjects too terribly remote or because the complex and ambivalent anger that accompanies mourning leaves us too divided to know whether to weep for or rage at the beauty of the image.

The colour fields used by de Miranda — washed out blues and hazy greens — resonate with emotional vistas, drawing us to locations and conversations that exist only in intergenerational memory. These moving images are tableaux that help us ease estrangement and bridge geographical and temporal distances. 'Home' remains an unreachable location, a pinging reminder imprinted into our collective family and community memory; it remarks on the way that past attachments stay ever-present, indicating absences and melancholic presences that insistently wound our present.

We shape our survival narratives to surround and protect the wound of absence. The body contains nostalgia and longing; it tells a story about how we are all vulnerable in certain spaces, and how in such spaces, we attach ourselves fiercely, sometimes, to things that don't deserve — and cannot bear — our love.

# Bibliography

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*: *Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981).

De Miranda, Mónica, *Geography of Affections*: *Tales of Identity*, *Diaspora and Travel in the Work of Monica de Miranda*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Middlesex University, 2013, http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/13929/1/MdeMiranda_thesis.pdf

Griselda Pollock, 'Back to Africa: From Natal to Natal in the Locations of Memory', *Journal of Visual Art Practice,* 5:1–2 (2006), 49–72.

Hirsch, Marianne, 'Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory', *Discourse*: *Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, 15:2: Special Issue: The Emotions, Gender, and the Politics of Subjectivity (1992–1993), 3–29.

—, 'Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile', *Poetics Today*, 17:4 (1996), 659–86.

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* [1977] (New York: Picador, 2001).

# 39. Transnational Minor Literature: Cristina Ali Farah's Somali Italian Stories

*Alessandra Di Maio*

## Minor Transnationalism in Italy's Contemporary Letters

An emerging, multicultural literature in Italian is conventionally thought to have begun in 1990 with the publication of the first two major book-length narratives by authors originally from different regions of Africa writing in Italian: *Io, venditore di elefanti* (*I am an Elephant Seller*) by Pap Khouma from Senegal, and *Immigrato* (*Immigrant*) by Tunisian writer Salah Methnani. The following year *Chiamatemi Alì* (*Call Me Alì*) by Moroccan Mohammed Bouchane was published, and in 1993 the first book-length narrative by a woman, Nassera Chohra, originally from Algeria, was printed with the title *Volevo diventare bianca* (*I Wanted to Become White*). These co-authored, autobiographical texts were followed by other narratives by migrants writing in the language of their new home: Italian. As became progressively clear, these first publications and those that promptly ensued, both autobiographical and fictional, were no mere passing phenomenon, despite the contention of early detractors proclaiming them a threat that would contaminate what they considered to be the purity of Italian letters — a constructed, unlikely

© 2019 Alessandra Di Maio, CC BY 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.39

purity. On the contrary, these literary texts, connected to rising levels of migration to Italy, marked the beginning of a revitalizing trend in Italian literature.

Graziella Parati and several scholars who have followed up on her pioneering studies have written remarkably about the birth and development of Italy's migrant literature.[1] In Italy, Lidia Curti is among the first to have focused on the intersection between gender and migration in contemporary multicultural Italian letters.[2] Later, I wrote about 'Black Italian literature' noting that several migrant authors writing in Italian come originally from Africa, focusing on the literary quality of their works as African diasporic texts.[3] Yet at this point in history, while Italy has become the native land of so-called third-generation migrants and these works have become part of Italian literature *tout court*, I believe it might be more advantageous to analyze the ways in which these texts relate to the Italian literary tradition as well as to other corpora of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih define 'minor transnational' literature.[4] In articulating the 'minor,' Lionnet and Shih draw from, and expand upon, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theorizations. In their essay 'What is a Minor Literature?' included in *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), Deleuze and Guattari, inspired by Franz Kafka's use of the German language in his writings, argue: 'A minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language'.[5] The two French philosophers recognize three distinctive elements in minor literature: the high coefficient of deterritorialization of the language in which it is written; its immediate political essence; and its collective aspect, which makes it a 'collective machine of expression'.[6] These three elements, they argue, are what make a minor literature 'revolutionary'.[7]

---

[1] See Graziella Parati (ed.), *Margins at the Centre*: *African Italian Voices*, Special Issue of *Studi d'Africanistica nell'Africa Australe/Italian Studies in Southern Africa*, 7:2 (1995); Graziella Parati (ed.), *Mediterranean Crossroads*: *Migration Literature in Italy* (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999); idem, *Migration Italy*: *The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

[2] Lidia Curti, *La voce dell'altra. Scritture ibride tra femminismo e postcoloniale* (Rome: Meltemi, 2006).

[3] Alessandra Di Maio, 'Black Italia. Contemporary Migrant Writers from Africa', in Clark Hine, Darlene T. Keaton and S. Small (eds.), *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 119–44.

[4] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (eds.), *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

[5] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka*: *Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; 1se ed. 1975), p. 16.

Lionnet and Shih contend that the concept of 'minor' and 'minority' are culturally involved and may change depending on national cultural contexts and in relation to different power structures. In my own application of their theory, 'minor' has a twofold implication. In a larger, global context, it refers to the fact that the writings under consideration are all in Italian, a non-dominant tongue within the largest frame of linguistic imperialism. On the other hand, these texts are produced by minority and diasporic writers whose mother tongue is not necessarily, or not exclusively, Italian, as is especially the case for the first-generation migrant writers. These 'New Italians',[8] for whom Italian is a dominant language, make a 'minor' use of it in their literature.[9]

The fact that these texts are written in Italian already marks them as a legitimate part of Italian literature, while opening up transnationally the concept of a national canon. According to Lionnet and Shih, 'The transnational […] can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center'.[10] The transnational, in other words, in its various theorizations, never denies the national. On the contrary, it interrogates, redefines and expands it. Elsewhere Lionnet and Shih explain: 'Transnational theory takes as its starting point the recognition that individual and social identities have traditionally been shaped by, and studied according to, the bounded categories of geopolitical location, nation, race, ethnicity and class'. However, they continue, 'In a world increasingly marked by migrations, diasporas and cultural as well as economic globalization, questions of home, community, and allegiance are constantly being redefined'.[11] As a consequence, I argue, in the contemporary era identity needs to be rethought, the role of minority cultures in remapping national boundaries must be acknowledged, and alternative visions and practices of culture ought to be offered. In their text *Minor Transnationalism*, Lionnet and Shih conclude, 'The *national* is no longer the site of homogenous time and territorialized space but is increasingly inflected by a *transnationality* that suggests the *intersection* of 'multiple spatiotemporal (*dis*)orders'. The transnational, therefore, is not bound by the binary of the local and the global and can occur in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities'.[12]

---

[6] Ibid., p. 21.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Charles Richards, *The New Italians* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994); Livia Turco with P. Tavella, *I nuovi italiani. L'immigrazione, i pregiudizi, la convivenza* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005).

[9] Simone Brioni applies the notion of 'minor literature' to Somali Italian text referring exclusively to Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the 'minor '. See Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature* (Cambridge and Abingdon: Legenda and Routledge, 2015)..

[10] Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, p. 5.

## Postcolonial Italy: The Somali Community

These considerations prove to be particularly useful in the analysis of Italy's long-neglected postcolonial literary production, which has only recently gained attention from both the public and the academic community. A form of immigration that Italy has largely yet to confront, having attempted to assimilate it to the more general migratory trend involving the nation, is in fact that of migrants from its former colonies and occupied territories in Africa. Since the late 1960s, such groups have arrived in Italy from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia — less so from Libya. In the early years, it was mainly women who arrived in Italy, sometimes with their young children who were soon sent off to *collegi* (boarding institutions), so that their mothers could work full time as domestic workers for Italy's bourgeoning upper-middle class. In the following decades, the number increased and men became more numerous, as more and more people were fleeing either brutal dictatorships or civil wars.

Italian colonialism was an altogether distinctive experience. Far from being 'weak',[13] as is too often still commonly thought today whilst many ridicule Mussolini's desire for imperial grandeur and his disastrously concluded attempts to reconstruct a novel Roman Empire, Italian colonial politics marked the history of the Horn — of Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Today, this region of the world still experiences the consequences of a problematic postcolonial aftermath. The doyen of Somali letters, writer Nuruddin Farah, born in the city of Baidoa during the Italian colonial domination, suggests that what happens today in Somalia is the result of a historical process that began with colonialism, the consequence of a disastrous 'post-colonial realpolitik, governed by the anachronistic sentiments of clannism'.[14] Somalia, once partially an Italian colony, declared its independence in 1960. After a spell of democracy, in 1969 Syiad Barre lead a coup d'état, remaining in power until January 1991, when he was ousted from Mogadishu by the insurgents' revolts. After over two decades of dictatorship, Somalia was plagued by almost as many years of civil war, from which it has resurfaced only recently. Across the decades, while the international community declared Somalia a failed state and embassies were being shut down across the world, including in the countries that not so long before had colonized it, the number of people who left behind their homeland was so high that today there are more Somalis living in diaspora than within the reconstituted national borders. It is no accident that for a large percentage of Somali refugees, Italy was the country of first landing. Farah explains,

---

[11] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, Homepage Intro of the UCLA Mellon Postdoctoral Program in the Humanities 'Cultures in Transnational Perspectives', 2006, http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/mellon/index.html

[12] Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, p. 6, my italics.

[13] Giampaolo Calchi Novati, 'L'Italia e il Corno d'Africa: l'insostenibile leggerezza di un colonialismo debole', in Stefano Bellucci and Sante Matteo (eds.), *Africa Italia. Due continenti si avvicinano* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara, 1999), pp. 100–16.

> Italy's colonialism is full of disasters, of humiliations, a tragic history ending in colonial culs-de-sac. In their self-assessments Italians are of the opinion that their colonialism was less brutal than the French or British subjugation of other African peoples. I doubt it, given that, as colonists, they were belittlers of the people over whom they ruled, whom they never saw as humans, only '*Negri*', uncivilized primitives, on *a par* with the beasts in the jungles.[15]

Shifting from the colonial past to the present situation, he continues:

> Little has changed in the Italians' attitude towards the Somalis. There was a time, not long ago, when all Africans were assigned the generic name '*Marocchini*'. The Senegalese, who are engaged in pretty trade all over Italy, are known by the pejorative appellation 'Vous comprez?', in allusion to their question in French 'Would you like to buy?'. For good or

---

[14] Nuruddin Farah, *Yesterday, Tomorrow. Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), p. 5.

[15] Ibid., p. 62.

> bad, Somalis had not earned themselves a name in Italian word-making, or a space in their minds, until the civil war. It is as if the Italians are taking a fresh look at the Somalis now because their country is front-page news the world over.[16]

This quote is from Farah's *Yesterday, Tomorrow. Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (2000), a non-fictional volume based on hundreds of interviews denouncing the strenuous living conditions of the Somali refugees in the 'sophisticated empire' that is the European Union, which the author defines as the 'single most cohesive, transnational economic unit the world has ever known, the wealthiest and most powerful entity in world history'.[17] In this text, a section is entirely dedicated to the Somali diaspora in contemporary Italy. It was the first time that Farah openly wrote about this subject — an interest that he later cultivated in his trilogy aptly called 'Past Imperfect', made up of the novels *Links* (2005), *Knots* (2007) *Crossbones* (2011), where he references Italy and its colonial past.

It was immediately after the publication of *Rifugiati*, in 2003 (*Refugees* is the title of Farah's *Yesterday, Tomorrow* in Italian), which I translated and prefaced, that I learnt about the existence of a flourishing production of Somali Italian literature.[18] Although I had read, and even reviewed for *Wasafiri*, the 1994 autobiographical text in Italian by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (*Far Away from Mogadishu*), a diary of the author's journey across countries, and Siran Hassan's *Sette gocce di sangue* (*Seven Drops of Blood*), a reflection on infibulation through the story of a friendship between two women published in 1996, I was not aware of the fact that there was a younger generation of Somali Italian writers at work, until one of them, Cristina Ali Farah, contacted me, in response to my Italian edition of Farah's *Yesterday, Tomorrow*. Meanwhile, I had read Igiaba Scego's award-winning short-story *Salsicce* (*Sausages*) and had met and interviewed the author — she, too, a younger Italian woman writer of Somali origins. Through these writers and their works, I soon found out that there was indeed a 'minor' postcolonial Somali community in Italy such as that Farah described in his important non-fictional text, which, despite its powerful creative interventions within the national discourse, experienced the constant risk of being marginalized by it. More surprisingly, this was occurring while Italy was finally recovering its colonial past, albeit slowly, after decades of deliberate ignorance. My theory is that in the new millennium the nation could finally accept its past faults, but wished to remain oblivious to those of the present. Italians were finally learning to speak about their fascist and pre-fascist colonial past, thanks to a number of historians and scholars — significantly, not necessarily or exclusively operating within national institutional systems, for a number of them works abroad. Italy was even ready to make some restitution, such as that of the Obelisk of Axum, taken from, and eventually returned to Ethiopia, after having embellished one of Rome's most central piazzas for a number of decades. Yet the nation preferred to remain ignorant of its postcolonial present. Colonialism was, and had to remain, a thing of the past.

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 55.

[18] Farah Nuruddin, trans. by Alessandra Di Maio, *Rifugiati. Voci della diaspora somala* (Rome: Meltemi, 2003).

Despite its historical responsibility towards those arriving on its shores from the former colonies in relatively large numbers, after a first effort in 1981 — when a law was promulgated granting them a special, temporary permit to stay,[19] — Italy has offered them no form of asylum, neither legally nor in terms of specific social policies. The Somalis who reside in Italy, for instance, as Nuruddin Farah points out in *Yesterday, Tomorrow*, should be considered refugees, having escaped either Syiad Barre's wicked regime or the civil war that ensued its fall and precipitated the nation's collapse. But Italy has never fully enforced the 1951 Geneva Convention on matters of refugees and asylum. Consequently, the Italian media consider Somalis *immigrati* (immigrants), and in the best case the laws treat them as foreigners, or more literally, 'strangers' — *stranieri* — if not simply as undocumented *clandestini*, forgetting the roles the colonizing country has played in their destiny. In Italy, strictly speaking, there is no immigration law, thus the 'immigrant' is not a juridical figure but rather a socially, and, one is tempted to say, mediatically constructed *persona* — or, more accurately, what sociologist Alessandro Dal Lago refers to as a *non-persona*,[20] often undocumented and without access to citizenship (which in Italy is passed on by blood, since *ius sanguinis* is in force). Nonetheless, there continues to be a rather large Somali community in Italy, mostly educated in the colonial system whose main language of instruction was Italian — and it remained so for many years after decolonization, partly even after Somali, until then an oral language, was finally transcribed, in 1972. Moreover, there is a second and third generation of Somali Italians who have become increasingly visible and audible.[21] Among them, a group of Somali Italian writers, most of whom, remarkably, are women, and as such, I would argue, twice 'minoritized' in the — borrowing and adapting from Toni Morrison — 'genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world' of Italian letters.[22]

---

[19] Law 26 December 1981, n. 763

[20] Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-Persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999).

## Sites of Intersection: Women Writings

Cristina Ali Farah and Igiaba Scego constitute two of the strongest voices among the Somali Italian writers. Both born in Italy in the early 1970s, their relationship with Somalia, their personal stories, as well as their poetics, differ substantially from one another, testifying to the complexity of Somali's history and its relations with Italy. Scego was born in Rome, where she was brought up and still resides, to Somali parents who fled their country after Barre's coup d'état. She has visited Somalia but never lived there for any extended period of time. Her writing is ironic, sarcastic, even comic, at points. Most of her stories are set in Rome, the City of her Eternal Obsessions, at once a metaphor for Italy and a private, familiar, and familial space.

On the contrary, Ali Farah, born in Verona to an Italian mother and a Somali father — in a reversal of the typical colonial white-man/Black-woman liaison — was raised in Mogadishu, where her family moved while she was an infant. She returned to Italy as a young adult, via Hungary, escaping Somalia's civil war. Her stories are set in Italy as well as in Somalia. Her characters, mainly exiles, move in the transnational space of the diaspora — her own Writing Obsession.

With Shirin Ramzanali Fazel and Sirad S. Hassan, also from Somalia, Maria Abbebù Viarengo and Gabriella Ghermandi from Ethiopia,

---

[21] Some of them — musicians, actors, writers, social activists etc. — connect through a network called G2 Seconde Generazioni, http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/

[22] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*: *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 4.

Erminia Dell'Oro and Ribka Sibhatu from Eritrea, together with several others, these women writers have contributed to the creation of what can indeed be considered an Italian postcolonial literary production. Their works have often been read within the migratory literary context, but a more detailed analysis of their texts shows that although they share some of the same preoccupations as other migrant writers, or minority writers, they also present some peculiarities that connect them to the specificity of the Italian postcolonial experience and, by extension, to postcolonial texts in other languages. Most importantly, their transnational texts suggest a reconsideration of the entire concept of postcoloniality, by highlighting, first and foremost through their very existence, what Sandra Ponzanesi, in her compelling study on contemporary women's writing from the Indian and the Afro-Italian diasporas, describes as one of the most evident 'paradoxes' of the postcolonial condition: the implicit assumption that postcolonial literature is mainly expressed in English, the global dominant language, which results in a marginalization of all other postcolonial traditions, such as those expressed in Dutch, French, Portuguese, Italian, and other 'minor' languages.[23] Ponzanesi suggests that the emerging literature by Afro-Italian women offers itself as a unique, largely unknown site of exploration of the contradictions and 'dissymmetrical relationships' that inform postcoloniality, besides contributing to the revival of 'an obscure chapter of Italian history: that of colonialism'.[24] Along these lines, I argue that these writings also contribute to the discovery of the even more obscure chapter of Italy's postcoloniality. This literature contributes to preventing further reproduction of homogenizing and totalitarian theoretical discourses, on the contrary favoring the historical, political and linguistic complexity of the postcolonial condition, by foregrounding what Ponzanesi describes as 'a set of asymmetric relationships in which language, hegemony, gender, ethnicity, and diaspora play a crucial role'.[25] In this light, it comes as no surprise that the Italian postcolonial literary production appears gender-marked, therefore, as I previously inferred following Morrison's suggestions, twice minoritized. And yet, these texts transcend vertical connections in favor of an inclusive horizontality, proposing a dialogue among the already composite Italian literary tradition, those of the once colonized territories, and world literature in its various inflections. Ponzanesi remarks: 'The Italian postcolonial presents itself as an intersection of minority discourses and offers an excellent critical apparatus to make corrections and integrations to the Italian literary canon. Moreover, it allows the Italian literary panorama to be positioned within a European, and transnational, frame, making possible the passage from a local geopolitical specificity to an understanding of global diasporic notions'.[26]

---

[23] Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Cultures. Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

[24] Ibid., p. xiv.

[25] Ibid., p. 3.

In *Minor Transnationalism*, Lionnet and Shih suggest that the very notion of postcoloniality has become insufficient, concerned as it is with a 'vertical analysis', namely with 'the exploration of relationality between dominant (colonizing cultures) and dominated (colonized) spaces'.[27] However, together with Ponzanesi, I believe that it is fundamental to finally apply the notion of postcoloniality to the Italian context, precisely in order to contribute to the recovery of the long-obliterated historical memory of the vertical relationship between Italy and its former colonies, and, I would argue, to highlight the fact that colonialism is not only a thing of the past but also very much of the present — *passato prossimo*, indeed — since its repercussions are still experienced, and unresolved, in the contemporary nation, as the incessant arrival of a considerable number of postcolonial migrants from the Horn of Africa on the Italian shores demonstrate. The recognition of this power relationship is necessary to debunk Italians' self-appraised myth of being *brava gente* (good people),[28] which, as Farah elucidates in the quote above from *Yesterday, Tomorrow*, is rooted in the nation's consciousness and undauntedly continues into the present, despite contrary past and current evidence. Yet the term 'postcolonial' as I intend it here is not to be interpreted exclusively 'in vertical'. It requires semantic expansion, resignification. In fact, the Italian postcolonial minor literary formations cross boundaries and also engage horizontally with multiple cultural and linguistic configurations, shuffling hierarchies and reversing power relations. In other words, in the Italian-language texts postcoloniality and transnationality intersect, including and defining each other.

---

[26] Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Il postcolonialismo italiano. Figlie dell'impero e letteratura meticcia', *Quaderni del '900*, 4 (2004), 25–34 (p. 34). In the past few years, an increasing number of scholars has been concerned with a definition of postcoloniality in the Italian context. Among them Curti, *La voce dell'altra*; Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (eds.), *National Belongings*: *Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (eds.), *Postcolonial Italy*: *Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[27] Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, p. 11.

[28] See Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente*? (Venice: Neri Pozza, 2005).

## Language and Power in Cristina Ali Farah

One of the most evident aspects that distinguishes the African Italian postcolonial texts and makes them unique in the transnational frame I have been delineating so far, besides their historical specificity, is their use of language. For most, if not all, these postcolonial writers, independently of their generation, Italian is a mother tongue — usually not the only one, but a mother tongue nonetheless, and more often than not the language of education, of formal schooling. As a consequence, in contrast to the first-generation migrant Italian writers' earliest works to which I initially referred, these texts have not required the linguistic support of a co-author — although now most migrant authors, especially those from the younger generation whose native tongue is Italian, have given up co-authorship and write their own texts autonomously. Moreover, they often emerge as markedly experimental. The Italian postcolonial authors, like most postcolonial writers from different linguistic areas, have appropriated, transformed and enriched the language of the former colonizer by bending it to their own cultural artistic and cultural needs, thus inverting, and transforming, the original, colonial power relations. For them, Italian becomes the chosen site for creative interventions and, ultimately, a site of resistance.

A specific example is offered by the use of some Somali terms that are linguistic borrowings or calques from the Italian, discernible in many of Ali Farah's stories, poems, and above all in her 2007 novel *Madre piccola* (*Little Mother*), a poetic reflection on the Somali diaspora in Europe from an all-female perspective, in which Rome plays a central role. Terms like *farmascio* (from the Italian *farmacia*, pharmacy), *restauranti* (from Italian *ristorante*, restaurant), *olio olivo* (from Italian *olio d'oliva*, olive oil), and *guersce* (from Italian *guercio*, blind in one eye) recur in Ali Farah's works. When, during an interview, I asked Ali Farah what motivated her to choose these terms, she explained,

> Contact between languages and cultures has always involved new linguistic acquisitions and contaminations: I think Italian readers should be challenged in this way. Along these lines, […] I employ Somali variants of Italian words in an attempt to overturn the interior workings of the relationship between language and power.[29]

The relationship between language and power is also challenged in Ali Farah's works by the consistent use of multiple narrating voices: in her longer works of fiction, including her latest novel *Il comandante del fiume* (*The Commander of the River*), published in 2014, all subjects of enunciation are bestowed with equal or equivalent narrative authority. On the other hand, it is not unusual for Ali Farah to shape the form of the monologue to her own artistic ends. She does so in the short stories *RapdiPunt* (*PuntRap*), set among the Afro-Italian youth in Rome; *Interamente* (*Entirely*), a lyrical reflection on how a young woman's life changes in war and in diaspora; *Madre piccola* (Little Mother) (2006), on which her later namesake novel is loosely based, the tale of a refugee woman longing to see her daughter; *Un sambuco attraversa il mare* (*A Dhow Crosses the Sea*, 2012), a nostalgic evocation of the narrator's grandmother in the Somalia of her childhood and a somber reflection on exile; and *Il seme del dattero* (*The Seed of the Date*, 2016), a recollection of life in Mogadishu as a young woman. When I inquired about the reasons for her interest in experimenting with voices and first-person narrators, Ali Farah replied, 'First-person narrative, with its individual point of view, is more subtle, less authoritarian, more fragmented than third-person narrative, and it offers a vision of reality that the reader is free to adopt and interpret as she prefers'.[30] Ali Farah's monologues, however, make space for dialogue. Her first-person narrators are often in dialogue with characters that might or might not be fully portrayed in the texts. She explains, 'One of the techniques that I use frequently is to imagine an external interlocutor so that I can add nuance to the voice. The way in which people speak, I believe, changes significantly, depending on whom their interlocutor is'.[31] By employing this narrative device, the author seems to be proposing a metaphor for the dialogue that her art has been engaging with Italy's dominant discourse, on the one hand, often personified by specific characters usually impersonated by state officers and bureaucrats; and, on the other hand, with the plethora of 'minor, transnational' characters that people her narratives, generally represented for the most part as Somalis living in diaspora.

---

[29] Cristina Ali Farah, quoted in Alessandra Di Maio, 'A Poetics of Passage: The Prose of Ubax Cristina Ali Farah' (with an interview with the author), in *Metamorphoses. Special Issue*: *Other Italies/Italy's Others*, 14:1–2 (Spring-Fall 2006), 241–68 (p. 251).

[30] Ibid., p. 253.

[31] Ibid.

Ali Farah builds her novel *Madre piccola* around this technique, in which the voices of three first-person female narrators intertwine, converse with each other and with several others, and welcome in their discourses a number of additional voices — for example, those of various Somali poets and singers. In so doing, not only does Ali Farah overturns the vertical relationship between the languages of the colonizer and the colonized but also expands that relationship horizontally, embracing a variety of idioms. The novel, whose timeframe spans from the late 1970s to circa 2004, namely the years of dictatorship and civil war, is about the friendship between two cousins, Domenica Axad and Barni, who grew up together in Mogadishu, were torn apart by the war, and eventually reunite in Rome, where Barni, who works as an obstetrician, helps Domenica have her baby. Barni, we learn, is the newborn's 'little mother': *madre piccola* is the literal translation from the Somali *habaryar*, which is the term for an aunt on the maternal side. The calque in the title subverts power relations linguistically: Italian, the tongue of the colonizer, is manipulated and enriched by that of the former colonized, upon whom a new idiom and concept is imposed — a concept that tackles the lexicon of Italy's most sacred territory, that of the Family.

The baby's father, Taageere, is an old, long-lost acquaintance from childhood whom eventually Domenica meets again in one of the diaspora's multiple sites — a non-identified city in North America, where she is filming parts of a documentary on the daily life of Somali refugees. Taageere's first-person narrative alternates with those of the two cousins in the novel. The three protagonists alternately take the floor, three times each, for a total of nine chapters (nine is a recurring, symbolic number in the novel, which resonates with the nine months of pregnancy). By talking each time to a different interlocutor, the three main characters tell their interwoven personal stories and those of their shattered, displaced community. The result is a choral, poetic narrative which, while offering a compelling portrait of the Somali diaspora — the three main, symbolic sites in the novel are Mogadishu, Rome, and the unnamed North American metropolis where Taageere lives — intends to recompose the fragments of a collapsed nation disavowed by the international community and forced to live mainly as a transnational minority scattered across continents, as the number of people fleeing their homeland increases daily.

The language in which *Madre Piccola* is written, I wish to argue, is a minor, transnational Italian. Following Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion, and Lionnet and Shih's interpretation, it is the use Ali Farah makes of language, and the way she has her diasporic protagonists reflect on it, that renders this novel an example of minor transnational literature. The tongue of *Little Mother* is that of the former colonizer transformed into the language of postcoloniality through creative manipulation and *métissage*. It mirrors, and represents, the postcolonial community in both Somalia and Italy. Postcoloniality, as has been variously maintained, is the site of hybridity par excellence. In this novel, in particular, postcolonial hybridity is inflected by the feminine,[32] revealing itself as *métissage*. Referring to her days as a child in her native Somalia, Domenica Axad, daughter of a Somali father and an Italian mother, explains: 'The Italian community [in Mogadishu] was mostly made up of mulattos like me'.[33] Even more significantly, the language through which the three diasporic protagonists 'translate' their stories,[34] crossing locations meanwhile making them intelligible to the former colonizer, is a language spoken in the diaspora, and as such it is inflected by the diaspora's several idioms. Words in Somali, first of all, but also in English, since part of the action takes place in North America, run through the text. The idiom of *Madre piccola* is transnational and all-inclusive, and, as such, a crucial site for identity exploration for the diasporic protagonists/narrators of this story. Domenica Axad, the *mulatta*, is particularly aware of this. She is fed by her creator with some of the most acute metalinguistic reflections in the novel. Upon reuniting with her cousin Barni in Rome, after many years of geographic distance, she says,

---

[32] Curti, *La voce dell'altra*.

[33] Cristina Ali Farah, *Madre Piccola* (Milan: Frassinelli, 2007). English translation by G. Bellesia-Contuzzi and V. Offredi Poletto, *Little Mother* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), p. 224.

[34] On the role of Domenica Axad as a translator, see ibid., pp. 232–33.

> My dear Barni, what you knew of me, nothing has remained the same. […] Even my way of speaking, of expressing myself has considerably changed. As they say, we mixed people are sponges. Mixed travelers. So many languages did I have to, want to learn, here and there, to go inside the people I met.[35]

Language for Domenica Axad, and by extension in the entire novel, becomes a site of resistance, survival, and knowledge. She manipulates it, by alternating silence, words from different idioms, juxtaposing them with images from different places — the images she films for her documentary. But her Italian, especially her written Italian, remains deliberately sophisticated. Chapter 8 in the novel coincides with a letter she writes to a psychologist, presumably a social worker, to whom she explains,

> As you may have observed, I use obsolete, outdated words. It is a seductive game. I speak in a difficult way. I use tortuous constructions. Especially when I begin my discourse, because I want to demonstrate what limit I can reach with my language. I want everybody to know without a shadow of a doubt that this language belongs to me. It is my stammering, the plural subject that raised me, the name of my essence, my mother.[36]

In her 'minor' use of her mother — and mother's — tongue, paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari, is Domenica Axad's revolution, as well as her creator's. Axad's awareness of the political implication of language-based relations contains in a nutshell her inventor's manifesto. Ali Farah's use of language brings to mind Deleuze and Guattari's theorizations,

> What is great, what is revolutionary, is the minor […]. A language remains a pastiche, a schizophrenic mix, a Harlequin costume through which many different linguistic functions and distinct power centers are practiced, suggesting what can and cannot be said: one can play one function against the other, let the coefficients of territoriality and deterritorialization play with, and against, one another. Even a major language can be used in an intensive way that gives life to an absolute deterritorialization. […] So much invention, and not only lexical — lexicon is just a little part of it; rather, sober syntactic invention.[37]

---

[35] Ibid., p. 97.

[36] Ibid,. p. 254.

[37] Ibid., pp. 47–48.

For Domenica Axad her mother('s) tongue also 'translates' her father's language — Somali. She comments on her own role as a child translator in the family: her mother never learnt Somali, so she became her 'translator', a 'dissimulator', a 'ferrywoman'; ultimately, 'a connoisseuse of the human soul'.[38] As her double name testifies, she embraces both Somali and Italian as two inseparable parts of her own linguistic identity, like a double 'half which is a whole'.[39] Proud of her linguistic skills, she also exhorts her fellow-countrymen and women to hold on to Somali, the language of the fatherland (and of her father). Sharing a language is one of the most effective ways to create community.

> Teaching to write your native tongue, communicating in the words of your father and mother despite the distance: this is what will allow us to hold on to each other tightly, without having other people's languages to separate us. Learn the alphabet, brothers: B T J.[40]

It comes as no surprise, then, that her voice becomes a resonating chamber echoing that of the Somali poet Cabdulqaadir Xirsi Siyaad 'Yamyam', whose verses from the 1977 patriotic song '*Soomaali baan ahay*' (I am the Somali) intertwine with her words throughout the novel epilogue.

Every character in the novel reflects on the way he or she uses language, on the power structures imposed by linguistic systems, and on the possibilities or subverting them. But primarily, *Madre piccola* reminds its Italian readers that the language once imposed by the colonizer has eventually become a first language for the present postcolonial subjects. Although for a relatively limited period of time, Italian — paraphrasing Chinua Achebe's comments on English in *Hopes and Impediments* — became an African language, in the sense that it was spoken on the African soil. And it has been passed on to the newer generations, albeit fragmentarily. Thus, the original native speaker has lost his or her exclusive access to his or her mother tongue, which is now equally shared with the former colonized. Complimented on her excellent Italian by a fictional Italian journalist who interviewed her intending to write a reportage on the Somali community in Rome, Barni responded:

---

[38] Ibid., p. 233.

[39] Ibid., p. 1.

[40] Ibid., p. 4.

> Are you complimenting me on my Italian? I have known this language since childhood. I learnt it in elementary school, which I attended with my cousin Axad. But you ought to know this: we Somalis almost always know Italian. At least my uncles, until the past generation. I used to practice it with my cousin, Domenica Axad, Italian-Somali.[41]

Somali embraces Italian, balancing relations off. Later in the story, Taageere, commenting on the elderly Somali making *marinata* dressing for the lamb they are barbecuing in the courtyard of the North American project where they live, says: 'They said exactly that: *marinata*. The elders profoundly own Italian, they own it, profoundly. Imagine how it must be to learn a language as a child, when your head knows no preoccupations and has enough space to be filled with all the words you wish'.[42]

However, just like people, even language changes with time, as does its social status. What once was the idiom of prestige, spoken by 'the well-mannered men with a position, working in the school system or as high officers at the ministry or in the army',[43] has eventually been reduced to a grotesque caricature of itself in the general collapse undergone by the nation. Young Taageere used to attend the Italian Cultural Centre in Mogadishu because he wanted to learn to speak fluent Italian, like a 'man of class': an 'Italian so fluent and copious that it would emerge here and there even when I spoke Somali. Here and there, often. I, too, want to speak like them, an Italian term every three Somali words. How elegant. Will it become natural to me, as if I had learnt the language as a child? I never knew: war made me give up'.[44] Yet, what is left of the Italian learnt at the *Centro Culturale* to a more mature Taageere, refugee in North America, is only a decent understanding and quite a few swearwords with which to challenge another 'minor, transnational' Italian — a Sicilian, he, too, sharing the same destiny of the diaspora:

> I looked at the Sicilian young man and told him: look, *gli occhi*! And he was scared to death, because he did not know that I spoke Italian, so he told me right away: you're mad! And I replied: *waffanculu*![45] And so forth. But I won. In the end, I knew more swearwords than he did.[46]

---

[41] Ibid., p. 14.
[42] Ibid., p. 192.
[43] Ibid., p. 82.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Orthographical corruption of *vaffanculo* (go to hell).
[46] Ibid., p. 220.

If Italian is the idiom of the élite, torn apart by the diaspora, language in general, in *Little Mother*, is what best represents the transformation of the diaspora. Language is a synonym for community, at home and abroad. It embraces pride, national belonging, fear of transformation, nostalgia for the past. It is indeed a metaphor for the survival of the community.

## Conclusion: Across Boundaries

Ali Farah and the other Italian postcolonial women writers have primarily in common an artistic agenda. Each in her own way, they portray a nation where the colonial past and especially the postcolonial present are central, proposing a dialogue that challenges those who are partial to monologue or historical revisionism, and persevere in believing in an alleged national monolithic identity. The protagonists of their transnational texts, disparate though they may be, similarly interrogate themselves on questions of belonging and show major concern in the construction of an individual identity which takes into consideration the totality of their life's experience. In so doing, each in their own voice, they all speak a 'minor, transnational' Italian, be it marked, like in Ali Farah's texts, by the reappropriation, within the frame of a national standard, of the Italian borrowings that entered the Somali language during colonialism, a calque such as that which gives the title to the novel, or the intersection of several languages. In conclusion, one may advance that Somali Italian literature, and, more generally, postcolonial Italian literature has been largely ignored by scholars because, among other considerations, it is a 'minor' one that does not involve a 'major' colonial power and language. Moreover, one might assume with some legitimacy that one of the reasons it has been long overlooked is that it is mainly produced by women writers, more specifically, by minority women writers. Whatever the case, Ali Farah's novel *Little Mother*, like the other Somali Italian literary texts, by speaking up from a 'minor' perspective, are calling for attention and connections, demanding to be inscribed in the literary and cultural history of Italy, Europe, Africa, and the contemporary global world.

# Bibliography

Ali Farah, Cristina, 'Il seme del dattero', in *Partire è breve, arrivare è lontano. Racconti dall'altra parte del mare* (Rome: Fondazione Argentina Altobelli, 2016), pp. 28–65.

—, *Il comandante del fiume* (Rome: 66thand2nd, 2014).

—, *Madre Piccola* (Milan: Frassinelli, 2007). English translation by G. Bellesia-Contuzzi and V. Offredi Poletto, *Little Mother* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

—, 'Un sambuco attraversa il mare/A Dhow Crosses the Sea', in *Wasafiri* (Indian Ocean Special Issue) 26:2 (2010), 18–24. English translation by Cristina Viti.

—, 'Madre piccola', in *Lingua madre duemilasei. Racconti di donne straniere in Italia* (Turin: Seb27, 2006). English translation by G. Bellesia-Contuzzi and V. Offredi Poletto, 'Little Mother', in *Metamorphoses. Special Issue*: *Other Italies/ Italy's Others*, 14:1-1 (Spring-Fall 2006), 281–85.

—, 'Rap di Punt', in Scego, Igiaba (ed.), *Italiani per vocazione* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005). English translation by G. Bellesia-Contuzzi and V. Offredi Poletto, 'Punt Rap', in *Metamorphoses. Special Issue*: *Other Italies/Italy's Others*, 14:1-2 (Spring-Fall 2006), 276–80.

Andall, Jacqueline and Derek Duncan (eds.), *National Belongings*: *Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

— (eds.), *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

Ben-Ghiat, Ruth, *Fascist Modernities*: *Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

— and Mia Fuller (eds.), *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Bouchane, Mohammed, with C. De Girolamo and D. Miccione, *Chiamatemi Alì* Milan: Leonardo, 1991).

Brioni, Simone, *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature* (Cambridge and Abingdon: Legenda and Routledge, 2015).

Calchi Novati, Giampaolo, *L'Africa d'Italia. Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale* (Rome: Carocci, 2011).

—, 'L'Italia e il Corno d'Africa: l'insostenibile leggerezza di un colonialismo debole', in Bellucci, Stefano and Sante Matteo, eds., *Africa Italia. Due continenti si avvicinano* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara, 1999), pp. 100–16.

—, *Il Corno d'Africa nella storia e nella politica. Etiopia, Somalia e Eritrea fra nazionalismi, sottosviluppo e guerra* (Turin: SEI, 1994).

Curti, Lidia, *La voce dell'altra. Scritture ibride tra femminismo e postcoloniale* (Rome: Meltemi, 2006).

Dal Lago, Alessandro, *Non-Persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999).

De Grazia, Victoria, *How Fascism Ruled Women*: *Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Del Boca, Angelo, *Italiani, brava gente*? (Venice: Neri Pozza, 2005).

—, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani. Miti, memorie, errori e sconfitte* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002).

—, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999).

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *Kafka*: *Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; orig. 1975).

Di Maio, A., 'Black Italia. Contemporary Migrant Writers from Africa', in Clark Hine, Darlene, T. Keaton, and S. Small (eds.), *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 119–44.

—, 'A Poetics of Passage: The Prose of Ubax Cristina Ali Farah' (with an interview with the author), in *Metamorphoses. Special Issue*: *Other Italies/Italy's Others*, 14:1-2 (Spring-Fall 2006), 241–68.

Farah, Nuruddin, *Crossbones* (New York: Riverhead, 2011).

—, *Knots* (New York: Riverhead, 2007).

—, *Links* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

—, *Yesterday, Tomorrow. Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000). Italian translation and Introduction by A. Di Maio, *Rifugiati. Voci della diaspora somala* (Rome: Meltemi, 2003).

Fazel, Shirin Ramzanali, *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (Rome: Datanews, 1994).

Gnisci, Armando, *Creolizzare l'Europa. Letteratura e migrazione* (Rome: Meltemi, 2003).

Hassan, Siran, *Sette gocce di sangue* (Palermo: La Luna, 1996).

Khouma, Pap, with O. Pivetta, *Io, venditore di elefanti* (Milan: Garzanti, 1990).

Labanca, Nicola, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

Lionnet, Françoise and Shu-mei Shih, Homepage Intro of the UCLA Mellon Postdoctoral Program in the Humanities 'Cultures in Transnational Perspectives', 2006, http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/mellon/index.html

— (eds.), *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

Lombardi-Diop, Cristina and Romeo, Caterina (eds.), *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Methnani, Salah, with M. Fortunato, *Immigrato* (Rome-Naples: Theoria, 1990).

Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark*: *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

Palumbo, Patrizia (ed.), *A Place in the Sun*: *Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

Parati, G., *Migration Italy*: *The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

— (ed.), *Mediterranean Crossroads*: *Migration Literature in Italy* (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999).

— (ed.), 'Margins at the Centre: African Italian Voices', Special Issue of *Studi d'Africanistica nell'Africa Australe/Italian Studies in Southern Africa*, 7:2 (1995).

Pinkus, Karen, *Bodily Regimes*: *Italian Advertising Under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

Ponzanesi, Sandra, 'Il postcolonialismo italiano. Figlie dell'impero e letteratura meticcia', in *Quaderni del '900*, 4 (2004), 25–34.

—, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Cultures. Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

Richards, Charles, *The New Italians* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

Scego, Igiaba, 'Salsicce' in Capitani, Flavia and E. Coen (eds.), *Pecore nere* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005). English translation by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi e Victoria Offredi Poletto, 'Sausages', in *Metamorphoses*, 13:2 (2005), 214–25.

Spackman, Barbara, *Fascist Virilities*: *Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Triulzi, Alessandro, 'Displacing the Colonial Event. Hybrid Memories of Postcolonial Italy', *Interventions*: *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 8:3 (2006), 430–43.

Turco, Livia, with P. Tavella, *I nuovi italiani. L'immigrazione, i pregiudizi, la convivenza* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005).

# 40. Seizing Control of the Narrative

## *Misan Sagay*

---

*Guerrilla* is a mainstream TV series. It is unusual in having a first generation migrant woman as one of the leads. It is set in London in 1974 in the aftermath of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech, which resulted in the UK parliament passing sweeping anti-immigration legislation.

Humanity learns its history through the narrative art form of the times; through the stories that get passed down through the generations. The oral histories of Greek heroes, originally told around campfires in 400 BC, are what shape our understanding of Ancient Greece today. Similarly, Shakespearean history plays don't reflect the truth about those times as much as shape how we see them.

The moving image is the narrative art form of our times. As a result, films and television have a unique responsibility to tell the human story fairly, to give an accurate representation of our time for this generation and those to come. It is therefore catastrophic that, from the outset, film has had a diversity problem, none more so than in films about resistance and people of color.

The film that established modern cinema as we recognise it today is one of the most explicitly racist films ever made. By calling it *Birth of a Nation* (1915), D. W. Griffiths created a new foundation myth for America. This movie is not simply a random exercise in hate speech but a deliberate attempt to seize control of the historical narrative. The

© 2019 Misan Sagay, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.40

nation was born not from a people's rebellion against a distant King (No taxation without representation!) or indeed from the Civil War that abolished slavery and moved the nation towards a closer union. Instead, America was born when Black people were re-subjugated by force exercised by the Ku Klux Klan to restore the natural order. In this alternative foundation myth, the United States of America is synonymous with and indissolubly linked to white supremacy.

Let us not forget too, the context in which it was received.

This film was shown in the White House and its contents were endorsed by the President. 'It is like writing history with lightning, and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true,' said President Woodrow Wilson.[1] It was shown around the world. There was a screening in Nairobi, Kenya, where white Kenyans were seeking to keep control of the colony from African hands.

Along with establishing cinematic language with its innovative story structure, camera work, and editing, *Birth of a Nation* established how the issues of race, Black people and Black rights were henceforth seen in film. Its visual imagery indelibly links Black people having and exercising equal rights with chaos and danger to white people. The film shows white rights as innate and inalienable and argues that any encroachment of those rights should be legitimately dealt with by overwhelming force. Black rights are shown to be in the gift of the white population and wholly dependent on Black behaviour. Black civil rights are, therefore, an aspiration, a reward to be achieved for good behaviour, like getting a new pony.

And the message was successful. Its power cannot be underestimated. The film is credited with the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan, numerous lynchings and ever more vigorous enforcement of the Jim Crow laws. There is a direct line from this film to the actions of white people today calling the police in reaction to Black people doing ordinary things. Because of *Birth of a Nation*, the world of film became one of the last safe spaces for the narrative of white supremacy.

For much of the twentieth century, the hero in cinema is a white man fighting for his rights or his survival. We have watched such white heroes battle against misfortune, Nazis, Native Americans, you name it. However, over the last seventy years, it has become harder and harder to frame a resistance narrative around the violation of the rights of white men. The great freedom movements of the late twentieth century — anti-colonization, civil rights, women's liberation or LGTBQ rights have cried out for another kind of narrative.

---

[1] Mark E. Benbow, 'Birth of a Quotation: Woodrow Wilson and "Like Writing History with Lightning"', *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Special issue: 'Native Americans and Indian Policy in the Progressive Era' 9:4 (2010), 509–33.

Film has struggled to reflect this history and has coped in destructive ways.

It has chosen to all but ignore the resistance stories that drove these events. Vast swathes of the most important historical events of our century are simply absent from the film canon and, therefore, from the popular historical record. Where are the films about the successful Maroon rebellions in Jamaica? Toussaint L'Ouverture liberating the nation of Haiti? The Kingdoms of Africa?

An egregious example is Slavery. Cinema continued to be dominated by the utterly false narrative of the happy slave in films like *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Slavery was, in reality, a story of unrelenting, unremitting resistance at every level and Black people were at the forefront of that rebellion. The 1712 South Carolina slave code, taken up by all the slave states, included provisions such as 'Slave homes are to be searched every two weeks for weapons.' Punishment for violations escalates to include the loss of an ear, branding, and nose-slitting, and, for the fourth offense, death. Slavery meant living in a state of permanent war and the cruel laws needed to enforce it did not exist because white slave owners were gratuitously sadistic. They were required because rebellion was a daily threat that could only be managed by ever more draconian laws and measures. Yet stories of Black slave rebellions, those epic tales of heroism, resistance and triumph, over 300 years, are wholly absent from the film canon and, therefore, from popular history. For years, as I struggled to make a film about slavery from a Black point of view, I was told that no-one would want to see it. It was Box Office Poison.

The stories of nationalist resistance that brought about the fall of the British Empire; the seismic changes as whole continents rejected white rule are barely present in the cinematic canon. Films dealt with the subject through the lens of nostalgia — 'the Raj' — or white benevolence: the colonies were 'given' freedom as a gift, it was not taken as a right. We were irrelevant to our own history.

When the subject of injustice to Black people is tackled in such films it is always through the story of a benign white man: the white savior narrative. In these narratives neither justice nor rights come about as a result of Black agency. Blacks are passive and their suffering serves merely to inform and influence the white savior's journey. In films like *White Mischief* (1987) and *Mississippi Burning* (1988), white discomfort serves as a proxy for Black pain. This provoked a fierce backlash. In the face of gathering anger, a new and even more disturbing trend has emerged.

Movie scripts are very structured. The first act sets up the conflict when the hero's rights are trampled on. That is the call to action. The remainder of the film is about our hero's resistance, his fighting back. Deprived of the white savior and yet unable or unwilling to show Black rebellion, a slew of films emerged that abandoned the normal narrative arc of film altogether. These films linger long and with almost pornographic relish on the suffering of the Black characters, on the laceration of Black flesh. Well into the third act there is still more and more suffering of Black characters who do not react against it. They are even constrained from seeming angry. In the age of videos of beatings (social media and events as they happen) there is great tolerance for that laceration and it goes on and on. Worst of all, the expected resolution at the end of the narrative never comes. This suffering does not effect change within the narrative of the film. Resolution must come from persuading the filmgoer to leave the cinema angry and, presumably, to change things in real life.

This is not how movies should work. We go to watch someone ride off into the sunset. In the absence of that, all that is left is a narrative of Black helplessness, Black hopelessness.

And, even when present, what is that Black sunset?

The white hero fights and utterly destroys the system that persecuted him. The Black hero's 'happy ending' is to be allowed to join the system that persecuted him or to be accepted by those who previously rejected him.

In a further perversion of the rules of drama, in film Black people are constrained from showing anger and from taking up arms. They must bear each indignity with saint-like forbearance until a white character notices and alleviates the situation. We are back to the White Savior.

This demand for forbearance is especially unyielding when it comes to women and especially to women of color. Too often they are reduced to stereotypes — the sassy best friend or the angry Black woman. It is hard to depict trespass of the rights of those who are seen as having no rights, not even to their bodies.

So while white resistance films tell of white men taking up arms in violent struggles for freedom, rights or revenge, Black resistance films focus on non-violent saintly heroes: Gandhi, Mandela, King.

From the outset, *Guerrilla* set out, both visually and narratively, to turn every single one of these tropes on its head. It is a love story set against the backdrop of one of the most politically explosive times in UK history. A politically active couple (played by Freida Pinto and Babou Ceesay) have their relationship and values tested when they liberate a political prisoner and form a radical underground cell in 1970s London.

When John Ridley approached me about the new series he was writing I was thrilled that one of the lead characters would be a woman of color. On agreeing to write one episode, I inherited an embarrassment of riches from John, including complex characters drawn by a master storyteller at the top of his craft.

Episode 5 was pivotal as it would set up the finale in episode 6. In keeping with the spirit of the series, I intended that the inciting incident would overturn the norms established so long ago about how to treat stories of Black resistance.

The main character was an Asian woman of color and this accurately reflects the history of the time. In America, the Black Panthers were an exclusively Black movement. The British Black Panthers grew out of the anti-colonial movements of the 60s and so was multicultural, with people from all over the disintegrating British Empire as members. Jas Mitra was based on the real-life British civil rights activist and Black Panther Mala Sen. She was played by Frieda Pinto.

While the more vocal members of the Panthers were men, many of their lasting achievements were due to the on-the-ground activism of the women of the movement. I wanted to pay homage to these women. While *Guerrilla* is a work of fiction it was important to pay tribute to real-life heroines, and I wanted to use the inciting incident to do so.

So I came to the creative decision that this inciting incident must be an outrage on a Black woman. Not her body. I wanted to avoid adding to the desensitization to Black trauma. It would be an outrage to her dignity.

At first I felt constrained by not wanting to show angry Black women until it dawned on me that one of the tools of oppression is to delegitimize the righteous anger and outrage of the oppressed. Make them ashamed or make them question their emotions. In cinematic language the value of something is dependent on the ferocity with which you will defend it. As I wrote I asked myself, 'Why shouldn't Black women be angry in the face of injustice?'

A true heroine of the resistance in Brixton at the time was the activist Olive Morris. She was a founder member of the British Black Panthers. She fought tirelessly for women's rights, children rights and tenants' rights and she was never afraid to be angry on their behalf. Research led me to an incident outside a housing office in the seventies. Olive was demonstrating against unfair housing practices when she was insulted by a council employee. Today that housing office in Brixton is named after her.

This episode was the springboard for the inciting incident. Jas Mitra would witness this incident with the character based on Olive, leading to righteous anger and violent rebellion and retribution.

In other words, the cinematic language reserved for white male heroes was co-opted to tell the story of a Black woman. I felt it was about time.

# 41. Migration as a Woman's Right: Stories from Comparative and Transnational Slavery Histories in the North Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds

### *Gunja SenGupta*

Transnational perspectives on slavery have yielded the important insight that migration makes meaning; that civic identities transform in transit from one place to another.[1] During the nineteenth century,

---

[1] For recent overviews of transnational history, see C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, '*AHR* Conversation: On Transnational History,' *American Historical Review* 111 (December 2006), 1440–64; and the essays by Nancy F. Cott, Stephen Tuck, Jean Allman, and Matthew Pratt Guterl in 'AHR Forum: Transnational Lives in the Twentieth-Century,' *American Historical Review* 118 (February 2013), 45–139. For a recent global approach to slavery, see Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History* (First David Brion Davis Lectures, Gilder-Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery and Abolition) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), and Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible*: *Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011, repr. 2013). Earlier classics include Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*: *A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); and for the West, David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), and *Inhuman Bondage*: *The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also his *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

© 2019 Gunja SenGupta, CC BY 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.41

the march of abolition and empire balkanized and realigned the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds along political, philosophical, and jurisdictional boundaries of difference over slavery. An imperial behemoth loomed over these divisions on the high seas and the lands that bordered them. For that power — an expanding but fractious British empire — antislavery activism was at least partly a matter of defining and defending the material and moral foundations of imperialism, and about integrating rescued captives into their colonies as subjects and workers.[2] This essay is woven from the archival traces of an international cast of women on the margins, enslaved and free, in North

---

Historical geography has invented oceanic worlds as meaningful frameworks for the study of slavery histories. For overviews of Atlantic historiography, see Peter Coclanis, 'Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?', *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (October 2006), 727–28, and Alison Games, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,' *American Historical Review,* 111 (June 2006), 741–57. See also James Sidbury, 'Globalization, Creolization, and the Not-So-Peculiar Institution,' *Journal of Southern History,* 73 (August 2007), 618; and Vincent Brown, 'Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,' *American Historical Review* 114 (December 2009), 1231–49. Lauren Benton, 'Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 47 (October 2005), 700–24, illustrates the role of law in constructing the oceanic regions that we use to organize knowledge about the 'global' and the 'local.' 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). See also 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 Paul Tyambe Zeleza, 'Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic,' *African Affairs,* 104:4 (2005), 35–68 (p. 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. On the narrativization of 'routes/roots,' see Susan S. Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). For the Indian Ocean, see Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Universalizing the Indian Ocean,' *PMLA,*125 (May 2010), 721–29; Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[2] See, for example, the essays in Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight (eds.), *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Van Gosse, '"As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends": The Emergence of African American Politics in the British Atlantic World, 1772–1861,' *American Historical Review,* 113 (October 2008), 1003–28; and Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital*: *Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

America and British India, who appeared to seek reinvention through flight or emigration across borderlands erected by British imperial abolition. In the process, these women nudged, navigated, and narrated the international frontiers of contest over freedom's meanings at the intersection of many tropes of difference — of gender and class, and race and religion, writing themselves into the records that make history. But the disparate circumstances and voices of these women interrupted linear and universalist narratives of liberty's progress under the British flag in the nineteenth century, illustrating that context configured the interplay of freedom's meanings with gender, work, and family, quite differently from one oceanic world to another.[3]

---

[3] Seymour Drescher makes the point that the enslaved enter our field of vision in moments and spaces of conflict in 'The Fragmentation of Atlantic Slavery and British Intercolonial Slave Trade,' in Walter Johnson (ed.), *Chattel Principle*: *Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 234–55. On tropes of difference in African-American women's history, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 'African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,' *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992), 251–75. A few examples of the rich and voluminous literature on enslaved women in the US include Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985); Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); 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); Kit Candlin and Cassandra Pybus, *Enterprising Women: Gender, Race, and Power in the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015); Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Wilma King, '"Mad" Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts,' *Journal of African American History*, 92 (Winter 2007), 37–56; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); 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); Andrea Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and Empire in India* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012); 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; Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 21–43; Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (eds.), *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). On slavery in the Indian Ocean, see Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), *Women and Slavery: Africa, The Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio

Let us juxtapose, for comparative purposes, a spectrum of female figures engaged the discourse of imperial abolition as it traveled from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. We begin in Canada West (present day Ontario), where in the early 1850s, the powerful voice of the African-American newspaper publisher and emigration advocate Mary Ann Shadd Cary rang out with a feminist vision of colorblind colonial citizenship under a benevolent female majesty. The action then moves across oceans back in time to a Delhi magistrate's *Kacceri* — a colonial office, a locus for the information-gathering, writing, authentication, and archiving that proved crucial to the daily operation and consolidation of empire.[4] There, colonial bureaucrats mediated and inscribed into

---

University Press, 2007); Gywn Campbell and Edward A. Alpers, 'Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labor and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia,' *Slavery and Abolition,* 25 (August 2004), ix–xxvii; Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Chatterjee and Richard Eaton (eds.), *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean African and Asia* (London: Routledge, 2005); Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2004); Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and Empire in India*; Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Utsa Patnaik and Manjari Dingwaney (eds.), *Chains of Servitude: Bondage and Slavery in India* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1985); Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Deryck Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Clare Anderson, 'Convicts and Coolies: Rethinking Indentured Labour in the Nineteenth Century,' *Slavery and Abolition,* 30 (March 2009), 93–109; Richard B Allen, 'Slaves, Convicts, Abolitionism and the Global Origins of the Post-Emancipation Indentured Labor System,' *Slavery and Abolition,* 35 (June 2014), 328–48; Frederick Cooper, Rebecca J. Scott, Thomas C. Holt (eds.), *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977); Benedicte Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India* (Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1967); Martin A. Klein (ed.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage and Emancipation in Modern South Africa and Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India;* Kishori Saran Lal, *Muslim Slave System in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Aditya, 1994); Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Bernard Moitt (ed.), *Sugar, Slavery and Society: Perspectives on the Caribbean, India, the Mascarenes, and the United States* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004); Jeanette Pinto, *Slavery in Portuguese India, 1510–1842* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing, 1992); Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); James L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

[4] Bhavani Raman, 'The Familial World of the Company's Kacceri in Early Colonial Madras,' *Journalism of Colonialism and Colonial History,* 9 (Fall 2008), [n. p.]; Olivera Jokic, 'Commanding Correspondence: Letters and the "Evidence of Experience" in

the archives the testimonies of 'freedom flights' by elusive enslaved concubines belonging to the local royal household, contributing to the reports that would shape the contours of slavery's 'delegalization' in British Asia. By placing these local perspectives within transnational and comparative frames of reference, we may contextualize and connect national (and nationalistic) histories and historiographies. These connections pit idealized African-American narratives of British abolition in the Atlantic world against imperial deference to slaveholding patriarchies in the Indian Ocean.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary came of age in a new republic founded in compromise on racial slavery. There, masters of human chattel constructed a mythology of the Old South as a patriarchal paradise populated by benevolent paternalists and happy slaves, and 'inhuman bondage' as a species of social insurance. Into this bipolar society divided starkly in law and etiquette into Black and white, and slave and free, where free Blacks were rendered an anomaly, Mary Ann Shadd Cary was born in 1823 into a relatively privileged free family of color of racially mixed descent in Delaware. The basic outlines of her biography are well known. As the slave state of her birth on the borders of the Mason Dixon line grew increasingly inhospitable to Black people during the antebellum era, Shadd Cary's father Abraham shifted his family to free Pennsylvania, where, in Westchester he set himself up as a shoemaker while immersing the family in abolitionist and Underground Railroad activism. His eldest daughter Mary Ann attended a private Quaker boarding school in Westchester, and entered the one profession open to African-American women in those days, teaching school across the Mid-Atlantic, from Delaware to Pennsylvania and New Jersey, while publishing controversial critiques of her community on grounds that ranged from charges of conspicuous consumption against the Black bourgeoisie, the alleged perpetuation of 'ignorance' and 'superstition' by Black churches, and the supposed preference for 'whining' over action by African American convention organizers. On the heels the draconian Fugitive Slave Act, which stripped suspected fugitives of their Fourth

---

the Letterbook of John Bruce, the East India Company Historiographer,' *Eighteenth-Century*: *Theory and Interpretation*, 52 (Summer 2011), 109–36; Mary Poovey, 'The Limits of the Universal Knowledge Project: British India and the East Indiamen,' *Critical Inquiry*, 31 (2004), 183–202.

Amendment rights, subjected them to arrest without a warrant, and no recourse to trial by jury, thus endangering entire communities of free Blacks, Shadd joined an exodus of people of color from the United States to Canada. She settled in the intimate farming community of Windsor, a spot that served as the first destination of refugees from slavery south of the border. With funding from the evangelical Christian abolitionist American Missionary Association, she established an interracial school.[5] At the same time, she embarked upon tours of her newly adopted home, and researched its potential as a haven for American Blacks. Her labors materialized in a forty-page pamphlet, published in 1852 under the title, *A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West, in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect: with Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver's Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants*. The following year, she launched a newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*, 'devoted to Anti-Slavery, Emigration, Temperance and General Literature.'[6] Although male collaborators fronted as editors of this publication, Shadd Cary was its guiding light and de facto operator, thus blazing a trail for African-American women in the field of journalism.

As the label of the pamphlet, *A Plea for Emigration* suggests, Shadd Cary placed her data on Canada's climate, natural resources, and politics of race relations within a comparative framework informed by emigration debates raging within African America: whether to stay and fight for immediate abolition and civil rights within the US as Frederick Douglass championed, or to seek equality and opportunity in less formidable realms — whether Central and South America as Martin Delany argued, or to repatriate to Africa, as the American Colonization Society envisioned. At the same time, however, I argue that Shadd Cary's emigrationist perspective sought to write women and people of color into a teleological, Hegelian representation of history as a march of freedom unfolding from east to west, and culminating, perhaps, in Vancouver's Island, within the framework of what Shadd Cary romanticized as a color-blind, antislavery empire with a woman at its helm. Within this haven, Vancouver would become, Shadd Cary wrote, 'the first island in importance on the globe.'[7] This locale's destiny lay not in agriculture. Rather, Shadd wrote, 'The Western Continent, and particularly the northern part, say 'wise men of the east,' must eventually leave the eastern far in the distance (a fact that should not be lost sight of by colored men) and that over the Pacific will the trade with eastern nations be prosecuted.' Vancouver refueled whale ships en route to the northern seas, and lay directly in the path of trade with Asia, so that 'the people there settled, of whatever complexion, will be the 'merchant princes of the world,' under the protection of Great Britain.' From this angle, Shadd judged 'any eastern move […], as for instance to Africa,' as a 'retrograde step.' Africa she deemed the colonizationists' 'land of promise,' a means of ridding North America of free Blacks, and particularly inhospitable to women of color. 'Tropical Africa' raised the specter of 'pestilence, a burning sun and fearful maladies,' in addition to 'big spiders, lizzards, snakes, centipedes, scorpions, and all manner of creeping and biting things.' The *Provincial Freeman* warned that complexion offered little guarantee of equal treatment. Gesturing to a derisive label forged in empire, she noted that 'colored nabobs' might prove hostile to less well-off newcomers, and 'as merciless as other men, when possessed of the same amount of pride, conceit and wickedness, and as much, if not more ignorance.' Nor did Mexico and South America offer attractive prospects of refuge, for they were weak states aligned with the Roman Catholic church. Only one government, Great Britain, promised to offer within her dependencies 'a *secure* home for the American slave, and the disgraced *free* man.'[8] Shadd Cary exhorted her compatriots that while they could not be 'a whole African nation' in Canada, they could 'be *part* of the Colored British nation. This nation knows no one color above another, but being composed of all colors, it is evidently a *colored* nation.' British soil, 'under the protection of the Queen' offered African Americans of both sexes their best chance at freedom.[9] This argument added a feminist twist to familiar African-American proclamations of Anglophilia — an attitude anchored at least partly in Britain's perceived emancipationist leanings. These extended from the landmark colonial era court decision, *Somerset vs. Stewart*, through British invitations to the enslaved to join the loyalist cause on the promise of freedom during the American Revolution, the British role in the abolition of the international slave trade, and West Indian emancipation, to the hospitality that greeted African-American fugitives from slavery in British cities. African-American celebrations of Britain's ostensible commitment to liberty as a matter of moral principle served sought at least partly to cement a strategic political and diplomatic alliance with an officially antislavery imperial state.[10] What Shadd Cary added to this connection was the observation that it was a female sovereign who steered the imperial project of freedom.

---

[5] For a full length biography of Shadd Cary, see Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). See also Rhodes, 'The Contestation Over National Identity: Nineteenth-Century Black Americans in Canada,' *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 30 (2000), 175–86; See also Jinx Coleman Broussard, *African American Foreign Correspondents: A History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Erica Armstrong Dunbar, 'Writing for True Womanhood: African-American Women's Writings and the Antislavery Struggle,' in Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Stewart (eds.), *Women's Rights and Trans-Atlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 304–10.

[6] Prospectus of the *Provincial Freeman and Weekly Advertiser*, electronic edition, African American Newspapers Collections, Accessible Archives, http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/provincial-freeman/, hereafter, the *Provincial Freeman*.

---

[7] *A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West, in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect: with Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver's Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants* (Detroit: John W. Pattison, 1852), p. 43, hereafter, *A Plea*.

[8] *A Plea*, p. 40

In this context, *A Plea for Emigration* portrayed Ontario as Black people's answer to the liberating mystique of westward expansion, in which geographical mobility offered a path to prosperity and personal reinvention. This land supposedly boasted a temperate climate, rich vegetation, arable land, plentiful timber, beautiful waterways, fine livestock, and affordable rural land prices, so that even men bereft of capital could 'with an axe and a little energy,' achieve 'an independent position.' Yet, it was the values of 'personal freedom and political rights,' that invested this soil with its most priceless quality, rendering it the genuinely liberated — and liberal — reverse mirror image of the US West.[11]

But what, in Shadd Cary's worldview, did freedom really mean? In an age in which proslavery interests defended masters of the lash as benevolent paternalists, and chattel bondage as a form of 'poor law' for the inherently dependent, she upheld self-sufficiency, above all, as the hallmark of liberty. She famously clashed with the Refugee Home

---

[9] *Provincial Freeman*, 15 April and 1 July 1854

[10] On these points, see Van Gosse, 'As a Nation'.

[11] *A Plea*, pp. 10, 8.

Society, run by fellow-émigré, the former fugitive slave Henry Bibb. The Society raised funds to purchase lands for resale to fugitive slaves. Shadd Cary criticized the venture for excluding 'nominally free' African Americans, and its leaders for allegedly lining their own pockets at the expense of their ostensible beneficiaries. But most of all, she charged that the Society's reliance on the largesse of white philanthropists reduced freed people to 'beggary.' That indiscriminate charity perpetuated stereotypes of the refugees' helpless degradation, playing, she seemed to be saying, into proslavery depictions of free societies as beset with 'the perils of pauperism,' class conflict, and radical ideologies of all stripes. *Plea for Emigration* quoted disparagements of such aid at length; 'We do not think it right that twenty-seven thousand colored persons, who are supporting themselves by their own industry, should lie under the disgrace of being called public beggars, when they receive nothing, and don't want anything.'[12] Her portrait of the settlement of Dawn, 'on the Sydenham river,' posed the very antithesis of the proslavery prognosis of free societies: 'Instead of [registering] an increase of vice, prejudice, improvidence, laziness, or a lack of energy,' this settlement was law-abiding, and paid 'due attention' to 'moral and intellectual culture.' Moreover, 'the former prejudices on the part of the whites, has given place to a perfect reciprocity of religious and social intercommunication. Schools are patronized equally; the gospel is common, and hospitality is shared alike by all.'[13]

Shadd Cary, then, embraced an emigrationist vision firmly embedded in trans-oceanic discourses over slavery, poverty and patriarchy. Deeply entangled with emerging global systems of capitalism and empire, her perspective melded Whig Poor-Law reformers' disdain for dependence with a Republican free labor vision of social mobility emerging on the US side of the Atlantic. The same Whig government that presided over the advent of Caribbean emancipation, also spearheaded a process to reform Britain's Poor Laws based on the principle that poor relief for the unworthy indigent encouraged laziness and immorality. The *Plea*'s observation that 'boxes of clothing and barrels of provisions' dispatched to Canada by misguided US philanthropists had been 'employed to support the idle, who are too lazy to work,' but who comprised a minority of Canada's 'colored

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 31–32.

[13] *A Plea*, p. 22.

population,' smacked of Whiggish indictments of the so-called 'unworthy poor' on both sides of the Atlantic. The quintessentially American answer to proslavery charges of 'pauperism' in free society lay, of course, in the ideology of free labor associated with the Republican Party in the 1850s. This emerging politics of antislavery that articulated the aspirations of an unstable, inchoate middle class, defined freedom as self-ownership, and people as individuals with the right (indeed responsibility) to sell their labor power in free and competitive markets for labor in the US industrial capitalist order. Republicans maintained that such labor — if founded upon the values of hard work, sobriety and thrift — offered the potential for social mobility, and with it, the guarantee of harmony between capital and labor.[14] Shadd Cary's celebration of the dignity of labor in Canada was steeped in Republican free labor thinking. A segment on 'Labor-Trades' in the *Plea* highlighted the demand for labor in Canada's thriving villages and its agricultural and timber sectors. Moreover, 'complexion' excluded no man from any trade. 'If a colored man understands his business, he receives the public patronage the same as a white man. He is not obliged to work a little better, and at a lower rate — there is no degraded class to identify him with, therefore every man's work stands or falls according to merit [...].'[15] At the same time, Shadd Cary encouraged her compatriots of color to become entrepreneurs and small producers, buying land directly from the Canadian government, rather than contracting labor for planters elsewhere — even under British governance, say in Jamaica.

Shadd Cary's most striking and unique contribution, however, consisted in writing women of color — as wives, mothers, and workers — into these Anglo-American narratives of equal opportunity and sturdy independence. While the *Plea* said little about family or gender, the *Provincial Freeman* wove these themes into a compelling composite picture of the mutual workings of economic oppression, sexual abuse, and family breakdown in US communities riven by slavery and race prejudice. The newspaper highlighted injuries to women and families featured commonly in abolitionist novels and fugitive slave narratives: the specter of families separated on the auction block; of Margaret Garner killing her child in a hideout in Cincinnati rather than have it 'live as a slave'; a jealous Tennessee mistress scalding and hanging her husband's enslaved mistress; and a runaway ad for a slave mother with a 'nearly white' infant — a visible marker all at once of sexual abuse, perverse paternal ties, and the illogic of racial slavery.[16]

---

[14] For a classic exposition of Free Labor Republicanism, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). See also, Jonathan Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[15] *A Plea*, p. 18.

But in addition, the paper's spotlight on race prejudice north of the Mason-Dixon line illuminated the difficulties of creating or sustaining families even in the free states of the American republic. Black exclusion from all but the most menial of trades, and shrinking opportunities for property ownership drove African-American youth off to sea, leaving African-American women without prospective marriage partners or breadwinners.[17] Shadd Cary's newspaper juxtaposed these accounts with the economic exploitation of working women in the US. 'Of all the classes of workers in this country,' one account began, 'the females are the most completely prostrated by under-paid labor. In no department of human industry is so much robbery endured and so much humiliating contempt inflicted, as upon poor, weak, working women.' The piece underscored that economic justice for women built both wholesome families and female virtue, for without it, 'no woman deprived of a husband or a father can be anything in America but a pauper and a beggar, unless by the sale of HER CHASTITY.' It reinforced the argument for emigration by placing ostensibly free Northern men on par with the worst despots of their sex in autocracies elsewhere: 'What is really the difference between the Russians flogging their women — the Southerners flogging their negro women, and the Northerners starving and cheating theirs?'[18]

This portrait contrasted forcefully with strategically placed arguments for women's rights within the British Empire. One article noted that Englishmen in general agreed that women 'may be a clerk, a partner, banker, a proprietress, a queen.' It went on to challenge the logic of limiting women from the public sphere of politics and the professions within an imperial realm under female suzerainty. 'A woman may be a nurse to both sexes. Oh, yes! And as a nurse or "granny" she may administer medicine, at second-hand, but to prescribe! Oh! That would be dreadful!

---

[16] *Provincial Freeman*, 25 March, 1854; 3 November, 1855; 22 March, 1856; 2 February 1856.

[17] *Provincial Freeman*, 27 January 1855.

[18] *Provincial Freeman*, 15 August 1857.

All we have to say about this, is — Pshaw! It certainly but ill becomes us, to say a great deal against a Woman's having to do with politics, when at the head of our Government, the greatest and freest on […] earth, stands a Woman, and she the very best Sovereign that ever swayed the British scepter […]. And, by the way, the ruling of Queens will bear the most triumphant comparison with the ruling of Kings, past and present […]. There now! Can you tell where we stand on Women's Rights?'[19]

It was clear where Shadd Cary stood on women's rights. Defined by the economic and political conditions necessary to sustain individual autonomy, personal integrity, and family life, such rights stood at the center of her conception of freedom. Mobility via emigration comprised a practical, activist mode of realizing such freedom. And British colonial nationalism under the protective eye of a female emperor offered the institutional framework for doing it.

But how did this idealized vision of imperial abolition measure up to colonial administration in the Indian Ocean? In what ways, for instance, did the relationships among empire, family, and freedom mutate as they traveled across the world to British South Asia? Historian Christopher Brown has argued that Britain emerged from the American War of Independence with a crisis of confidence, as well as a mission that fused the colonial project with the moral capital of antislavery policy.[20] As the nineteenth century opened, however, controversy over the ways in which the abolition of the international slave trade applied to British Asia tested the limits of that mission. Professions of good intent collided with the overriding imperial imperatives of political expansion and revenue collection, generating inconsistent and often arbitrary attitudes toward Indian forms of servitude. Indeed, intercontinental abolitionists and social reformers, as well as critics of British imperialism, made a compelling case that the imperial policy of legal pluralism had, in fact, created and codified forms of servitude not recognized by the East India Company's Muslim predecessors. Governor-General Warren Hastings had set the tone of British Indian law in 1772 by declaring that in 'all suits regarding inheritance, succession, marriage, castes, and other religious usages or institutions, the laws of the Koran,' would govern Muslims, while the provisions of 'Shaster' would rule Hindus.[21] Subsequently, British India's Calcutta-based supreme court of civil and revenue jurisdiction ruled that 'the *spirit* of the rule for observing the Muhammadan and Hindu laws was applicable to cases of slavery.' Abolitionists argued that this decision, ratified by the Governor General in Council in 1798, served as a principal instrument for the 'perpetuation' of slavery with the blessings of colonial rule, for among other things, it resurrected ostensible Hindu provisions governing slavery as interpreted by *pundits*.[22] Two decades later, a chief judge of the same court, while proposing regulations for the guidance of courts of judicature on slavery cases, sought to establish legal grounds for Atlantic-style 'freedom' suits by or on behalf of the enslaved by raising the question whether the slaves claimed by masters were lawful slaves as interpreted by Muslim and Hindu jurists, by making maltreatment a grounds for dispossessing the master of his servile dependents, and moreover, by bringing these cases under the purview of the criminal rather than civil courts — in other words, making them not about property, but rather about personal freedom.[23] The proposal was never adopted. Yet, a patchwork of discordant colonial practices offered subalterns some maneuvering space. Thus for instance, Sir Charles Metcalf, Resident at Delhi, issued in 1812, a proclamation prohibiting the import of slaves into the areas under his jurisdiction for any purpose whatsoever. 'The Law regarding Slavery became, therefore, by force of this Proclamation different in that territory from what it is in any other part of British India.'[24]

---

[19] *Provincial Freeman*, 12 August 1854.

[20] Brown, *Moral Capital*.

It is to the land where Metcalf once operated, then, that we now turn, to unearth the story of two alleged enslaved concubines from a royal household in colonial Delhi. These two fugitives ran headlong into the deference that British authorities had historically paid to the workings of elite Indian domestic establishments, whose custodians they sought not to alienate, as well as to the rhetoric of slavery as a 'domestic' institution, not subject to government regulation. These households often incorporated enslaved women into lineages they were expected to perpetuate through reproductive labor, earning certain privileges in exchange. In 1828, two such women scaled the walls that separated their royal *zenana* in Delhi from the world outside, and arrived in a colonial police station, pleading the right to leave the extended family they served. Colonial officials hesitated to free them, for the Mughal Sultan claimed them as his son's concubines. The women's restoration, then, became a matter of 'honour, […] of the King himself and of the whole palace […].' Edward Colebrooke, then Resident at Delhi, wrote that 'the palace is thronged with women of this description, kidnapped by persons employed for the purpose, and bought from those persons; […] of the hundreds of brothers and sisters, sons, daughters, and grandchildren of his Majesty, scarcely one […] will be found to have been born from any but such mothers.' The King expressed to colonial bureaucrats his apprehension that liberating the two alleged concubines would set a dangerous precedent that might invite other women in the palace under similar circumstances to follow suit. 'And he asks,' wrote the Resident, 'what would be the consequence if one of the Begums (wives) themselves should elope from the palace, and claim the protection of the police?' One of the women in the 1828 'elopement' case testified that she had been drugged and forcibly carried away from the sweet shop she had operated, passed off as a Muslim, sold to the prince, and mistreated by his wife. However, it was only when she swore that she had had no marital or sexual relations with any man in the *zenana*, that she was, rather a common servant — a testimonial buttressed by evidence of physical abuse that she presented — that the British government authorized her release. This case reflected then, the tensions and contradictions that shaped British definitions of slavery and freedom in India. On the one hand, it illustrated the spirit of the principle of the British law of slavery upheld since the 1770s, in which bondage lay in the realm of personal law, and assumed a special immunity from regulation when it emerged within the sanctum of familial relations within the patriarchal household. There was, in other words, no refuge from bondage as long as it was judged a matter of *domestic* governance, not subject to trespass by outsiders.[25] Yet, Harrington's proposal and Metcalf's regulations — which defined slavery in terms of personal freedom rather than familial relations, and judged maltreatment grounds for emancipation, may have offered the women in question a resource for engaging the formal institutions of colonialism in their quest to escape oppression within the households that held them to service. In the long run, freedom flights of the sort effected by the Delhi refugees helped shape Parliament's rather peculiar view of abolition in British India. Instead of outlawing slavery outright, the ambiguity of servile statuses and conflicting claims to family and freedom prompted the imperial state to merely 'delegalize' slavery in India in 1843. This meant, among other things, that colonial bureaucrats reserved the right not to return fugitives from servitude to their masters.

---

[21] Quotation taken from Eric Lewis Beverley, 'Property, Authority and Personal Law: Waqf in Colonial South Asia,' *South Asia Research*, 31:2 ( 2011), 155–82 (p. 158).

[22] William Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in* British *India*: *In* a *Series of Letters to Thomas Fowell Buxton, Esq.* (London: Smith, Elder, 1840), pp. 26–27, https://archive.org/details/lawcustomofslave00adamrich/page/n6

[23] *Slave Trade* (*East India*). — *Slavery in Ceylon* (The House of Commons, 1 March 1838), https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SStDAAAAcAAJ&lpg=PR1&hl=it&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q&f=false, p. 322.

[24] *Reports of the Indian Law Commission upon Slavery in India, January 15, 1841*: *With Appendices*, 2 vols. (India Office Records), vol. 1, p. 313, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008420865

In the Indian Ocean, then, as in the North America, the gendered trope of family supplied a key ingredient in the terms of debate over the meaning of freedom. Yet, Indian Ocean societies configured slavery's relationship with kinship and race constructs differently than did the American South. Within these diverse contexts of power, discourses of family supplied women with very different languages, symbols, and arguments to assert their claims to personhood against the prerogatives of masters and men, and of nation and empire. Such claims may not always have succeeded. Yet, they helped register these marginalized voices in the reports and records that shaped colonial discourses on slavery and freedom.

---

[25] Edward Colebrooke to Chief Secretary Swinton, August 4, 1828; T. T. Metcalf, Esq., Judge and Magistrate, Delhi, to J. E. Colebrooke, August 2, 1828; Deputy Secretary Stirling to Colebrooke, August 29, 1828, all in Return to an Order of the Honorable The House of Commons, dated 1 March 1838; — for, COPIES OR ABSTRACTS of all Correspondence between the Directors of the East India Company and the Company's Government in India, since the 1st day of June, 1827, on the subject of SLAVERY in the TERRITORIES; under the Company's Rule; also respecting any SLAVE TRADE therein; also of all ORDERS and REGULATIONS issued, or any Proceedings taken, by Order or under the Authority of the Company, with a view to the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade, since the above Date; also of any CORRESPONDENCE between the BOARD OF CONTROL and the COURT OF DIRECTORS on the said subjects, Ordered by the House of Commons, to be Printed, 31 July, 1838.

# Bibliography

'Edward Colebrooke to Chief Secretary Swinton, August 4, 1828; T. T. Metcalf, Esq., Judge and Magistrate, Delhi, to J. E. Colebrooke, August 2, 1828; Deputy Secretary Stirling to Colebrooke, August 29, 1828, all in Return to an Order of the Honorable The House of Commons, dated 1 March 1838; — for, COPIES OR ABSTRACTS of all Correspondence between the Directors of the East India Company and the Company's Government in India, since the 1st day of June, 1827, on the subject of SLAVERY in the TERRITORIES; under the Company's Rule; also respecting any SLAVE TRADE therein; also of all ORDERS and REGULATIONS issued, or any Proceedings taken, by Order or under the Authority of the Company, with a view to the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade, since the above Date; also of any CORRESPONDENCE between the BOARD OF CONTROL and the COURT OF DIRECTORS on the said subjects' (House of Commons, 31 July, 1838).

*A Plea for Emigration*; *or Notes of Canada West, in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect*: *with Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver's Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants* (Detroit: John W. Pattison, 1852).

Adam, William, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in* British *India*: *In* a *Series of Letters to Thomas Fowell Buxton, Esq.* (London: Smith, Elder, 1840), https://archive.org/details/lawcustomofslave00adamrich/page/n6

Allen, Richard B., 'Slaves, Convicts, Abolitionism and the Global Origins of the Post-Emancipation Indentured Labor System,' *Slavery and Abolition*, 35 (June 2014), 328–48.

Anderson, Clare, 'Convicts and Coolies: Rethinking Indentured Labour in the Nineteenth Century,' *Slavery and Abolition*, 30 (March 2009), 93–109.

Bayly, C. A., Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, '*AHR* Conversation: On Transnational History,' *American Historical Review*, 111 (December 2006), 1440–64.

Benton, Lauren, 'Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47 (October 2005), 700–24.

Beverley, Eric Lewis, 'Property, Authority and Personal Law: Waqf in Colonial South Asia,' *South Asia Research*, 31:2 ( 2011), 155–82.

Blackburn, Robin, *The American Crucible*: *Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011, repr. 2013).

Bose, Sugata, *A Hundred Horizons*: *the Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Broussard, Jinx Coleman, *African American Foreign Correspondents*: *A History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

Brown, Christopher Leslie, *Moral Capital*: *Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Brown, Vincent, 'Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,' *American Historical Review*, 114 (December 2009), 1231–49.

Camp, Stephanie M. H., *Closer to Freedom*: *Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Campbell, Gwyn, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), *Women and Slavery*: *Africa, The Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

— (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean African and Asia* (London: Routledge, 2005).

—, *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2004).

— and Edward A. Alpers, 'Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labor and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia,' *Slavery and Abolition,* 25 (August 2004), ix–xxvii.

Candlin, Kit and Cassandra Pybus, *Enterprising Women*: *Gender*, *Race*, *and Power in the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

Chatterjee, Indrani, *Gender*, *Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

— and Richard Eaton (eds.), *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

Coclanis, Peter, 'Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?', *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (October 2006), 727–28.

Cooper, Frederick, Rebecca J. Scott, Thomas C. Holt (eds.), *Beyond Slavery*: *Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Cott, Nancy F., Stephen Tuck, Jean Allman, and Matthew Pratt Guterl, 'AHR Forum: Transnational Lives in the Twentieth-Century,' *American Historical Review*, 118 (February 2013), 45–139.

Davis, David Brion *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

—, *Inhuman Bondage*: *The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

—, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

—, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

Drescher, Seymour, 'The Fragmentation of Atlantic Slavery and British Intercolonial Slave Trade,' in Walter Johnson (ed.), *Chattel Principle*: *Internal*

*Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 234–55.

Dunbar, Erica Armstrong, 'Writing for True Womanhood: African-American Women's Writings and the Antislavery Struggle,' in Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Stewart (eds.), *Women's Rights and Trans-Atlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 304–10.

Foner, Eric, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

Frederickson, Mary E., Darlene Clarke Hine and Delores Walters (eds.), *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Friedman, Susan S., *Mappings: Feminism and Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Games, Alison, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,' *American Historical Review*, 111 (June 2006), 741–57.

Glickstein, Jonathan, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

Glymph, Thavolia, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Gosse, Van, '"As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends": The Emergence of African American Politics in the British Atlantic World, 1772–1861,' *American Historical Review,* 113 (October 2008), 1003–28.

Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Harms, Robert, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight (eds.), *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

Harris, Joseph E., *The African Presence in Asia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977).

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks, 'African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,' *Signs*, 17 (Winter 1992), 251–75.

Hjejle, Benedicte, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India* (Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1967).

Hofmeyr, Isabel, 'Universalizing the Indian Ocean,' *PMLA* 125 (May 2010), 721–29.

Hunter, Tera, *To 'Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Jokic, Olivera, 'Commanding Correspondence: Letters and the "Evidence of Experience" in the Letterbook of John Bruce, the East India Company Historiographer,' *Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 52 (Summer 2011), 109–36.

King, Wilma, '"Mad" Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts,' *Journal of African American History*, 92 (Winter 2007), 37–56.

Klein, Martin A. (ed.), *Breaking the Chains*: *Slavery*, *Bondage and Emancipation in Modern South Africa and Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

Kumar, Dharma, *Land and Caste in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

—, *Land and Caste in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

Lal, Kishori Saran, *Muslim Slave System in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Aditya, 1994).

Major, Andrea, *Slavery*, *Abolitionism*, *and Empire in India* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

—, *Slavery*, *Abolitionism*, *and Empire in India* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

Manning, Patrick, 'Africa and the African Diaspora: New Directions of Study,' *Journal of African History*, 44 (2003), 487–506.

—, *Slavery and African Life*: *Occidental*, *Oriental*, *and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Miles, Tiya, *Ties that Bind*: *The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Miller, Joseph C., *The Problem of Slavery as History* (First David Brion Davis Lectures, Gilder-Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery and Abolition) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

Moitt, Bernard (ed.), *Sugar*, *Slavery and Society*: *Perspectives on the Caribbean*, *India*, *the Mascarenes*, *and the United States* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004).

Morgan, Jennifer L., *Laboring Women*: *Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Patnaik, Utsa and Manjari Dingwaney (eds.), *Chains of Servitude*: *Bondage and Slavery in India* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1985).

Patterson, Orlando, *Slavery and Social Death*: *A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Pinto, Jeanette, *Slavery in Portuguese India*, *1510–1842* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing, 1992).

Piot, Charles, 'Atlantic Aporias: Africa and Gilroy's Black Atlantic,' *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100 (Winter 2001), 155–70.

Poovey, Mary, 'The Limits of the Universal Knowledge Project: British India and the East Indiamen,' *Critical Inquiry*, 31 (2004), 183–202.

Prakash, Gyan, *Bonded Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Prospectus of the *Provincial Freeman and Weekly Advertiser*, electronic edition, African American Newspapers Collections, Accessible Archives, http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/provincial-freeman/

Raman, Bhavani, 'The Familial World of the Company's Kacceri in Early Colonial Madras,' *Journalism of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 9 (Fall 2008), [n. p.].

*Reports of the Indian Law Commission Upon Slavery in India, January 15, 1841*: *With Appendices*, 2 vols. (India Office Records), vol. 1, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008420865

Rhodes, Jane, 'The Contestation Over National Identity: Nineteenth-Century Black Americans in Canada,' *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 30 (2000), 175–86

—, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*: *The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

Scarr, Deryck, *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

Scully, Pamela and Diana Paton (eds.), *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

Sidbury, James, 'Globalization, Creolization, and the Not-So-Peculiar Institution,' *Journal of Southern History*, 73 (August 2007), 618.

*Slave Trade* (*East India*). — *Slavery in Ceylon* (The House of Commons, 1 March 1838), https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SStDAAAAcAAJ&lpg=PR1&hl=it&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q&f=false

Smallwood, Stephanie E., *Saltwater Slavery*: *A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Sowell, Thomas, *Race and Culture*: *A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Stam, Robert and Ella Shohat, *Race in Translation*: *Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

Stevenson, Brenda, '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.

Watson, James L. (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

White, Deborah Gray, *Ar'n't I a Woman*? *Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985).

Zeleza, Paul Tyambe, 'Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic,' *African Affairs*, 104:4 (2005), 35–68.

# 42. The Sacred Migration of Sister Gertrude Morgan

*Imani Uzuri*

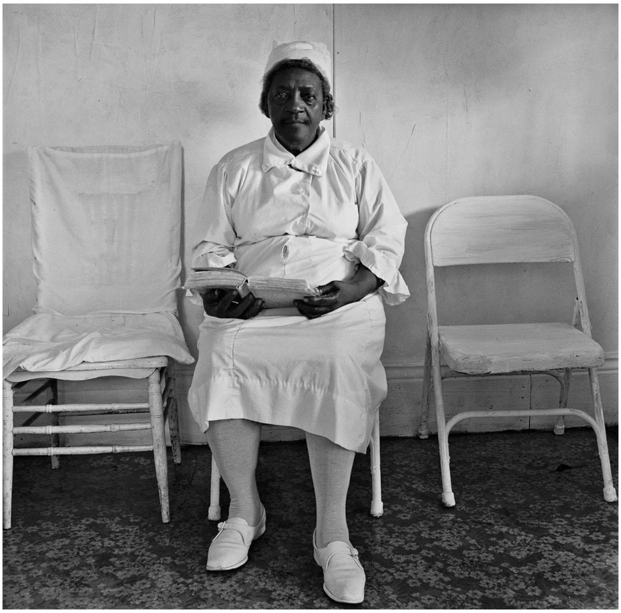


Fig. 42.1 Sister Gertrude Morgan, the Bride of Christ, the Nurse for Dr Jesus and the Housekeeper for Dada God, in her Everlasting Gospel Revelation Mission, New Orleans, 1974. Photograph by Guy Mendes, from 40/40–*40 YEARS 40 PORTRAITS*, Institute 193. All rights reserved.

© 2019 Imani Uzuri, CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.42

This chapter focuses on what I call Sister Gertrude Morgan's 'sacred migration', animated by her spiritual 'calling' from 'God' to 'Goooo Preacher, tell it to the world',[1] her journey to New Orleans from Georgia, and her travels outside of and within the city. I also explore the themes of travel and migration that appear within her visual work and on her only recorded album, 'Let's Make A Record' [1970]; her use of a Prayer Room in her final home in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward as a modality for traveling spiritually; her performativity as a street preacher in New Orleans' French Quarter, Lower Gentilly, Lower Night Ward and surrounding areas; her letter-writing practice as a tool for sending her theological philosophies across the country; and finally my own sonic, visual and performative work (in progress) *Come On In The Prayer Room* inspired by her Prayer Room (as well as the culture of 'prayer rooms' within Black American and Black Diasporic religious culture).[2]

---

[1] Sister Gertrude Morgan recounted in her artwork and personal testimony her 1938 spiritual directive from God that initiated her sojourn from Georgia to New Orleans.

[2] This essay is taken in part from my recent Columbia University African American Studies (IRAAS) Masters' thesis entitled *Come In My Room, Come On In The Prayer Room*: *Sister Gertrude Morgan's Subversive Salvation* under the thesis advisement of Dr Kellie Jones, to whom I owe a debt of great gratitude. I also want to thank Brooke Davis Anderson who was a door opener; William Fagaly who so generously allowed me to interview him and meet with him several times, and who kindly escorted me to the now empty lot covered in four leaf clovers in the Lower Ninth Ward where Sister Gertrude's Everlasting Gospel Mission formerly stood, and to her grave site, where I was able to leave bouquets of white flowers; Elaine Yau who so generously allowed me access to her thoroughly researched 2015 dissertation *Acts of Conversions*: *Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Sensation of Black Folk Art, 1960–1982*; Guy Mendes for sharing beautiful personal stories and articles and for taking my favorite photo of Sister Gertrude sitting in her Prayer Room; Alice Yelen, who so generously allowed me to read and make copies from her collection of Sister Gertrude Morgan's personal letters written to her 'darling daughter' Dr Regenia Perry; Dr Reginia Perry who so generously visited my Harlem home in NYC and spent the day with me sharing amazing mementos from her personal archive, memories, insights, assessments and stories about her times with Sister Gertrude Morgan and for gifting me an original 'Let's Make A Record' vinyl album and an original handwritten personal letter from Sister Gertrude Morgan; Dr Deborah Willis for attending my first work-in-progress performance at Park Avenue Armory of my visual, sonic and performative prayer-room installation inspired by Sister Gertrude Morgan's Prayer Room and for the invitation to be a part of the Women and Migration working group in Florence, Italy to share my research and to perform my second work-in-progress iteration of my prayer-room project. And finally, to Sister Gertrude Morgan herself for calling me to her and to this work of continuing to help spread the 'good news' of her life and ministry.

## 'Go-o-o-o-o, Preacher, Tell it to the World'

The adage that 'the personal is political' informed my interrogation of Black Southern American visual artist, street preacher, singer, tambourine player, guitar player, pianist and mystic Sister Gertrude Morgan, who lived from 1900–80 and employed the modality of Black sacred testimonial practices in her own life through various artistic and spiritual mediums, which tell of her significant evolution as a spiritual being and a dedicated servant of her God. This motto, 'the personal is political', was propagated by the 1970's Black feminist Combahee River Collective (whose name was inspired by Harriet Tubman's 1863 rebellious Civil War battle victory there) and was deepened by Kimberlé Crenshaw's 'mapping' of intersectionality.[3] These concepts help me to begin to think through how Sister Gertrude Morgan's 'personal' reads politically through the lens of her own intersectionality, spirituality, spatiality, sacred migration and liturgy and the ways in which these 'tools of her ministry'[4] help to translate her actualization of what I am theorizing as *subversive salvation*, which she practiced specifically within New Orleans' Lower Gentilly, the French Quarter and the Lower Ninth Ward. My theory of Sister Gertrude Morgan's 'subversive salvation' unpacks and celebrates a particular legacy of Black American sacred practices that include personal direct antiphonal relationships with 'God' (the Holy Spirit); prayer, petitioning, improvisation, 'hearing' (as in spiritual hearing); divination and prophetic vision: epiphanies, dreams, seeing the past and the future, 'knowing'; sacred migration; journeying, pilgrimages, maroonage, and fugitivity, each embedded with a nuanced politics of resistance and existence.

In thinking about my theory of Sister Gertrude Morgan's subversive salvation, it is not that Sister Gertrude Morgan is not religiously conservative in some ways but her actions, liturgy and expression, if explored through a particular lens, indicate a certain radicalism, agency and progressiveness that beg to be acknowledged and honored. This does not mean that her system of belief is without contradictions, yet she can still be seen as heretical on many levels. My goal is to place her at the center of a narrative that honors a more radical, progressive vision of her spirituality as well as looking at how she continuously self-identified and reading that tendency through the lens of a womanist theology. I also explore ways to think about her renegade presence in these psychic, artistic, physical and spiritual locales within the context of her sacred migration, and how themes of 'travel' showed up in her visual art, music, letters, and liturgical practices.

---

[3] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), 1241–99.

[4] Jason Berry, William A. Fagaly, Gertrude Morgan and Helen M. Shannon, *The Tools of Her Ministry*: *The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan* (New York: American Folk Art Museum and Rizzoli International Publications, 2004).

Sister Gertrude Morgan (née Williams) grew up the seventh child in Jim Crow rural Alabama in a small town named Lafayette. She was forced to leave school in third grade to begin working in the fields. A year after the start of the Great Migration in 1917 she migrated with her family at the age of 17 to Columbus, Georgia. She experienced her first spiritual conversion during this time in Columbus, Georgia's Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church. This encounter marks the beginning of her path towards a prophetic transgressive religiosity.

As was the typical condition of many poorer Black American women of this era, due to her lack of other opportunities under an oppressive white-supremacist and capitalist system, Sister Gertrude worked as a domestic and nursemaid in white folks' private homes. She eventually married at the age of 28 in 1928 to William Morgan. In her mid-30s in 1936 and then again in her late 30s in 1938, she testifies she heard a prophetic voice from what she deemed to be God that eventually compelled her to journey from Georgia and leave her former life behind.

LaKisha Michelle Simmons in her book *Crescent City Girls*: *The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* explores Darlene Clark Hine's concept of the 'inner lives' of Black women and recounts:

> In 1989 historian Darlene Clark Hine asked what noneconomic motives had driven black women to join the Great Migration […] by looking for the 'hidden motivation' in black women's migrating patterns [Hines] theorized that the greatest factor was their desire to possess rights of their own bodies, fleeing from […] domestic abuse […] [and] the struggle for 'cultural dissemblance' […] 'a self-imposed invisibility' that gave black women the 'psychic space' 'for mental and physical survival in a hostile world.[5]

---

[5] LaKisha Michelle Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*: *The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (Charlotte: Paw Prints, 2016), p. 6.

There is no evidence that Sister Gertrude Morgan's leaving Georgia and thus her husband after ten years of marriage was related to domestic violence, or if there were other 'hidden motivations' for her exodus, but by her own testimony, she heard the 'voice of God' in 1938 telling her to 'Go-o-o-o-o, Preacher, tell it to the world', which began her sacred migration from Georgia across parts of Alabama, alone, until in 1939 she eventually arrived in New Orleans, which she considered 'the headquarters of sin'.[6] This was a bold example of fugitivity and 'stealing away'[7] for several reasons. Sister Gertrude was raised Baptist at a time when women within the denomination were not *allowed* to preach; she demonstrated a radical intentionality to follow that 'voice of God' and claim her space as a 'Prophetess'[8] of God while embracing the improvisational power of the religious missive to 'go where I [implying God] send thee'.[9]

Fred Moten writes in *In The Break*: *The Aesthetic of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003), in the chapter 'Praying with Eric', about the 'prophetic' aspects of improvisation, the sight before sight, as he explains: 'Improvisation is located at a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between feeling and reflection, disarmament and preparation […] always operates as a kind of foreshadowing, if not prophetic […] Improvisation must be understood then, as a matter of sight and as a matter of time, the time of a look ahead […] The time, shape, and space as a set of determination *in and as light*, by and through the illuminative event'.[10] For Sister Gertrude the 'illuminative event' was her embrace of her ability to receive prophetic vision directly from God without an intermediary or outside confirmation, and her embrace of her own ability to be called as a 'chosed vessel'.[11]

What boldness for a thirty-eight-year-old Southern Black woman during her era to take off on her own, ultimately land in an urban

---

[6] Berry et al., *The Tools of Her Ministry*.

[7] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*: *Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); African-American spiritual, 'Steal Away'.

[8] This self-identification as a Prophetess is present visually and textually in some of Sister Gertrude Morgan's visual art, for example her work entitled *Prophetess*, ca. 1970–79, painted on styrofoam, size 4.5x7 inches (11.4x17.8 cm).

[9] Lyric from the African-American spiritual, 'Children Go Where I Send Thee'.

[10] Fred Moten, *In the Break*: *The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[11] Berry et al., *The Tools of Her Ministry*.

Southern city known for 'vice' including prostitution, gambling, diverse spiritual practices, and one that she even considered to be 'the headquarters of sin'. If engaging in a facile reading of Sister Gertrude Morgan's spiritual goals for her arrival in New Orleans, one could possibly misinterpret her actions as self-righteous and even a delusional grandiose missionary project, but upon closer interrogation one understands Sister's pilgrimage as a transgressive, radicalized act of agency. Unlike her traveling contemporaries Bessie Smith, Mahalia Jackson and other women artists who journeyed as part of their musical work, and even unlike many other Black women who rebelliously migrated because of a desire for safety, work and/or family, Morgan journeyed simply as an amplification of her own agency to *choose* to be only under God's authority and direction; this was the only authority she deemed higher than her own. She was working for and with the Lord. I am not sure if she travelled by bus, train, hitch-hiking or perhaps even walking; neither do I know what response she received from her family, husband or community; nor do I know what she carried with her as she traveled from Georgia to parts of Alabama before settling in New Orleans; but I do know the conditions of her spiritual sojourn disrupted the expectations of a married Black lower-class woman of her age at that time.

In 1939 when Sister Gertrude Morgan arrived in New Orleans it was the country's busiest port town.[12] Along with the import and export of goods and supplies there was also an active 'underworld'. Herbert Asbury writes about the long history of New Orleans's notorious red light district, violent street crime, local bordellos and its status as the earliest gambling capital of the US.[13]

Although the bulk of the Black population of New Orleans was economically extremely poor, it was rich in a mostly Black expressive culture and is considered the birthplace of Jazz, and the home of a celebrated brass-brand culture including Second Line parades, Mardi Gras Indians and heavily influenced by the influx of Fon ethnic and linguistic groups kidnapped and forcibly brought to the area during the treacherous Atlantic Slave Trade, bringing 'voudoun', a Fon word meaning 'spirits' or 'gods'. Sister Gertrude found in New Orleans' rich and eclectic Black spiritual life a syncretic mixture of Catholicism and other diverse Black Diasporic spiritual practices, including the active Spiritual Church Movement. These vibrant streets were the sonic, visual and energetic backdrop against which Sister Gertrude Morgan ministered, preached, prayed, sung, played tambourine and sermonized for several decades, all amplified through her handcrafted paper megaphones.

---

[12] Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter*: *An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (Garden City: Garden City Pub., 1938).

[13] Ibid.

We know from oral history accounts, her paintings and by her own testimony that for about the first eighteen years of her time in New Orleans (1939–57), Sister Gertrude was involved in a collaboration with two other Black American women who came out of the Holiness Sanctified Black tradition (which places great importance on music, ecstatic dancing, speaking in tongues and prophetic visions). Together, Sister Gertrude, Mother Margaret Parker and Sister Cora Williams founded an orphanage and mission in the rural outskirts of New Orleans in Lower Gentilly, in a home they shared. The orphanage was dynamic and provided shelter to as many as twenty Black orphans, children of working mothers and runaways at any given time, mainly girls.

Funding and sustenance for the orphanage came from offerings raised by the three Sisters, who traveled around New Orleans street preaching and performing sacred music while also growing their own vegetables and raising livestock. During this season of their lives, Sister Gertrude Morgan and her cohort donned Black Robes with white cuffs and waist ties. They held neighborhood feasts, played music and traveled as 'prophetesses' to prisons and to revivals and church camp meetings around Louisiana and Texas.[14]

These women were not formally affiliated with any specific 'traditional' institutional church (with the exception of their association with Triumph Church[15]), which was heretical on many levels (especially in an era when it was common for Black women to build up churches and turn them over to their Black male counterparts to lead[16]). They created a community together that could be read as a family system, perhaps even a 'queered' family system with an active politics of service that was, in many ways, in direct alignment with other secular and non-secular Black Women's organizations of the time. According to Tera Hunter in *Survival and the Social Welfare in the Age of Jim Crow*:

---

[14] Berry et al., *The Tools of Her Ministry*.

[15] Elaine Yau, 'Acts of Conversions: Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Sensation of Black Folk Art, 1960–1982', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2015.

[16] Evenlyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*: *The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church*, *1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

> Progressive reformers tried to remedy social imbalances produced by industrial capitalism, especially in urban America […]. Whether in cross-class organizations like Neighborhood Union or in groups, black women diligently built clinics, kindergartens, orphanages, and reformatories to meet the exigencies of living in a separate and unequal society.[17]

Sister Gertrude Morgan and her ministering cohort could be read in many ways as engaging in a 'womanist theology'.[18] Their labor, which supported and nurtured runaways, throwaways and folks deemed outcast by society, animated the *New Testament* text: 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'.[19]

As well as living out a deep spiritual understanding of service embodied within this aforementioned scripture, there were other things at work including an awareness of her agency. Sister Gertrude in her spiritual sojourn aligned herself with these other women and her adopted community at large. Ashon Crawley in his doctoral thesis, 'Black Sacred Breath: Historicity, Performance and Aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism', calls this 'radical sociality':

> Not only does Spirit give life, but that life is evident in how one leans toward others, how one engages with others in the world. We do not merely share in sociality, but we share in the materiality of that which quickens flesh, we share wind and air through the process of inhalation and exhalation.[20]

---

[17] Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 130.

[18] Linda E. Thomas, 'Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm', *Womanist Theology. Cross Currents*, 48:4 (1998–99), [n.d.].

[19] Matthew 25: 35–40.

[20] Ashon Thomas Crawley, 'Black Sacred Breath: Historicity, Performance and Aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2013, p. 97.

Sister Gertrude Morgan 'stealed [herself] away' from a dominant narrative of spirituality and claimed her place that was in many ways one of her own making. Her identity is multi-layered and contradictions abound, but a facile read of her religiosity would not illuminate the complex nuanced prism of identity embodied by Sister Gertrude Morgan. Through her ever-evolving ministries, she 'leans toward others' in body, mind and spirit as a 'chosed vessel' of her God.

## 'I Got a New World in my View'

As well as claiming her personal power and agency, subverting dominant expectations about what her role as a woman had to be, her good works for her community and the many other ways that Sister Gertrude Morgan expressed her *subversive salvation*, her ministry came to light even more prominently to a larger audience during the last twenty-two years of her life, from 1957–80. In 1955, her long time spiritual collaborator Sister Cora Williams died, according to scholar Elaine Yau (who unearthed a previously unavailable death certificate and shared its findings in her recent 2015 dissertation 'Acts of Conversions: Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Sensation of Black Folk Art, 1960–1982'.)[21] Her other collaborator, Mother Margaret Parker, died in 1968 according to art historian William Fagaly,[22] although it seems as if their collaboration ceased around the same time as Cora Williams' death.

This transition correlated closely with the timeframe of Sister Gertrude's 1956 spiritual calling to create visual art as a part of her ministry, and in 1957 she received another major revelation. This vision told her she was a Bride of Christ and at this time she began to dress head to toe in all white (a ritual she continued until her death). The wearing of white can be found in many African and African-descended sacred and secular cultural practices. Even within New Orleans, other Black American women mystics (including the ones photographed by Michael P. Smith such as Saint Catherine, Bishop I. Butler, and Reverend Mother Lydia Gilbert) all wore white for various sacred reasons. For Sister Gertrude Morgan her wearing of white was a signal of her transformation into a Bride of Christ.

---

[21] Yau, 'Acts of Conversions'.

[22] Berry et al., *The Tools of Her Ministry*, p. 9.

Her agency empowered her to name and claim herself and her own image and she chose how she would represent herself and her body within her artwork. She took up audible space on the streets, using her homemade megaphone to amplify her voice and her message, taking up sonic and psychic space within and above the din of New Orleans's street culture, and visual space with her artwork and with her 'performance' as a street preacher.

## Come in my Room, Come on in the Prayer Room

In 1965 when Sister Gertrude (still wearing all white as a self-proclaimed Bride of Christ) named her Lower-Ninth-Ward shotgun-style home 'The Everlasting Gospel Mission' and created her 'all-white Prayer Room' in the front room, this abode became significant to her creative and spiritual work. She continued to preach in the French Quarter, to perform, teach and preach at Jazz Heritage fest, sell her paintings (with Larry Bornstein, art gallerist and co-founder of Preservation Hall, whom she met in 1961 and who acted as her art-world liaison) and give away her paintings, but her Prayer Room became a centralized location for another phase of her sacred migration; her journeying became fixed in a space of physical stillness. She created several visual works that honor the importance of her Prayer Room to her spiritual evolution, and it was open to the public according to a sign in the front window of the Everlasting Gospel Mission that read: SERVICE IS SUNDAY/ THURSDAY. However, she was apparently available any time someone needed prayer or 'laying on of hands'.

'*Come in my room, Come on in the prayer room*', a visual work made with tempera, acrylic, ballpoint pen, and pencil on paperboard, created by Sister Gertrude Morgan circa 1970, is a colorful visualization of her sitting in her personal Prayer Room in her home. The title, which is part of the written text embedded within the piece, is also the title of a popular Black American early gospel song. The song speaks to the Black American Christian practice of literally and symbolically entering into one's 'prayer closet'. This is referenced in Matthew 6:6 which reads, 'When you pray, enter into your closet [inner room]'. In this painting Sister Gertrude Morgan centers a drawn and painted representation of herself in the middle of the frame. She draws herself in all white, inspired by her 1957 vision that told her she was the

'Bride of Christ' and to wear all white. The central imagery behind this revelation is referenced in *Revelations* 21, which talks about a 'new heaven and a new earth' and 'the Holy City [...] coming down out of heaven [...] prepared as a bride beautifully adorned for her husband'. After her 1957 vision, this particular text became a very important part of Sister Gertrude Morgan's iconography and liturgy and was often referenced in her visual work, her way of dressing, her sermons and songs.

She began her letter writing with Dr Regenia Perry while she lived in her 'mission' and she recorded her only album there. She wrote in a letter dated 6 September 1972 that 'God uses me in the prayer room, he give me revelations and a few days later he gives me how'. She relates that God spoke with her in the prayer room about how she was 'praying on people's case'.[23] For Morgan, prayer was a way to deal with temporal slippage and this idea of 'here, now, and there'.

Travel and migration are also themes that feature prominently in her music, sermonizing and visual art. She wrote in another letter to Dr Regenia Perry dated Nov, 1972 'You no [sic] traveling is education'. One of her most important catchphrases was 'Jesus is my airplane'. She created numerous works[24] that featured this motif and her original 1970 vinyl album cover for 'Let's Make A Record' features another artistic representation of it, yet again signaling its importance in Sister Gertrude's iconography. However, she does not include a version of Mother McCollum's 1930s song of the same title on her album, although the album features four songs that deal with ideas of sojourn.

Her voice was a strong alto with gruffness and conviction. She used blue-esque melisma akin to a field-holler or shout. She chanted her refrains over and over again with the ever-present sound of the rhythmic shaking and slapping of her tambourine skin on the palm of her hand and the energetic clanging of the small tambourine cymbals. Her singing demonstrates what musicologist Eileen Southern describes as 'typical in African tradition — the singers, singing with all their might and becoming totally involved in the experience'.[25] The early gospel classic 'Precious Lord Take My Hand' written by Thomas Dorsey appears on her album credited as 'Take My Hand, Lead Me On' along with three original compositions 'Take The Lord Along With You', 'New Jerusalem' and 'I Got The New World In My View'.

---

[23] I accessed a collection of Sister Gertrude Morgan's personal handwritten letters (1971–74) to Dr Regenia Perry (whom Sister often called 'my darling daughter') on 14 January 2016 in New Orleans when art and artifacts collector Alice Yelen generously allowed me to read through copies of her archive of the original letters and also allowed me to make my own copies of the letters.

[24] 'Jesus is my airplane' is a motif used in numerous of Sister Gertrude Morgan's painting including: *New Jerusalem with Jesus Is My Airplane*; n.d., acrylic and/or tempera, pencil and ballpoint ink on paper; 18 x 20 inches; Collection of Christopher and Jane Botsford; '*Jesus Is My Air Plane*', ca. 1970, tempera, ballpoint pen and ink, and pencil on paper, 18 x 26.3 inches (45.7 x 67.0 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum; *Jesus Is My Air Plane*; ca. 1970, watercolor, ballpoint pen, and pencil with heavy thread and safety pin on paper, 17x4x4 inches, High Museum

'I Got The New World In My View' led me to consider how Sister Gertrude used her religious ideology as a way to talk about time and space in our lives, and that, for her, 'heaven' was a radical escape. Dressing in white was a signal of her preparedness 'as a Bride adorned for her husband',[26] to go 'home' to heaven.

Additionally, there has been little written theorizing her public 'practice' of street preaching, praying, healing, prayer room services, costuming and singing. These aspects intrigue me deeply as I consider Morgan's life and work through the lens of performativity. I am also interested in exploring the ways in which her performativity is connected to certain Black religious practices and the happenings of Black American Christian prayer rooms and prayer services, and how all of this might be framed theoretically within the context of performance studies theories and beyond.

I have begun to embody my research within the context of a work-in-progress visual, performative and sonic installation entitled '*Come On In The Prayer Room*' (formerly entitled *Prayer Request*), inspired by Sister Gertrude Morgan's 'all white' Prayer Room. I use methodological tools including historical research, oral interviews with people who knew her, analyzing photos of her, meditating on her artwork, listening to her recordings and engaging my own imagination. Sister Gertrude's home and her self-made 'all white' prayer room was a ritual space. A hand-made sign welcomed visitors and passersby that read 'The Everlasting Gospel Mission', marking the space as such, perhaps not unlike other spaces of sacred and secular domesticity including the 'house system' used in drag-ball culture[27] and the ceremonial houses used within African religions such as Ifa and African-derived religions such as Santeria, Vodoun, Candomble' and so forth.

---

[25] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*: *A History* (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 80.

[26] Revelations 21:2.

I am considering Jonathan Crary's ideas about sleeping and dreaming from his book *24/7*: *Late Capitialism and the Ends of Sleep*[28] and José Esteban Muñoz's thoughts about 'everynight life', salvation and utopia in his book *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.[29]

José Esteban Muñoz's book *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity* has me thinking about Morgan's own search for 'utopia'. Although on first glance she could seem like a conservative Christian evangelical, upon closer reading it becomes clear that she is transgressing many boundaries herself as a Black woman taking up public space on her own terms within New Orleans's French Quarter.

Reading Fred Moten's book *In The Break* led me to think more deeply about conceptual artist Adrian Piper and Black performativity, particularly her 1970s street performance series 'Catalysis' and her 1973 'Mythic Being' series where she dressed in an Afro wig and mustache 'challenging passersby to classify her through the lens of their own preconceptions about race, gender, and class'.[30] Curator Naomi Beckwith cited *Mythic Being* as 'a seminal work of self-fashioning that both posited and critiqued models of gender and racial subjectivity'.[31] Thinking about these ideas in relation to Sister Gertrude Morgan led me to ask, what does it mean for her to take up public space as ritual space and as performance space, on the porch of her shotgun house (both African design features), inside her prayer room and on the streets of the Lower Ninth Ward, dressed in all white from head to toe, with her tambourine, her handcrafted fans and her handmade megaphone? How did these strategies of dress, demeanor and amplification project her image and shift the landscape of those spaces of liminality, betwixt and between secular and sacred, in places like the French Quarter and in her own private domicile? Was she engaging in a particular aspect of what Munoz calls 'everynight life' that gestures towards utopia?

---

[27] Livingston, Jeannie, Pepper Labrija, Kim Pendavis, Freddie Pendavis, Dorian Corey, Venus Xtravaganza, Willi Ninja, and Laurent O. St., *Paris Is Burning* (United States: Fox Lorber Home Video, 1992).

[28] Jonathan Crary, *24/7*: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

[29] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[30] Robin Cemblast, 'Adrian Piper Pulls Out of Black Performance-Art Show', *Art*News, [n.p.], 25 October 2013.

[31] Ibid.

Sister Gertrude's own 'gestures towards utopia'[32] are part of an ongoing sacred migration and are embedded within the text of one of her primary theme songs:

*I got a new world in my view*
*Lord my journey I pursue,*
*I said I'm runnin, runnin for the city*
*I got a new world my view*

This 'new world' is another reference to Revelations 21, which speaks of a 'new heaven and a new earth'. It is the primary message of her homily and this speaks to her utopic idea of a 'new world'. Sister Gertrude sermonizes as follows on her 1970 recording during her song (and possibly in the streets of New Orleans), 'I Got The New World In My View':

> 21st chapter of Revelation John talking bout the New World, said I saw a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no mo' sea. John said 'I saw new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a Bride adorned for her husband. Amen. You know Ye are a city set on a hill, cannot be hid. Certainly a person is a city. Amen. So let us (h)umble ourselves dear on. Get ready for the new world. Prepare yourself to live in that holy city.

How can we unpack these 'gestures' inscribed in Sister Gertrude's street-preaching, costuming and, for me, most importantly, her prayer work? In his chapter section 'The Not-Vanishing Point' from his book *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz' writes: '[…] clubs eventually close for the night […] Club kids stumble into taxis in broad daylight […] we also must understand that after the gesture expires, its materiality has transformed into ephemera that are utterly necessary'. If we think of prayer as performance we can understand prayer also as a gesture beyond the 'materiality' of the moment. Even after the prayer is done it continues to translate out, representing hyper-presentness, fugitivity and futurity: 'Speaking it into existence'.

---

[32] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

In thinking about Crary's book 24/7: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* I ask if a 'dream' space is a 'counter strategy' to capitalism and so forth, as he suggests, what about prayer? Prayer can indeed be described as a waking dream. When in a state of prayer, trance and meditation, one is here but not here. I am reframing the practice of prayer in this way and noting it as a practice that can be a public or private gesture (sometimes at the same time, as within the context of an altar call or a prayer service).

In Ashon Crawley's 2013 dissertation 'Black Sacred Breath: Historicity, Performance and Aesthetics of Blackpentecostalism' (which became his 2016 book *Blackpentecostal Breath*: *The Aesthetics of Possibility*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017)) he explores questions about certain Black religious practices as performance practices, and how they are embedded as an integral part of Black culture in interesting and important ways that are not necessarily religious. He writes: 'We do not merely share in sociality, but we share in the materiality of that which quickens flesh, we share wind and air through the process of inhalation and exhalation'. In this way, prayer and a prayer service can be one way to represent Crawley's 'radical sociality' as a way one 'leans toward others [and] engages with others in the world'.[33]

Prayer state is perhaps a liminal space. It is a 'somewhere' a transforming of the moment, a temporal slippage betwixt and between.

For my work-in-progress prayer-room installation and performance entitled *Prayer Request* (later renamed '*Come On In The Prayer Room*'), I did frame prayer within the context of performance and performance art.

I was seeking to explore how to embody aspects of Sister Gertrude Morgan's performative legacy as well as wanting to celebrate the Black American traditions of fervent prayer, prayer rooms, prayer lists, prayer meetings and prayer shut-ins. As a child in rural North Carolina, I grew up participating in many aspects of these practices with my family in our small country Missionary Baptist church. I wanted to also bring my southern queered sensibility to my performance.

As I began to conceptualize what my prayer room space and performance would be, I thought about how Black queered night clubs and Black prayer rooms are connected. There is a conversation

---

[33] Crawley, 'Black Sacred Breath', p. 97

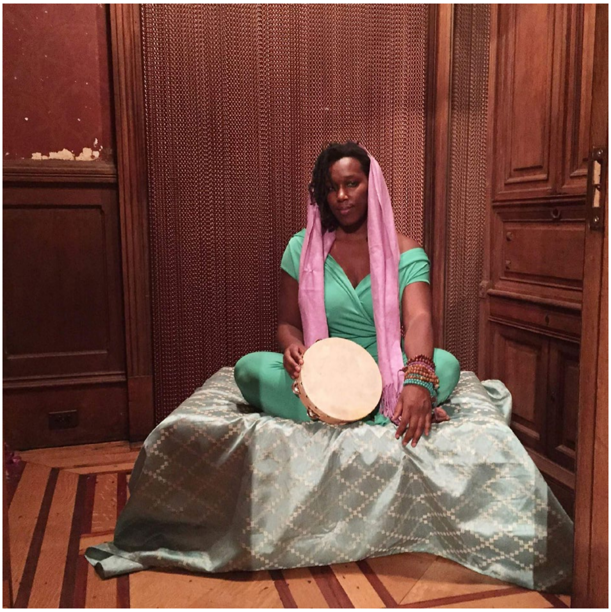


Fig 42.2 Imani Uzuri in prayer room, Sunday 25 October 2015, from her work-in-progress performance and installation *Prayer Request* at Park Avenue Armory, New York. Photo by Jennifer Pritheeva Samuel, CC BY 4.0.

between these queered night clubs, drag balls, the queer house system and speakeasy spaces. In many scenarios these often continue a Black charismatic religious aesthetic tradition, sharing certain mores and values such as personal liberation, salvation, 'home' and 'heaven'. These secular spaces, these sacred spaces, these fugitive spaces are another iteration of the hush arbors, praise houses, prayer services and so forth that were physical and psychic sanctuaries secretly, intentionally and rebelliously created by enslaved African Americans (queered and otherwise). These rebellious gatherings involve rituals of surrender through music, testimony, dance and aspects of 'prayer' as tools towards trance and transcendence, life and liberation. In my artistic exploration of the prayer room, I was exploring how creating a sacred space within a secular setting informs my own quest for liberation as a queered Black woman. Sister Gertrude Morgan was very intentional when she created the Prayer Room in her home. She painted everything in the room white, including the chairs, and used a white Bible and other white artifacts as part of her services. She herself was dressed in all white as a testament to her vision of herself as the 'Bride of Christ'. She intentionally named her house the Everlasting Gospel Mission and hung a handmade sign of welcome on one of the front pillars of the house.

In my work-in-progress performance(s) I explore prayer as a 'dream space', as an intermediary, an intercession. I think about prayer within the contexts of improvisation, divination, 'knowing', petitioning, hearing and also within the context of the history of Black American prayer rooms. I want to amplify Sister Gertrude Morgan's prayer-room practice while also speaking to the larger cultural context of prayer rooms. The Christian scripture Matthew 6:6 'when you pray enter into your inner room [prayer closet]' is the central text and theme that I conceptualize my prayer-room performances. This verse is very personal for me, as my own late maternal Grandmother Lula would often tell me to 'go into your prayer closet and pray' in my times of seeking. Black people often took this missive literally and my Grandmother would gesture to the actual closet in her bedroom. For her, this closest was a ritual space and provided a special access to her divine source. The action of actually going into a space, an inner room, held a particular imaginative power for me. It was a divine serendipity that the room in which I performed at Park Avenue Armory had a beautiful inner closest with a big window. I employed this space during my performance and it became my prayer closet.

As well as identifying the prayer closest, I created the larger prayer-room space by fabricating small altars, providing audience members with plain wooden church fans, setting up candles and flowers, and using my tambourine. I brought in upholstered wooden benches (to represent church pews) and organized the space with benches and chairs on three sides of the room. The color theme I used was a mixture of lavenders, turquoise, rose, greens, hot pink and deep purples.

I wanted the prayer room to have a sonic hum so I created a prayer sound installation that I played within my prayer room during parts of my performance. It was a soundscape that I composed from recordings of individuals praying, which I collected from about thirteen different people of various backgrounds, all whom I knew personally. The sound installation included secular missives, traditional sacred prayers and meditations from different belief systems including Buddhism, Hinduism, Yoruba, Christian prayers, secular humanist thought, pagan and Goddess prayers. I also played Sister Gertrude Morgan's voice singing and sermonizing from her only recorded album 'Let's Make A Record'.

My performances followed a traditional Black American Baptist order of service for a prayer meeting. I read texts from various secular and sacred traditions, sang songs including African-American Spirituals, invited testimony from audience members and so forth.

My work-in-progress prayer exploration *Prayer Request* (in a subsequent iteration renamed *'Come On In The Prayer Room'*) also included a durational element. On Saturday night before the Sunday performances, I stayed overnight in Park Avenue Armory inside my prayer room. I had set up an email address: prayerrequestsubmissions at gmail dot com (prayerrequestssubmissions@gmail.com) that was publicized on the Park Avenue Armory's website and their social media platforms and also on my own Facebook page, Twitter, Instagram, text messages and email lists. I received almost one hundred prayer requests from various folks, including many strangers.

When I first decided to include this element, I wasn't sure if I should leave the prayer requests unread but then I realized that I should follow tradition, and I stayed up all night and did indeed pray (in Black American church tradition this is called a 'prayer shut-in'). I literally prayed all night for each of the folks who sent in prayer requests. It was a very powerfully touching experience for me. I didn't expect it to be so emotional. People who sent in prayer requests shared deep and private things about their lives. Even people that I knew told me all kinds of secrets about which they wanted me to pray. I have never shared with anyone what people wrote to me in those prayer requests, and I do not intend to do so.

As another part of the durational aspect of my performance, throughout the night, every hour or so, I would give an update of sorts on social media. I would post a note that would recount 'this is what I am doing now…' and a photo or some type of time stamp so people would understand where I was in the process of my prayer watch. I continued praying throughout the many hours of the evening, 'til the break of dawn' the next morning. As the sun began to shine, I 'woke up' from my dream state of prayer, from my travel state brought on by my spiritual journeying while praying in my prayer room. Like Sister Gertrude, I had found myself 'praying on people's case'.

I felt grateful and humbled by the experience:

> 'My eyes are open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place'. 2 *Chronicles* 7:15.

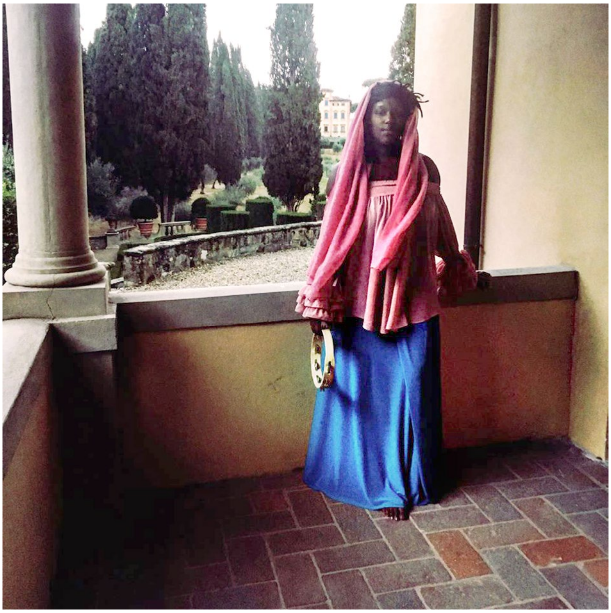


Fig 42.3 Imani Uzuri, 'Come On In The Prayer Room', performance still, Villa La Pietra, Florence, Italy, June 2017. Courtesy of the artist, CC BY 4.0.

In June 2017, it was a joyous honor to be invited to Florence, Italy at Villa La Pietra to commune for two days with some of my creative, intellectual and feminist/womanist heroes as part of the Women and Migration working group conference co-curated by Deborah Willis. I was also invited to perform an iteration of my work-in-progress sonic, visual and performative installation *Come On In The Prayer* as the closing event.

This performance (the companion to my paper 'Come In My Room, Come On In The Prayer Room': Sister Gertrude Morgan's Subversive Salvation' that I also presented an excerpt from as part of the conference) was a continuation of my prayer room/prayer service exploration begun during my Park Avenue Armory Artist in Residency, but I had transformed the title from *Prayer Request* into *Come On In The Prayer Room* as a nod to Sister Gertrude Morgan's visual work of the same title.

This time, my performance was in a converted high-ceilinged *limonaria* barn on the Villa La Pietra estate. I requested the *limonaria* performance space to be organized with the chairs on three sides. I asked that the big double barn doors behind the middle section of chairs to be opened wide and for all of the windows to be opened, to bring in as much breeze and light into the room as possible as the dusk approached. A torrential rainstorm began unexpectedly just before my ritual performance was about to start and this helped to create an even more mystical atmosphere. As guests entered through the side entrance, I greeted each one repeating 'Come on in my room, Come on in the prayer room' over and over again as if in a trance. Before arriving, guests had been requested to enter the prayer room in silence to help to create a contemplative space. Unlike the first iteration at Park Avenue Armory, this work-in-progress version was less a prayer service and more a ritual prayer ceremony. Although I was unable to play the prayer sound installation, I used my voice in various extended vocal techniques to bring a strong sonic presence into the room. I played my tambourine, I sang, I chanted and walked around the room weaving throughout the audience while encouraging them to join me in repetitive refrains of sacred text, choruses of African-American Spirituals, scripture, clapping, silences and humming. The 'Spirit' was surely present and moving. At the closing of my performance, I walked around the prayer room one final time and whispered into the ears of as many participants as possible, 'when you pray, enter into your prayer closet; when you pray, enter into your prayer closet; when you pray, enter into your prayer closet'. I shared this mantra with each person as a meditation, as a reminder, as a promise. I thought of Sister Gertrude Morgan as I received hugs and handshakes from many participants from around the globe in the aftermath of my performance. I thought about Sister Gertrude's dedication to sharing her vision through various mediums and the importance of her prayer practice as part of this missive and I felt blessed to be carrying on aspects of her traveling ministry in my own way.

## Conclusion

Sister Gertrude Morgan, born in Lafayette, Alabama in 1900, died in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1980, lived, created and prayed at the intersection of 'there and here', 'betwixt and between'. Her music, liturgy, visual art, sartorial choices, street preaching, poems and letter writing, performativity and prayer-room practice allowed her expansive spiritual access to transform potentially limiting conditions. She was a woman of her own naming and her own making, and she is still reaching many through good works, even now from her heavenly perch, where she has finally arrived home. On her 1970 album 'Let's Make A Record' Sister Gertrude Morgan sang 'I got a new world in my view'. In her life she created her world anew by rebelliously claiming a powerful agency through self-identification and in her subversive salvation. She claimed herself as one who had a direct relationship with her God by receiving revelations; radically taking up sonic and visual public space during her holy sojourn from Georgia; street preaching and performing in the New Orleans French Quarter and surrounding areas; painting visual works that included Black bodies (including her own) as a part of sacred iconography; claiming futurity and gesturing towards her version of utopia, 'a new heaven and a new earth'. In these ways Sister Gertrude Morgan perpetuated her sacred migration and shared it in the streets of New Orleans, in her home and with the world.

# Bibliography

Asbury, Herbert, *The French Quarter*: *An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (Garden City: Garden City Publications, 1938).

Berry, Jason, William A. Fagaly, Gertrude Morgan and Helen M. Shannon, *The Tools of Her Ministry*: *The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan* (New York: American Folk Art Museum and Rizzoli International Publications, 2004).

Britt, K. and G. Morgan, *King Britt Presents Sister Gertrude Morgan* ([CD]: Ropeadope, 2005).

Broughton, Viv, B*lack Gospel*: *An Illustrated History of the Gospel Sound* (Poole: Blandford, 1985).

Carpenter, Delores, and Nolan E. Williams, *African American Heritage Hymnal*: *575 Hymns, Spirituals, and Gospel Songs* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2001).

Crary, Jonathan, *24/7*: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London; New York: Verso, 2013).

Crawley, Ashon, 'Black Sacred Breath: Historicity, Performance and Aesthetics of Blackpentecostalism', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2013.

Crawley, Ashon, *Blackpentecostal Breath*: *The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991), 1241–99.

Floyd, Samuel A., *The Power of Black Music*: *Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Hartman, Saidiya V., *Scenes of Subjection*: *Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Higginbotham, Evenlyn Brooks, *Righteous Discontent*: *The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Hunter, Tera, *To 'Joy My Freedom Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Livingston, Jeannie, Pepper Labrija, Kim Pendavis, Freddie Pendavis, Dorian Corey, Venus Xtravaganza, Willi Ninja, and Laurent O. St, *Paris Is Burning* (United States: Fox Lorber Home Video, 1992).

Morgan, G., *Let's Make a Record* ([CD]: Preservation Hall Recordings, 2004).

Moten, Fred, *In the Break*: *The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Reagon, Bernice Johnson, *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me*: *The African American Sacred Song Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2001).

Simmons, LaKisha Michelle, *Crescent City Girls*: *The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (Charlotte: Paw Prints, 2016).

Southern, Eileen, *The Music of Black Americans*: *A History* (New York: Norton, 2006).

Thomas, Linda E., 'Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm', *Womanist Theology*: *Cross Currents*, 48:4 (Winter 1998–99), [n.d.].

Thompson, Robert Farris, *Flash of the Spirit*: *African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983).

Yau, Elaine, 'Acts of Conversions: Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Sensation of Black Folk Art, 1960–1982', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2015.

# List of Illustrations

## Chapter 1

1.1 Hortense Mitchell Acton by Steffens Studio. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 14

1.2 Hortense Mitchell Acton travelling. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 15

1.3 Bookplate of Hortense Mitchell Acton. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 15

1.4 Record of Admission to St. Benedicts Home for Destitute Colored Children. Author's collection. 20

1.5 Margo Ledee Toscano, portrait photograph. Author's collection. 22

## Chapter 2

2.1 Author with mother and friends, August 1984. Photographer unknown. Author's collection. © Anna Arabindan-Kesson. 32

## Chapter 3

3.1 Identity photographs of Léonie Ngoie, ca. 1960-90. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie. 39

3.2 Portrait of Léonie Ngoie on rooftop of the Sendwe Clinic, Lubumbashi, Republic of the Congo, ca. 1963. Photographer unknown. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie. 41

3.3 Portrait of Léonie Ngoie on rooftop of the Sendwe Clinic, Lubumbashi, Republic of the Congo, ca. 1963. Photographer unknown. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie. 42

3.4 Wedding day of Léonie Ngoie and André Colard, Brussels, Belgium, 1969. Unknown photographer. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie. 44

3.5 Wedding day of Léonie Ngoie and André Colard, Brussels, Belgium, 1969. Unknown photographer. Personal collection of Léonie Ngoie. © Léonie Ngoie. 45

## Chapter 5

5.1 Mirta Kupferminc, *En Camino*, 2001. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved. 58

5.2 Still from Mirta Kupferminc and Mariana Sosnowski, *En Camino*, 2005. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved. 59

5.3 Still from Mirta Kupferminc and Mariana Sosnowski, *En Camino*, 2005. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved. 60

5.4 Mirta Kupferminc, *Bordado en la piel de la memoria*, 2009. Image provided by the artist. All rights reserved. 61

5.5 Still from Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Carrying All*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, Victoria Miro, London, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. All rights reserved. 63

5.6 Still from Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Carrying All*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, Victoria Miro, London, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. All rights reserved. 64

5.7 Still from Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Carrying All*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, Victoria Miro, London, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. All rights reserved. 65

5.8 Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: Beijing*, 2001. Image courtesy of Pace Gallery. All rights reserved. 66

5.9 Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: Groningen*, 2012. Image courtesy of Pace Gallery. All rights reserved. 67

5.10 Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: San Francisco*, 2003. Image courtesy of Pace Gallery. All rights reserved. 68

## Chapter 7

7.1 Gary Ray Bugarcic, 'The Limo at Key Food on Avenue A with Karen Finley', 1985. Original 3D lenticular print. Courtesy of the artist. © Gary Ray Bugarcic. 79

## Chapter 9

9.1 Sama Alshaibi, 'Fatnis al-Jazirah' [Fantasy Island], from the series '*Silsila*', 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 108

9.2 Sama Alshaibi, '*Silsila*' [Link], from the series '*Silsila*', 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 109

9.3 Sama Alshaibi, 'Ma Lam Tabki' [Unless Weeping], from the series '*Silsila*', 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 109

9.4 Sama Alshaibi, 'Jarasun Yaqra' li-l-Mawt' [Death Knell], from the series '*Silsila*', 27 1⁄2″ × 39 3⁄8″, inkjet pigment print, edition of 5, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 110

9.5 Sama Alshaibi, 'Sabkhat al-Milh' [Salt Flats], from the series '*Silsila*', 47 ¼″ diameter, c-print mounted with Diasec, edition of 3, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 110

9.6 Sama Alshaibi, ‘Al-Ṭariqah’ [The Path], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 5′ 5 3⁄8″ × 8′ 2 3⁄8″, unique print mounted with Diasec, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 111

9.7 Sama Alshaibi, ‘Ma Ijtamaʿat Aydina ʿala Qabdih Kan Muʿattal’ [What Our Hands Joined Was Broken], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 47 ¼″ diameter, c-print mounted with Diasec, edition of 3, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 111

9.8 Sama Alshaibi, ‘Wahat Siwa’ [The Siwa Oasis], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 27 1⁄2″ × 39 3⁄8″, inkjet pigment print, edition of 5, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 112

9.9 Sama Alshaibi, ‘Idha Intaha Thumma Yabtadi’ [If Over and Then Begins], from the series ‘*Silsila*’, 39 3⁄8″ × 27 1⁄2″, inkjet pigment print, edition of 5, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery, Dubai. 112

## Chapter 10

10.1 Jessica Ingram, ‘Charlotte’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 116

10.2 Jessica Ingram, ‘Letter to my first born son’, 2006. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 117

10.3 Jessica Ingram, ‘Isabelle at Prom’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 118

10.4 Jessica Ingram, ‘Rosaura’s Wedding’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 118

10.5 Jessica Ingram, ‘SF’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 119

10.6 Jessica Ingram, ‘Alanna’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 119

10.7 Jessica Ingram, ‘Juicy’, 2006. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 120

10.8 Jessica Ingram, ‘Picnic’, 2005. Courtesy of Jessica Ingram, CC BY-NC-ND. 120

## Chapter 11

11.1 Lorie Novak, 'Reading the News', 1999, CC BY-NC-ND. 121

11.2 Lorie Novak, 'Above The Fold', in my studio, July 2018, CC BY-NC-ND. 123

11.3 Lorie Novak, 'Men & A Few Women With Guns', 60′ x 32′, inkjet photograph, 2017, CC BY-NC-ND. 125

11.4 Lorie Novak, 'Dead Bodies', 60′ x 32′, inkjet photograph, 2017, CC BY-NC-ND. 126

11.5 Lorie Novak, 'Refugees & Migrants', 60′ x 32′, archival inkjet photograph, 2017, CC BY-NC-ND. 132

11.6 Lorie Novak, 'Reading the News', 2018, CC BY-NC-ND. 133

## Chapter 14

14.1 Lalla Essaydi, *Converging Territories #26* (2000-01). © Lalla Essaydi, New York. Courtesy Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York. 162

14.2 Lalla Essaydi, *Converging Territories #30* (2000-01). © Lalla Essaydi, New York. Courtesy Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York. 163

## Chapter 16

16.1 Fig. 16.1 'Stowage of the British Slave Ship Brookes Under the Regulated Slave Trade Act of 1788.' Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Slaveshipposter.jpg 201

16.2 'Diagram of the Decks of a Slave Ship, 1814', from *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, CC BY-NC 4.0, http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/2004 202

## Chapter 17

17.1 Jonathan Edwards, *Grit*, 2018. © Jonathan Edwards. All rights reserved. 210

## Chapter 18

18.1 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina. 218

18.2 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina. 219

18.3 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina. 219

18.4 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina. 220

18.5 Editha Mesina, Candlelight Vigil for Mary Jane Veloso. Indonesian Consulate, New York City, 28 April 2015. © Editha Mesina. 220

18.6 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. 6 October 2016, NBC Headquarters, New York City. © Editha Mesina. 222

18.7 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. 6 October 2016, NBC Headquarters, New York City. © Editha Mesina. 223

18.8 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. 6 October 2016, NBC Headquarters, New York City. © Editha Mesina. 223

18.9 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. 6 October 2016, NBC Headquarters, New York City. © Editha Mesina. 224

18.10 Editha Mesina, Gabriela Action: NBC's proposed sitcom, *Mail-Order Family*. 6 October 2016, NBC Headquarters, New York City. © Editha Mesina. 224

18.11 Editha Mesina, Azreal. Still from Filipina Stories, 2017. © Editha Mesina. 225

18.12 Editha Mesina, Joelle. Still from Filipina Stories, 2018. © Editha Mesina. 226

18.13 Editha Mesina, May. Still from Filipina Stories, 2017. © Editha Mesina. 226

## Chapter 21

21.1 Portrait of Fredi Washington. Courtesy of Schomburg Center, New York Public Library. 243

## Chapter 22

22.1 Julia de Burgos, ca. 1938. Miriam Román Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY. 249

22.2 Flyer for poetry reading by Julia de Burgos, 10 May 1940. Pura Belpré Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY. 250

22.3 Many Vega, *Remembering Julia*, 2006. Mosaic by Manny Vega. Photo by Francisco Molina Reyes II. Courtesy of Mambóso Nuyotópia Archives. All rights reserved. 256

22.4 Commemorating Julia de Burgos's death. La Bruja, 2011. Photo taken by author, CC BY 4.0. 256

22.5 Alexis Díaz, 'Dejarse vencer por la vida es por que dejarse vencer por la muerte', Santurce, Puerto Rico, 2013. © Hunter College. All rights reserved. 259

## Chapter 24

24.1 Juana Valdes, 'Redbone Colored China Rags', 2017, CC BY 4.0. 273

## Chapter 25

25.1 Patricia Cronin, *Memorial To A Marriage*, 2002. Carrara marble, over life size, photographed by Steven Bates. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. 284

25.2 Patricia Cronin, *Beatrice Cenci*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 15 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Beatrice Cenci*, 1856. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. 285

25.3 Patricia Cronin, *Puck*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 15 x 12 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Puck*, 1855. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. 289

25.4 Patricia Cronin, *Tomb of Judith Falconnet*, 2006. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 15 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Tomb of Judith Falconnet*, 1857-58. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. 290

25.5 Patricia Cronin, *Zenobia*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 15 x 12 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *Zenobia*, 1859. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. 291

25.6 Patricia Cronin, *The Sleeping Faun*, 2006. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 15 inches. After Harriet Hosmer, *The Sleeping Faun*, 1865. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. 294

25.7 Patricia Cronin, *Queen of Naples*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. 297

## Chapter 26

26.1 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana. © Roshini Kempadoo. 305

26.2 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 01. © Roshini 306

26.3 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 05. © Roshini Kempadoo. 307

26.4 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 11. © Roshini Kempadoo. 308

26.5 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 09. © Roshini Kempadoo. 309

26.6 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Nana 07. © Roshini Kempadoo. 310

26.7 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Deirdre 04. © Roshini Kempadoo. 315
26.8 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Deirdre 05. © Roshini Kempadoo. 316
26.9 Roshini Kempadoo, Screen still from the artwork *Face Up*, 2015. Deirdre 06. © Roshini Kempadoo. 317

# Chapter 29

29.1 Tracey Moffatt, from ‹Suburban Landscapes’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0. 349
29.2 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘Picturesque Cherbourg’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0. 350
29.3 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘Picturesque Cherbourg’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0. 351
29.4 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0. 354
29.5 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘Pioneer Dreaming’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0. 357
29.6 Tracey Moffatt, from *Spirit Landscapes*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0. 359

# Chapter 30

30.1 Ming Wong, still from *Imitation of Life*, 2009, CC BY 4.0. 363

# Chapter 31

31.1 The Mossell family, group portrait, ca. 1875. Unknown photographer. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania. 380

31.2 Sadie T. M. Alexander (1898-1989), ca. 1948. Portrait photograph by Wilson G. Marshall. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania. 381
31.3 Fannie Jackson Coppin, 1865. Unknown photographer. Photo courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives. 383
31.4 Mary Church Terrell, ca. 1890, three quarter length portrait, seated, facing front. Unknown photographer. Library of Congress. Public domain. 384
31.5 Tanner family, group portrait, 1890. Unknown photographer. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania. 385
31.6 Sadie T. M. Alexander holding *To Secure these Rights*, ca. 1947. Unknown Photographer. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania. 391

## Chapter 32

32.1 Evita Robinson, founder of Nomadness Travel Tribe. Used with permission from Evita Robinson. 401
32.2 Frazer Harrison, Zim Ugochukwu at AirBnB Open Los Angeles. Getty Images. 402
32.3 Nomadness Travel Tribe, Pamplona, Spain. Image courtesy of Sheila Brown, CC BY 4.0. 403
32.4 'In the Hasaan II Mosque,' *Travel Noire* Instagram page. Image courtesy of Abena Bempah, CC BY 4.0. 404

## Chapter 33

33.1 Mattie A. McAdoo with tennis racquet. Photo by The Richmond Studio, ca. 1890-91, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Image courtesy of Young Robertson Gallery Collection, New York. All rights reserved. 416

33.2 Marta 'Mattie' Eliza Allan, contralto calling card. Photo by Urlin & Pfeifer Studio, Columbus, Ohio, USA, ca. 1884. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 418

33.3 Martha 'Mattie' Eliza Allan's high school graduation portrait. Photo by Urlin Studio, Columbus, Ohio, USA, ca. 1885. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 418

33.4 Orpheus Myron McAdoo, formal portrait. Photo by Melba Studio, Melbourne, Australia, ca. 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 419

33.5 Orpheus Myron McAdoo, formal portrait, 'Orpheus M. McAdoo, Sole Proprietor and Director of the Original Jubilee Singers'. Photo by Talma Studio, Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, ca. 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 419

33.6 Studio portrait of Mattie and Orpheus McAdoo in stylish dress. Photo by Alba Studio, Sydney, Australia, ca. 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 421

33.7 Mattie A. McAdoo as a soloist. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 422

33.8 Mattie A. McAdoo with her quartet. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 423

33.9 Invitation to the marriage of Miss Mattie E. Allan to Mr. Orpheus Myron McAdoo, Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, South Africa, 1892. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 428

33.10 Birth announcement for Master Myron Holder Ward McAdoo, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 9 February 1893. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 429

33.11 Baby Myron McAdoo with puppy. Photo by W. Laws Caney Studio, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, ca. 1895-96. Image courtesy of Young Robertson Gallery Collection, New York. All rights reserved. 429

33.12 Baby Myron McAdoo with rocking horse. Photo by W. Laws Caney Studio, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, ca. 1895-96. Image courtesy of Young Robertson Gallery Collection, New York. All rights reserved. 429

33.13 Jubilee Singers as vaudeville concert singers. Note little Myron McAdoo at bottom right, ca. 1898. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 430

33.14 McAdoo Company performers. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 431

33.15 Broadside advertisement for Opera House Performance by Mattie McAdoo and her brother Robert Allen and sister Lula Allen. Note the surname has changed from Allan to Allen. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 433

33.16 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Conference Committee Chairmen. Mattie A. McAdoo, second row, second from left. Image courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Public Domain. 435

## Chapter 34

34.1 Audley Moore. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. 442

## Chapter 36

36.1 My mother Ingrid (third row, center) poses with her siblings and extended family at Timehri International Airport, Guyana in the mid-1970s, as she bade farewell to a sister who was leaving for Barbados. © Ali-Persaud family collection. Courtesy of Grace Aneiza Ali, CC BY 4.0. 475

36.2 Keisha Scarville, *Untitled #1,* from the series 'Mama's Clothes', 2015. © Keisha Scarville, CC BY 4.0. 479

36.3 Keisha Scarville, *Untitled #5,* from the series 'Mama's Clothes', 2016. © Keisha Scarville, CC BY 4.0. 481

36.4 Erika DeFreitas's grandmother Angela DeFreitas pictured in British Guiana with a wedding cake she made and decorated, ca. late 1960s. © DeFreitas family collection. Courtesy of Erika Defreitas, CC BY 4.0. 482

36.5 Erika DeFreitas, 'The Impossible Speech Act', 2007. © Erika DeFreitas, CC BY 4.0. 483

36.6 Christie Neptune, *Memories from Yonder*, 2015. © Christie Neptune, CC BY 4.0. 484

36.7 Christie Neptune, video stills from *Memories from Yonder*, 2015. © Christie Neptune, CC BY 4.0. 485

36.8 Anastacia Winters, who lives in Lethem, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo (Region Nine), Guyana. Khadija Benn, *Anastacia Winters* from the series 'Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women', 2017. © Khadija Benn, CC BY 4.0. 486

36.9 Mickilina Simon, Tabatinga, Lethem, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo (Region Nine), Guyana. Khadija Benn, *Mickilina Simon* from the series 'Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women', 2017. © Khadija Benn, CC BY 4.0. 487

# Chapter 37

37.1 *The Acton Photograph Archive: Research and Conservation at Villa La Pietra 3*, cover image. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 492

37.2 Cora Antinori, undated. Photograph found with an undated letter to Harold Acton addressed from Palazzo Antinori from her brother. Archival Series Number I.A.4.2.-18. recto. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 494

37.3 Rosa Lanza di Scalea, dressed in Persian costume for the fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costumes [designed by Paul Poiret of Paris] given by [the US Ambassador/consul] Lewis Einstein at Villa Schifanoia 1914. Signed and dated on the recto. Photographs by Mario Nunes Vais. Archival Series Number I.A.4.2.-folder23a.-100a. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 496

37.4 Rosa Lanza di Scalea, dressed in Persian costume for the fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costumes [designed by Paul Poiret of Paris] given by [the US Ambassador/consul] Lewis Einstein at Villa Schifanoia 1914. Signed and dated on the recto. Photographs by Mario Nunes Vais. Archival Series Number I.A.4.2.-folder23a.-100c. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 496

37.5 Louise Crawford, 1891, cabinet card. Photo by Steffens, Chicago. Annotated on the verso ‘Yours while Louise Crawford, July 2nd ‘91’. Archival Series Number I.B.3.5.-2.-recto. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 497

37.6 Louise Bates, *née* Crawford, in her wedding dress ca. 1890s. Archival Series Number I.B.3.5.51.-6. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 497

37.7 Hortense Mitchell Acton as a child, ca. 1870. Cabinet card photo by Gehrig, Chicago. Archival Series Number I.B.1.3.-64. recto. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 499

37.8 Hortense Mitchell Acton outside Villa La Pietra, ca. 1903. Archival Series Number I.B.1.3.-103. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 499

37.9 Hortense Mitchell Acton outside Villa La Pietra with the dog Caesar 1903. Archival Series Number I.B.1.3.-105. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 499

37.10 Hortense Mitchell Acton dressed up in Persian costume for the fancy-dress ball in Persian and Venetian costume [designed by Paul Poiret of Paris] given by [the US ambassador/consul] Lewis Einstein at Villa Schifanoia 1914. Photograph signed by Nunes Vais. Archival Series Number I.B.1.4.36.-18a. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 501

37.11 Hortense Mitchell Acton, ca. 1920. Signed studio portraits by De Meyer. One of these was the original, which was removed from its frame in the Biblioteca in Villa La Pietra in June 2004 and replaced with a digital print. Archival Series Number I.B.1.4.42.-90. New York University, The Acton Photograph Archive, Villa La Pietra, Florence. 501

## Chapter 38

38.1 Monica de Miranda, woman in front of a rusting ship. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012-13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 508

38.2 Monica de Miranda, woman in front of a rusting ship (closeup). Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012-13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 513

38.3 Monica de Miranda, installation view of man looking at skyscrapers and greenery. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012-13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 515

38.4 Monica de Miranda, installation view of man and woman on boat. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012-13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 515

38.5 Monica de Miranda, man on deck. Still from *An Ocean Between Us*, 2012. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 519

38.6 Monica de Miranda, woman looking out from boat. Still from *An Ocean Between Us*, 2012. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 519

38.7 Monica de Miranda, Luanda. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 522

38.8 Monica de Miranda, Portugal. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 522

38.9 Monica de Miranda, Brazil. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 523

38.10 Monica de Miranda, London. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 523

38.11 Monica de Miranda, installation view. Architectural drawing from 'Home Sweet, Sour Home', 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 524

38.12 Monica de Miranda, installation view of three frames of rusting ships. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012-13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 526

38.13 Monica de Miranda, Monica, city lights. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012-13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0. 529

## Chapter 42

42.1 Sister Gertrude Morgan, the Bride of Christ, the Nurse for Dr Jesus and the Housekeeper for Dada God, in her Everlasting Gospel Revelation Mission, New Orleans, 1974. Photograph by Guy Mendes, from *40/40–40 YEARS 40 PORTRAITS*, Institute 193. All rights reserved. 581

42.2 Imani Uzuri in prayer room, Sunday 25 October 2015, from her work-in-progress performance and installation *Prayer Request* at Park Avenue Armory, New York. Photo by Jennifer Pritheeva Samuel, CC BY 4.0. 596

42.3 Imani Uzuri, 'Come On In The Prayer Room', performance still, Villa La Pietra, Florence, Italy, June 2017. Courtesy of the artist, CC BY 4.0. 599

# Index

abolitionist movement 5, 200, 267, 381, 420, 565–566, 570
Aboriginal 348, 351–353, 357–358, 360
abroad 5, 7, 231, 280, 289, 382–383, 388, 390, 392, 396, 398, 401, 406–409, 416–417, 420, 423, 432, 439, 441–442, 444–445, 448, 488, 498, 539, 550
Achebe, Chinua 548
activism 2, 5–7, 26, 49, 144, 168–169, 171, 177–179, 185–187, 212, 225, 234–235, 239, 244, 246, 248, 252, 258, 265, 267, 270, 329, 338, 380, 383, 389–390, 392, 409, 436, 439, 441–442, 444–449, 559–560, 562, 565, 572
Acton, Arthur 14, 16, 492, 498, 500
Acton, Harold 492, 494
Acton Photograph Archive 7, 491–493, 495, 500
actress 4, 94, 243–245, 286, 366
aesthetics 6, 57, 61–62, 69, 179, 187–188, 228–229, 231–232, 276, 278, 296, 312, 318–319, 345–347, 351–352, 361, 372, 453, 466, 511, 514, 596
Africa 2, 6–8
Africa, African 20, 40, 42–43, 45, 47, 52, 63–64, 72, 86, 91–93, 97–99, 102, 107, 129–130, 143, 156–158, 167–169, 172, 174–177, 179, 183–184, 195–196, 198–199, 203–204, 227–232, 244–246, 252, 266, 279–280, 312, 339, 371, 381–387, 389, 392, 396–398, 407–410, 415–417, 420, 423–428, 430–436, 439, 441–449, 453–468, 517, 528, 533–534, 536–537, 542–543, 548, 550, 556–557, 564–569, 571, 589, 592–593, 596, 598, 600
African 4–5, 7–8
African American 20, 86, 91–93, 99, 102, 156, 167–169, 172, 174, 177, 179, 184, 244–246, 266, 279, 339, 385, 389, 392, 396–398, 407–410, 415–416, 420, 427, 431, 433–436, 447–448, 453, 464, 466, 564–569, 571, 596, 598, 600
African-American 5, 7
African Diaspora 436
African Jubilee Singers 424
African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) 382, 384, 387–389
Afro-American 169, 464–466
Afro-Latinx 274
Ahmed, Sara 167
AirBnB 406
airport 67, 228, 474, 477
Alabama 47, 236, 431, 447, 584–586, 601
Albania, Albanian 122
Ali Farah, Cristina 8, 533, 538, 540, 543–547, 550
  *Madre piccola (Little Mother)* 543–546, 548
Ali, Grace Aneiza 7, 303, 334
Alshaibi, Sama 3
Alston, Charles 183, 457

America, American 2–3, 5–7, 16, 20, 23, 30, 48, 52, 86, 91–93, 97–100, 102, 113, 130–131, 140, 156, 164, 167–169, 172, 174–177, 179–184, 186–187, 204, 208, 211, 213, 225, 227, 231, 233, 236, 244–246, 252, 260, 265–266, 268–269, 273–275, 277–280, 283, 286–287, 289–290, 293, 295, 326, 331, 333, 338–340, 365–366, 379–381, 384–392, 396–398, 405–410, 415–416, 420, 423, 426–427, 431, 433–436, 439, 446–448, 453, 458, 460, 462, 464–466, 468, 475–476, 479–480, 484–486, 495, 528, 545–546, 549, 555–556, 559, 562–572, 575, 582–584, 587–590, 592, 595–598, 600
Americas, the 178, 195–196, 198, 278, 370
Amritsar 334, 336
Angola 518, 520–521, 527–528
Anthony, Susan B. 267
Antinori, Cora 494
Appadurai, Arjun 275
appearance 64, 147, 364, 368, 372, 424, 428, 449, 456, 467, 512
Arab, Arabic 74, 107, 143, 163–166, 334, 339–340
Arabian Nights 334
Ardizzone, Heidi 16–17
Arendt, Hannah 61
Argentina, Argentinian 57, 59
Argentinian 2
Armstrong, Louis 245
art 1, 4–5, 10, 13–14, 16–17, 35, 49–50, 71, 74, 76–77, 80–82, 84, 86, 97, 107, 163–165, 167–171, 173–174, 179–184, 186, 268, 273–281, 283, 286–290, 293, 296, 302, 340–342, 348, 352, 354, 358, 454, 456–468, 483–485, 512, 545, 555, 584, 589–591, 595, 601
Art-Deco 7
artist 2–4, 7–8, 50, 57, 59, 61, 66–67, 69, 71, 74, 80–85, 93, 95–96, 99, 122, 162–165, 167–172, 174–179, 181, 183–184, 249, 252, 254, 256, 258, 261, 268, 274–281, 283–288, 290–293, 295–296, 324, 327, 333, 346–348, 373, 384, 434, 436, 453–458, 460, 462–466, 468, 475, 477–485, 488, 512–514, 517, 520, 583, 586, 593
artistic 62, 79–82, 84, 168, 179, 181, 232, 276, 287, 457, 464–466, 477, 543–544, 550, 583–584, 591, 596
artistry 482
Art Nouveau 7
Asia, Asian 32, 93, 100, 107, 128, 143, 172, 184, 221–222, 231, 292, 331–334, 336, 338–339, 370–371, 399, 441, 460, 528, 559, 565, 567, 572
asylum 113, 131, 136–138, 147–149, 153, 511, 539
Athens 73
Atlantic 98, 195–196, 200, 208, 269, 293, 381, 441, 449, 478, 514, 561–562, 564–565, 569–570, 573, 586
audience 6, 92, 96, 99, 164, 166, 170, 225, 248, 326–327, 341, 365, 367, 369, 371, 375, 402, 420–421, 424–425, 427, 432, 444, 460, 516, 589, 597–598, 600
Australia 2, 6
Australia, Australian 23, 27, 31–34, 218, 346, 348, 351–352, 356–357, 360, 415, 419–420, 423, 426–427, 430–434, 460

Bahadur, Gaiutra 476
Baker, Ella 212
Baldwin, James 84
Baltimore 379–380, 388
Bandinter, Elizabeth 145
Baptist 236, 584–585, 595, 598
Baraka, Amiri 448
Barbados 196, 198
Barnwell, Kattian 478
Barre, Syiad 537, 539–540
Barthes, Roland 494, 505, 507

Bearden, Romare 84, 178, 184, 457, 466
Beatrice Cenci 285, 289
beauty 7, 14, 17, 40, 73, 75, 175, 177, 183–184, 213, 257, 268, 304, 328–329, 351–352, 395, 405, 407–408, 425, 444, 463, 468, 488, 493–494, 497, 500, 506, 529–530, 568, 597
Beijing 66
Beinecke Library 93
Belgian 2
Belgium, Belgian 40–46
Belle da Costa Greene 16–17, 21–22
Benn, Khadija 477–478, 486–488
  ‘Those Who Remain: Portraits of Amerindian Women’ 487
Berenson, Bernard 16–17
Berlin 92, 99, 383
Bibb, Henry 569
Black 4–8, 17–18, 20–21, 28, 41, 43–44, 50, 92, 94–98, 100–101, 143, 147, 150, 155, 167–172, 174–177, 179–188, 195, 204–205, 207–209, 211–214, 229, 233–239, 244–245, 257, 265–266, 268–270, 278–279, 301–303, 311–312, 314, 323–329, 332, 339–340, 364–366, 371–375, 379–381, 383–384, 386–390, 392, 395–410, 416–418, 420, 423–424, 426–427, 439–449, 456–457, 460, 462–465, 467–468, 477, 479, 534, 540, 556–560, 565–568, 571, 582–590, 592–593, 595–598, 601
Black Arts Movement 168, 170–171, 456, 462–464, 468
Black Feminist Theory 323–324, 326, 328–329
Black July 23–24, 26–28, 31, 34
Black Lives Matter 6, 332, 408–409
Blackness 172, 214, 234–235, 256–258, 270, 278, 327, 368, 374, 401
Black Panthers 392, 559–560
Black Power 177, 439, 446, 448, 463
Black Radical tradition 204–205, 585
Blavity 405, 409
body 3–5, 13, 26, 28–29, 47, 52–54, 62, 64, 69, 75, 83, 85, 88, 122, 141–142, 144–150, 159–161, 164–165, 169–170, 173–176, 183–184, 187, 195–196, 200, 203–205, 211, 230, 235–237, 247, 290, 296, 302–303, 312–314, 319, 325, 336, 340–341, 347, 353, 355–358, 360, 371, 382, 391, 403, 408, 415, 446, 449, 467, 477, 480–481, 483, 497, 505–506, 513–518, 527, 529–530, 559, 584, 589–590, 601
Bond, Julian 212, 448
border crossings 1
border icon 248, 254–256, 258
borders 1, 5, 22, 47, 51, 69, 93, 114, 127, 131, 138–139, 172, 176, 228, 248–249, 251–252, 254–256, 258, 336, 338, 341, 346, 427, 449, 473, 477–478, 481, 488, 537, 565–566
Borges, Jorge Luis 61
Borowski, Frederick 94
Boston 164, 169, 267, 293, 432–434, 455
Bowers, Eliza 379, 392
Bowery, The 83–84
Brazil 218, 339, 487–488, 521, 527–528
Brenson, Michael 175, 187–188
Brielmaier, Isolde 4
Brisbane 348–350, 355
Britain, British 27–28, 72–73, 230, 267, 286, 295, 318, 334, 336, 338, 351–352, 370–374, 419, 432, 473, 479, 481, 488, 493, 537, 557, 559–560, 562–563, 565, 567–575
Brixton 560
Broadway 5, 84, 244–246
Brockman Gallery 167–168
Bronx, the 51, 185–186, 251, 283
Brooklyn 51, 77, 82, 479–480, 486
Brown 208, 233–234, 238
Brussels 44
Buddhism, Buddhist 26, 597
Bunche, Ralph 183
Burgos, Julia de 5, 247–252, 254–261

Burke, John E. 18–19
Bush, George W. 131
Butler, Judith 369–370

Calder, Ebora 485–486
California 169, 392, 443
Campt, Tina 173–174, 185, 188, 304, 313
Canada, Canadian 27, 31, 228, 379, 460, 474, 476, 478, 482, 487, 566, 568–570
Cape Town 382, 424, 426–427
Capodacqua, Alessandra 7
career 5, 16–17, 42, 82–83, 93, 95, 115, 170, 172, 227, 244–245, 267, 286, 293, 296, 455–456, 467–468
Caribbean 1–2, 172, 204, 260, 275, 278–279, 318, 381–382, 443–444, 447, 453, 467, 474, 476, 478, 487, 569
Caribbean Diaspora 1
Carnegie Mellon University 179–180
Carter, Jimmy 392
Castro, Fidel 131
Catholic, Catholicism 13, 18–19, 74, 80, 295, 567, 587
Catlett, Elizabeth 4, 167–188, 462–463, 466
censorship 2, 84
Cerwonka, Allaine 352
Chaplin, Charlie 367
Cherbourg 350–356
Chicago 13–14, 16–17, 92, 94–96, 98, 175, 180–181, 183, 497–498
Chicano 274, 276
childhood 76, 162–163, 211, 295, 348–349, 479, 484, 521, 524, 544–545, 549
children 2–4, 18–20, 30, 33, 43–46, 48–49, 51, 60, 71–73, 85, 87–89, 113–115, 141, 159, 172–173, 176–177, 184–185, 197–200, 203, 205, 208–211, 213–214, 221, 227, 244, 249, 267, 277, 287, 292, 339, 348, 353, 360, 380, 386, 390, 460, 474, 487–488, 498, 511, 513, 536, 546, 548–549, 560, 571, 584, 587, 595
China, Chinese 57, 66, 84, 100–101, 128–129, 278, 339, 370, 389, 528
Chinese 2
Chinoiserie 7
Christianity, Christian 21, 72, 143–144, 156, 212, 426, 435–436, 566, 590, 592–593, 597
cinema 6, 356–357, 363–369, 371, 373–375, 507, 555–558, 560
Civil Rights Congress 386, 392
Civil Rights Movement 392
Civil War 18, 380, 420, 556, 583
Clark Hine, Darlene 584
Clark, Septima 212–213
Cleopatra 292
clothing 33–34, 67, 72, 85, 158, 164, 231, 268, 338, 421, 480–481, 483, 569, 588
Coates, Ta-Nehasi 211, 339–340
Colard, Sandrine 2
Cold War 176, 258
Coleman, Beth 325, 328
Colombo 26–27, 29–30, 32, 528
colonial 3–4, 6, 27, 29, 40, 43, 45–46, 63, 83, 147–148, 155, 197–198, 205, 260–261, 279, 318, 334, 345–348, 352–357, 360, 364, 371–373, 388, 417, 445, 447, 474, 511, 514, 516–517, 520, 528–529, 536–543, 550, 556, 559, 564, 568, 572–575
colored educator 434
colored educators 434
Columbia, Columbian 175, 198, 457
comedy 221, 430
commodity 3, 88, 150, 222, 278
Communist 183–184, 440, 445
community 2, 16, 18, 26–28, 49, 62, 66, 86, 108, 140–142, 144, 146, 148, 150, 181, 183, 187, 209, 212–213, 225, 232, 238–239, 248, 252, 255, 276, 286, 290, 293, 326, 332, 351, 397, 400, 409, 420, 426, 433–434,

444, 446, 463–464, 475, 479, 481, 487–488, 509, 530, 535–538, 540, 545–546, 548, 550, 565–566, 570, 586, 588–589
Congolese 2
Congo, the 2
Congo, the; Congolese 39–41, 43–44, 46, 128–129, 467
Connecticut 246, 475
Cooke, Marvel 184–187
Cooper Jackson, Esther 184–185, 187
Coppin, Fannie Jackson 382–383
Crary, Jonathan 593, 595
Crawford, Lewis 497
Crawley, Ashon 588, 595
Crenshaw, Kimberlé 583
Cronin, Patricia 5, 284–285, 291
Cuba, Cuban 17–18, 47, 128, 131, 178, 251, 277–280
Culbertson, Roberta 62
cultural heritage 2, 82, 84
curfew 426
Czechoslovakia 59
Czech Republic, Czech 138, 146

Dafora, Asadata 458–459, 468
Dal Lago, Alessandro 539
Davis, Alonzo 167
Davis, Angela 178, 186
Davis, Henrietta Vinton 444
death 5, 9, 21, 75, 98, 122, 138, 157, 160, 171, 177, 187, 199–200, 217–218, 237, 244, 247–249, 251–254, 259, 270, 283, 285, 289, 336, 432, 434–435, 443, 480–481, 492, 509, 517, 524, 530, 549, 557, 589
Debre Berhan 156, 158
DeFreitas, Erika 477–478, 481–484
  'The Impossible Speech Act' 482–483
Deleuze, Gilles 534, 546–547
Delhi 333–334, 336, 339, 401, 564, 573–575
dell'Ongaro, Francesco 268
Dell'Oro, Erminia 541
de Meyer, Adolf 500, 502
Denmark 139, 493
design 7, 62, 85, 87, 228, 230–232, 260, 327, 454–456, 458–462, 466, 593
Detroit 177, 406, 448
Díaz, Alexis 259
digital 5, 31, 131, 323–329, 348, 350, 396–398, 402, 405–406, 409, 516
Di Maio, Alessandra 8
displacement 1, 3, 6, 25, 34, 69, 83, 131, 149, 336, 345, 347, 352, 355–356, 361, 478, 480, 507, 510–511, 513–514, 530
dispossession 6, 204, 345–348, 352, 356–357, 361, 573
diversity 3–4, 10, 82, 136, 140, 164, 184, 221, 225, 229–230, 340, 370, 555, 575, 586–587
documentary 7, 107, 454, 477, 487, 509, 514, 545, 547
documentation 3, 13, 19, 96, 295, 342, 463, 468, 481, 524
domination 3, 131, 133, 149, 165, 255, 270, 275, 278, 289, 346–347, 352, 445, 449, 518, 535, 537, 541–542, 545, 589
Donaldson, Jeff 466, 468
Douglas, Aaron 183, 457
Douglass, Frederick 94, 269, 566
Dreiser, Theodore 95
Dubai 400
Du Bois, Shirley Graham 440, 445
Du Bois, W. E. B. 18, 183, 212, 386–387, 440, 445, 468
Durban 417, 427
Dutch 29, 147, 426, 541
Dvorák, Antonín 94

East 52, 72, 83–84, 100, 107, 130, 156–157, 165, 247, 252, 312, 371, 382
East Village 80–82
*Ebony* 397, 404–405
Egypt, Egyptian 51, 127, 269, 292, 456
Eiffel Tower 399, 405

Einstein, Lewis 495, 500
Ellington, Duke 183, 244–246
Ellis Island 81, 338
Ellison, Ralph 183
emigration 8, 217, 379, 381, 563–564, 566, 571–572
emotion 2, 136, 141, 175, 198, 248, 252, 303, 319, 348, 368, 462, 493, 506–508, 514, 516, 521–522, 530, 560, 598
empowerment 2, 145, 211, 254, 270, 387, 403
England, English 16, 27, 48, 73, 94, 100, 177, 196, 198–200, 221, 266–267, 286, 289, 352, 375, 383, 399, 419, 426, 432, 486, 541, 546, 548, 571
erasure 2, 31, 84, 144, 160, 235, 258, 329, 341, 352, 449, 483, 514
Eritrea 9, 536–537, 541
escape 5, 9, 30, 76, 248, 251–252, 396–397, 420, 575, 592
Essaydi, Lalla 4, 161–166
*Essence* 397
Ethiopia, Ethiopian 3, 155–160, 445–447, 456–457, 466, 536–537, 539–540
ethnicity 3, 30, 122, 141, 204, 323, 370–371, 374–375, 457, 535, 541, 586
Eurocentrism 275–276
European Union 136–138, 145, 149, 538
Europe, European 2–3, 5, 8–9, 23, 27, 39–40, 43, 46, 93, 97–98, 100, 135–139, 141–150, 155, 157, 164, 180, 195–196, 198, 200, 231, 244, 266–267, 270, 275, 278, 280, 312, 318, 353–354, 359, 365, 371, 383, 385–386, 388–389, 397, 399, 441, 453, 458, 460–461, 493, 538, 542–543, 550

Facebook 325, 400, 403, 598
family 1–3, 10, 13–14, 17–18, 20, 28, 30–31, 33–34, 45–46, 49, 59, 71, 73–77, 114–116, 121, 131, 141, 150, 158, 161, 165, 172, 185, 197, 200, 218, 221, 227, 245, 247, 251–252, 255, 267, 285, 287, 313, 333, 336, 338, 340, 351, 353, 375, 380, 384, 399–400, 402, 417, 423, 434, 440, 473–474, 476–478, 482, 484, 488, 492–493, 495, 498, 509–511, 514, 516–517, 520–521, 524, 527, 530, 540, 548, 563, 565, 570, 572, 574–575, 584, 586, 588, 595
Fanon, Frantz 43, 371
Farah, Nuruddin 537–539, 542
Far East 165, 371
farmer 50, 87, 332
farmers 5, 86, 156, 341
Farrakhan, Louis 448
Farris, Sarah 145
Farris Thompson, Robert 458
fascism 155–157
fashion 4, 6, 32, 85–86, 186, 227–232, 269, 373, 403, 482, 491, 502
feminism 4, 57, 62–65, 81, 136, 142, 145, 148–150, 167–168, 171–172, 184–185, 187, 237–238, 250, 254–255, 265, 296, 302–303, 319, 323–326, 369, 448–449, 564, 568, 583, 599
femme 4, 235, 237, 239, 370
Femonationalism 145
Filipino/a 4, 217, 221, 225
film 1, 5, 8, 169, 244–246, 332, 338, 340–341, 363–367, 369, 371, 373, 434, 493, 507, 509, 514, 516–518, 520, 525–527, 547, 555–559
First World War 95, 386, 443
flight 8, 53, 76, 87, 89, 251, 314, 474, 563, 565, 575
Florence, Florentine 8, 14, 16–17, 266–270, 286, 449, 498, 599
food 1, 5, 80, 82, 114, 157
Foster, Abby Kelley 267
France, French 44, 92, 98–99, 138–139, 143, 145, 182, 371, 383, 386, 407, 453, 459, 493, 534, 537, 541, 582–583, 590, 593–594, 601

freedom 6, 20–21, 45, 49, 102, 115, 144–146, 148, 150, 160, 186, 228, 260–261, 266, 328, 380, 390, 392, 397, 409, 420, 441, 444, 507, 557, 559, 563, 565, 567–568, 570, 572–575
future 2, 9, 57, 59, 62, 64–65, 68–69, 83, 94, 99, 108, 138, 187, 196, 199, 203, 258–259, 276, 292, 296, 342, 421, 497, 583

Gabriela USA 4, 217, 221–222, 225
Galerie Soulanges 454, 461
Gandhi, Mahatma 559
Garvey, Marcus 443–445
gender 3, 5, 7, 10, 63, 86, 96, 122, 135–136, 141–142, 145–147, 149, 160, 171, 184, 225, 235–239, 248–249, 254–256, 258, 266, 294, 327, 334, 345, 347, 363–366, 369–370, 374–375, 383, 388–389, 392, 407, 423, 442, 493, 534, 541, 562–563, 570, 593
Genocide Convention 390, 392
gentrification 2, 80, 82
Georgia 8, 129, 244, 390, 426, 431, 447–448, 582, 584–586, 601
Germany, German 20, 48, 180, 384, 493, 534
Gershwin, George 99, 246
Ghana 441
global 4, 6, 9–10, 65, 69, 107, 175, 221, 227–228, 230, 232, 260, 274–275, 331, 341–342, 397, 400–403, 405–406, 440–449, 473, 478, 535–536, 541–542, 550, 562, 569
globalization 1, 63, 67–68, 273, 446, 535
God 13, 582–586, 589, 591, 594, 601
Godfrey, Mary 13, 17–21
Grand Tour 5, 265–266, 287, 289, 295
Great Barrington 17–18, 20
Greece, Greek 71, 268, 288, 292, 555
Green, Allyson 8, 19
Greenwich Village 84, 183
Griffiths, D. W. 555
  *Birth of a Nation* 434, 555–556
Guattari, Félix 534, 546–547
*Guerrilla* 555, 559
Guinea 441, 528
Guyana, Guyanese 7, 314, 473–488

Habermas, Jürgen 141
Haiti, Haitian 7, 47, 51–52, 89, 128–130, 230, 381–382, 388–389, 453–455, 457, 460–461, 463–464, 467–468, 557
Hall, Stuart 303, 318, 355, 372–375
Hammonds, Evelyn M. 324
Hampton University 173, 182, 418
Harlem 91–93, 98, 101, 156, 168, 177, 179, 183, 186, 244, 246–247, 251–252, 443–444, 446, 457
Harlem Renaissance 91, 93, 179, 457
Harley, Sharon 7, 386
Hassan, Siran 538, 540
Havana 252, 279
Hawthorne, Nathaniel 286, 292–293
headline 92, 157
headlines 98
Hebrew 60
Herring, James 179
Herzog, Melanie Anne 174
Hill Collins, Patricia 265, 326
Hinduism, Hindu 27, 30, 336, 573, 597
Hirsch, Marianne 2, 510–511
Hispanic 278
history 1, 3–6, 8–9, 17–18, 21–22, 26–28, 31, 59, 61–62, 66, 69, 81, 84, 91, 96, 107–108, 148–149, 155, 158, 160, 166, 168–169, 172, 174–176, 180, 182, 186, 208–209, 211, 225, 234–237, 248, 254, 261, 265–266, 268–270, 275–276, 278–279, 285, 287–288, 293, 296, 314, 324, 334, 339, 345–348, 352–357, 360–361, 368, 372–373, 397–398, 425, 436, 442–443, 449, 454, 460–461, 464–465, 482, 487, 491–493, 506, 509, 513–514, 517, 520, 527–529, 534, 537–543, 550, 555–557, 559,

562–563, 566–567, 586–587, 592, 597
Hobbes, Thomas 141
Hoberman, J. 366
Hollywood 4–6, 101, 183, 243–246, 356, 363, 367, 369, 371, 373
Holman Conwill, Kinshasha 459
Holocaust 59, 390, 510–511
Holt, Nora 3, 91–102
home 7, 9, 14, 16, 18–19, 22, 25–26, 28–34, 43, 46–47, 49–54, 59, 67, 71–77, 92, 94–95, 98, 100–101, 115, 122, 139, 160, 172, 176, 182–183, 186, 213, 218, 230, 234, 237–238, 266–267, 269, 277, 289, 302, 311, 350, 352, 354–356, 361, 375, 384, 388, 390, 392, 395, 399–400, 407–409, 420, 432, 441, 443–444, 448, 461, 476, 478, 480–481, 484–485, 487, 508, 510, 514, 517–522, 524, 526–527, 533, 535, 550, 557, 566–567, 582, 584, 586–587, 590, 592, 596, 601
homeland 1, 7, 28, 30, 42, 266, 449, 473–476, 480, 483, 488, 537, 546
Honduras 130, 260, 408
honorary white 426
Hopkins, Thomas F. 19, 21
Horne, Gerald 440
Horn, Jim 210
Hosmer, Harriet 5, 283, 285–296
Houdini, Harry 48
Houllebecq, Michel 147
Howard University 169, 179–180, 434, 436, 456, 459, 463, 465, 467
Hughes, Langston 91, 93, 100, 183
human rights 4, 135, 171, 212, 217, 225, 260, 342, 380–381, 390–392, 446
Hungary, Hungarian 48, 59, 138–139, 540
Hunter, Tera 588
Hunton, Addie W. 383, 386–389
Hurst, Fannie 365–366
Hurston, Zora Neale 93
identity 1, 3, 6–7, 10, 13, 21, 24, 28, 40, 51, 86, 141, 143–145, 157, 164, 197, 199, 227, 232, 252, 257, 275–277, 279–280, 324–325, 327–328, 347, 357, 364–365, 367–370, 372, 374–375, 428, 434, 442, 462–463, 468, 488, 512, 516, 529, 536, 546, 548, 550, 589
Illinois 13, 443
*Imitation of Life* 244–246, 364–369, 373–375
immigrant 2, 7, 9, 16, 32–33, 35, 84, 127–130, 133, 136–139, 143–144, 146–150, 180, 225, 252, 278, 331, 338, 340, 473, 476, 479–480, 484–485, 506, 511–512, 524, 530, 539
independence 2, 5, 27, 31, 40, 43–44, 72, 74, 227, 258, 260–261, 267, 270, 374, 473, 479, 537, 570
India, Indian 5, 27–28, 30, 129, 332–334, 339, 341, 370–371, 382, 389–390, 401, 419, 425, 514, 528, 541, 561–565, 568, 572–575
Indian Ocean 514, 561–562, 564–565, 572, 575
indigeneity 1, 65, 176, 332, 346–348, 353–358, 361, 487
Indonesia 128, 144, 217–218
Instagram 325, 403–405, 598
internet 5, 324, 326, 400
involuntary migration 1, 446
Iowa 179–180
Iowa, University of 179–180
Iraq, Iraqi 3, 47, 51, 127–128, 130
Ireland, Irish 20, 266, 348, 407
Islam 107, 143–144, 147, 163–164, 166, 331
Islamic 107, 143, 165–166, 334
Islamization 142
Islamophobic 209
Israel, Israeli 51, 390
Italy, Italian 3, 5, 8–9, 13, 19, 84, 138–139, 144, 149–150, 155–160, 230–231, 266–270, 283, 286–287, 293, 295, 401, 407, 533–550, 599

Jacobs, Margaret 357
Jaffna 26–27, 30
Jamaica, Jamaican 49, 203, 443, 557, 570
Japan, Japanese 100, 385, 399, 419
jazz 3, 91–93, 100, 102, 177, 366–367, 408, 458, 586, 590
Jew, Jewish 48–49, 60–61, 184, 389
Jim Crow 236–237, 386, 390, 397, 443, 556, 584, 588
Johannesburg 228–229, 400, 406
Johnson, James Weldon 93, 97, 101
Jones, Kellie 4, 468
Jones, Löis Mailou 7, 179, 453–468
  *Damballah* 454–455, 468
  *Les Fetiches* 458–459, 467
  *Symbols d'Afrique* 454–455, 468
Jordan, June 50
journey 2, 4, 9, 40, 48, 64, 77, 107, 116, 131, 203, 227, 229, 251, 267, 270, 301, 336, 395, 405, 474, 477–478, 520, 525–526, 528, 538, 558, 582, 584, 594
Jubilee Singers 418–419, 424–426, 430–432
justice 4–5, 49–50, 141, 149, 213, 239, 260, 266, 269, 276, 289, 325, 333, 340–341, 385, 397, 423, 441, 444, 447, 558, 571

Kafka, Franz 534
Kansas 91, 93, 100
Kendi, Ibram X. 211
Kenya, Kenyan 2, 57, 63, 72, 74, 556
King Jr., Martin Luther 212, 463, 559
Kosovo 122, 127–128, 131
Ku Klux Klan 556
Kupferminc, Mirta 2, 57–59, 61–62, 65–66, 69
  *En Camino* 57–59, 62–63, 65, 69

Laclau, Ernesto 140
Lampedusa 9, 143
Lamu 74, 76
language 8–9, 27, 48, 72, 82–83, 156, 158, 199, 249, 251, 260, 288, 311, 354, 367, 370–372, 386, 416, 477, 521, 533–535, 540–541, 543–550, 556, 560, 575
Lanza di Scalea, Rosa 495, 500
Larsen, Nella 93
Latin American 5, 140, 180, 273–280
Latino/a/x 5, 115, 172, 233–234, 254, 256, 273–281
Lawrence, Jacob 183–184, 186, 457
Lebanon 128, 137
Lebow, Alisa 311
Lega 139, 147
legacy 4–5, 28, 158, 235–236, 247–248, 254, 286, 360, 370, 374, 392, 583, 595
leisure 6, 396–398, 495
Le Pen, Marine 139, 145, 147
Lewis, Samella 169, 181–183
LGBTQ 145
LGTBQ 557
liberation 4, 145, 170–171, 260, 397, 443–446, 448–449, 557, 596
Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Ealam (LTTE) 26, 28
Liberia 128, 379, 381
Libya, Libyan 138–139, 149, 157, 536
*Life of Imitation* 364, 368, 374
Ligon, Richard 196
Lionnet, Françoise 165, 534–536, 542, 546
Lisbon 199, 230, 387, 518, 520
Locke, Alain 97, 179, 459, 468
Locke, John 141
London 8, 92, 99, 266–267, 292–293, 301, 303, 311, 313–314, 318, 382, 387, 433, 473, 520, 555, 559
Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth 268
Long Island 47, 49–50
Los Angeles 92, 101, 167, 227, 245
Louisiana 52, 443–445, 447, 587, 601
love 1, 8, 21, 32, 43, 85, 93, 187, 197–198, 204–205, 214, 230, 251,

254, 288, 295–296, 337, 396, 399, 408, 427–428, 484, 520, 530, 559
Love, Bettina 4, 237
Lower East Side 80, 83–84
Luanda 518, 520, 527
Lubumbashi 42
Lucas, Matilda 269
Lumumba, Patrice 40
Lusophone 505, 514, 520, 527–528

Magliore, Paul E. 460–461
*Mail-Order Family* 221–222
Malaysia, Malay 217, 367, 370, 375, 382
Mali 143, 231
Mandela, Nelson 559
Manet, Édouard 155
Marek, Joyce 97
margins 8, 254, 342, 562
Mariposa 256–257
market 4–5, 80–81, 83–85, 197, 205, 231, 274, 276–277, 280, 287–288, 318, 339, 396–397, 400, 406, 461, 463, 570
marriage 1–2, 14, 20, 44–46, 73, 93, 98, 205, 217, 246, 283, 336, 427–428, 460, 474, 497, 524, 571–572, 585
Marshall, Thurgood 183, 212
Massachusetts 17–18, 164, 267, 285, 433, 453
materials 2, 58, 65–66, 68, 76, 135, 149, 170, 177, 195, 278, 304, 312, 346, 348, 360, 390, 464, 483, 491, 495, 505–506, 512, 527, 562
Mau-Mau 72
McAdoo, Mattie Allen 6, 415–428, 430–436
McAdoo, Orpheus Myron 417–421, 423–428, 431–432
McCarthyism 176, 184
McDuffie, Erik 185, 449
McLean, Ian 348, 358
McMillan, Uri 302, 324–325
media 5, 26, 61, 63, 81, 127, 131, 137, 143, 147, 221–222, 229, 233–234, 303, 312, 323, 328, 340–342, 364, 366, 396–398, 403–406, 409, 442, 467, 539, 558, 598
Mediterranean Sea 8–9, 137–138, 157, 312
Melbourne 33, 66
memoir 1–2, 8, 35
memory 1–3, 24–26, 29–31, 33–35, 57–62, 66–69, 122, 160, 162, 166, 175, 238, 247, 254, 349, 506, 510–514, 516, 520–521, 524, 530, 542
Metcalf, Charles 573, 575
Methodist 29, 91, 93
Mexico City 172, 177, 186
Mexico, Mexican 4, 114, 128–131, 167–169, 172–173, 176–178, 180, 186–188, 280, 379, 389–390, 566–567
Miami 131, 277, 279–280
Middle East 2–3, 107, 130, 312, 371
Middle Passage 4, 198–200, 203–204, 236
Mills, Florence 98–99
Miranda, Mónica de 8, 505, 507–508, 513–514, 516–518, 520–521, 525–530
  *An Ocean Between Us* 507, 514, 516–517, 520
  'Home Sweet, Sour Home' 514, 516, 520
  *Once Upon a Time* 507, 514, 516, 525–527
Mirzoeff, Nicholas 302
missionary 6, 348, 382, 586
Mississippi 47, 52, 93, 447, 558
Mitchell Acton, Hortense 13–14, 16, 19, 21–22, 86, 492, 498, 500, 502
mobility 1–2, 5–6, 25, 42–43, 57–58, 64, 66, 68, 76, 238, 266, 268, 313, 346, 397, 508, 568–570
Moffatt, Tracey 6, 345–358, 360–361
Mogadishu 537–538, 540, 544–546, 549
Moller Okin, Susan 145
Monte Carlo 92, 99

Montgomery, Evangeline J. 169, 454
Moore, Audley E., 'Queen Mother' 7, 366, 439–449
Morgan, Gertrude 8, 581–601
Morgan, J. P. 16–17, 19
Morocco, Moroccan 107, 161, 163–164, 341, 533
Morrison, Toni 9, 25, 207, 540–541
  *The Origin of Others* 9
Moten, Fred 585, 593
mother 2, 17–22, 29–30, 33, 40–46, 48–49, 51, 63, 72–73, 85, 87, 89, 113–115, 131, 175, 185, 187, 197–199, 203, 217, 227, 230, 244, 267, 285, 336–337, 348, 355, 365–368, 371, 374–375, 383–384, 434, 436, 443, 473–474, 477–485, 520–521, 524, 535, 540, 543, 545–548, 571
Mozambique, Mozambican 230, 528
Muñoz, José Esteban 347, 356, 593–594
music 5, 92–95, 97, 99–102, 373, 420, 424, 457–458, 462, 465, 584, 587, 591, 596, 601
Muslim 107, 143–144, 146, 150, 164, 166, 213, 331, 333–334, 336, 340, 382, 572–574
Mussolini, Benito 156–160, 445, 536
Mutu, Wangechi 2, 57, 62–66, 69
  *The End of Carrying All* 57, 62–63

Nairobi 63, 74, 76, 556
Namatjira, Albert 358
narrative 17, 23–25, 28, 34–35, 77, 148, 168–169, 186, 205, 208, 211, 265, 269, 289, 304, 314, 318, 327, 368, 374–375, 402, 404, 449, 474, 478, 507, 514, 516–518, 520, 525, 527–528, 533, 544–545, 555–558, 584, 589
National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM) 92, 96–98, 101
National Broadcasting Company (NBC) 221–222
Native American 457, 556
Nazi 389, 556
Negro 3, 91–94, 96, 98–99, 101–102, 175, 177, 179, 181–187, 244–245, 371, 386, 389–390, 418–419, 423, 425, 428, 434, 436, 443, 456–460, 468
  spirituals 418, 424
Neptune, Christie 477–478, 484–486
New Black Travel Movement 396–397
New Deal 366, 389
New Jersey 51, 303, 475, 565
New Negro Arts Movement 456–459, 468
New Orleans 8, 181–182, 443, 445, 582–587, 589–590, 593–594, 601
newspapers 14, 95, 122, 133, 158, 260, 293, 379, 420, 425, 564, 566, 570–571
Newton, Huey P. 392
New York 1, 3, 8, 13, 18–19, 47–49, 63, 66, 76, 80, 82, 92, 98–99, 101, 121–122, 127, 133, 157, 177, 183–184, 186–187, 217, 225, 227, 230, 247–248, 251–252, 254, 257, 260, 293, 340, 348–349, 380, 387, 390, 395, 397, 408–409, 443, 445–447, 449, 456–458, 473–476, 478–479, 484–485, 493, 498, 595
*New York Times* 3, 121–122, 127, 133, 157, 230, 397
New York University 8, 13, 19, 449
New Zealand 427, 430, 432
Nicaragua 47, 50, 260
Nigeria, Nigerian 129–130, 218, 231, 401, 464, 466–467
Nomadness Travel Tribe 396, 399–403, 405–407, 409
North Carolina 179, 447, 453, 456, 595
Nunes Vais, Mario 496, 500
Nuyorican 255–256, 276, 339
  poetry 255

Obama, Barack 131, 340
Oberlin College 382, 384
ocean 135, 200, 252, 507, 517, 526

Ohio 6–7, 415, 417, 420, 427, 436
Ontario 380, 564, 568
Orientalism 164–165, 371, 390
othering 135–136, 143, 147, 371, 374–375, 478

pain 2, 57, 62, 221, 236, 408–410, 443, 507, 509, 517, 528, 558
Pakistani-American 331, 340
Pakistan, Pakistani 128–129, 144, 331, 337, 340
Palestine, Palestinian 3, 47, 51, 128–130
Pan-African 439–440, 442, 444–446, 448–449
Paris 92, 98–100, 164, 384–386, 399, 422, 433, 454, 457–459, 461, 467, 495, 500
Parker, Margaret 587, 589
Penn Station 395, 399
Pennsylvania 47, 98, 227, 387, 565
performance 4, 96, 101, 107, 185, 244, 302–304, 326, 328, 339, 364, 369–370, 372, 405, 418, 420, 424–425, 427, 432, 436, 457–458, 462–463, 481, 590, 592–595, 597–600
Perry, Regenia 591
Persian 333, 495, 500
personal 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 31, 62–63, 67, 76, 93, 144, 164, 212–213, 227, 229–230, 304, 312, 319, 348, 354, 357–358, 365, 368, 384, 402, 408, 443, 477–478, 484, 495, 505–506, 514, 517, 521, 524, 526, 529, 540, 545, 568, 572–575, 583, 589–590, 596–597
Petry, Ann 183
Philadelphia 96, 227, 244, 293, 384, 387, 390, 392, 395, 405, 447
Philippines, the 115, 217, 221, 225
photographic portrait 416
photography 1, 3–4, 7, 29–31, 33–35, 46, 76, 100, 131, 133, 155, 158–159, 161, 165, 287, 312–313, 333, 341, 352, 354–355, 416, 423, 454, 458, 477–478, 480, 486–487, 493–494, 497–498, 500, 502, 505–507
place 1, 4, 8, 16, 21–23, 25–27, 29, 34–35, 43, 47, 50, 62, 72, 76, 87, 96, 101, 114–116, 136–137, 141, 144, 146–147, 159–160, 167, 172, 180, 197–198, 209–210, 230, 232, 238, 254–255, 258, 277, 283, 293–294, 302, 326, 334, 336–337, 340, 353, 355, 357, 368–369, 392, 399, 406–407, 409, 446, 467, 473, 476, 478, 480, 487–488, 493, 498, 505–506, 512–514, 516–518, 521–522, 524, 527, 546–547, 561, 569, 584, 587, 589, 594, 599
pleasure 1, 86, 266, 324, 327–329, 349, 410, 506
Poland, Polish 48, 138
politics 1, 3–6, 8–9, 26–28, 40, 93–94, 108, 122, 135–136, 138–142, 144–146, 149–150, 157, 160, 169–171, 173, 176–178, 181, 184–185, 204, 208, 212–213, 250–252, 254–255, 257–261, 270, 274, 276–277, 280, 318–319, 323–324, 327–329, 340, 352, 365, 372–375, 380–382, 387–391, 398, 405, 407, 409, 434–435, 440–445, 447–449, 462, 464–465, 474, 491, 493, 506–507, 509, 511–512, 535, 537, 541–542, 547, 559, 562, 568–572, 583, 588
Pollock, Griselda 512
Ponzanesi, Sandra 541–542
Porter, James 179–180, 434, 436, 463–464
portrait 7, 41, 46, 91, 186, 225, 268, 283, 294, 313, 354, 415–416, 423, 454, 456, 465–468, 480, 482, 486–488, 493, 495, 498, 500, 502, 510, 545, 569, 571
Portugal, Portuguese 17, 197, 199, 513, 516–517, 520–521, 527–528, 541
Powell, Richard J. 168, 175, 462
power 4, 13, 21, 26, 63, 65, 81, 83, 88, 133, 139, 141–142, 157–158, 160, 163, 165, 172–174, 200, 204,

207, 212, 229–230, 252, 254, 260, 265–266, 283, 288, 313, 328, 332, 334, 338, 353, 357–358, 367, 405–406, 409, 420–421, 423, 444, 459, 495, 506, 508–509, 511, 514, 517–518, 520, 522, 526, 528, 535, 537–538, 542–545, 547–548, 550, 556, 562, 564, 570, 575, 585, 589, 597, 601
Powers, Hiram 293
Prayer Room 582, 590, 592, 595–596, 598–599
pregnant 3, 113–115, 199, 203, 545
presentation of the self 423
prey 3, 149
Primus, Pearl 458, 468
prisoner 8, 26, 447, 559
psychology 6, 25, 85, 162, 164, 208, 370, 400, 466, 507, 509, 514, 526
Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican 5, 47, 84, 172, 247–252, 254–261
Punjabi 333, 338

Queensland 351, 358, 360

race 5, 7, 10, 96, 139, 171, 175, 179, 184, 195–196, 225, 239, 246, 248–249, 254, 256–258, 266, 269, 278–279, 345, 363–372, 374–375, 385, 387, 389, 392, 406–407, 420–421, 423–424, 433–434, 436, 445, 459–460, 535, 556, 563, 566, 570–571, 575, 593
race woman 433
racial passing 1
racism 4, 43, 45, 50, 127, 133, 148, 156–157, 207, 209, 211, 213, 222, 235, 257, 265, 269, 276–277, 279, 303, 311, 326, 329, 350, 365, 367–368, 372, 375, 379, 392, 406, 420, 427, 433, 445, 447, 555
radical 4, 8, 140, 167, 171, 184–185, 187, 204, 212–213, 238, 252, 261, 354, 365, 386, 392, 405, 510, 559, 569, 584–585, 588, 592, 595
Ramzanali Fazel, Shirin 538, 540
record 8, 19–20, 24, 35, 51, 84, 92, 107, 199, 203, 301, 327, 339, 360, 395, 398–399, 443, 495, 506, 509, 557, 594
Red Cross 500
refugees 1, 3, 9, 27, 30, 58, 60, 108, 122, 127, 131, 133, 136–139, 146–150, 311, 511, 537–539, 544–545, 549, 566, 569, 575
reinvention 8, 562–563
Remond, Sarah Parker 5, 265–270
Republican 388, 569–570
reputation 5, 168, 179, 286, 293, 295
research 5, 17, 84, 209, 288, 295, 463–464, 467, 500, 514, 524, 592
Ringgold, Faith 456, 466–467
Robeson, Paul 244–245
Robinson, Cedric 204–205
Robinson, Evita 396, 399–402, 404, 406–409
Rochemont, Louis de 245
Rogin, Michael 367
Rome, Roman 19, 268–270, 286, 289–290, 292–293, 295, 537, 539–540, 543–546, 548, 567
Roosevelt, Franklin D. 252, 388
Rose, Gillian 313
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 141
Russia, Russian 48, 571

Saar, Betye 168, 172–173
Saar, Louis Victor 94
safety 3, 30, 51, 73, 238, 318, 352, 388, 426–427, 446, 556, 586
Said, Edward 371
Salvini, Matteo 139, 144
Sancho, Ignatius 198–199
San Francisco 3, 113–114
  Mission District 3, 113
Saudi Arabia 144, 163
Savage, Augusta 457
Scarville, Keisha 477–481, 483
  'Mama's Clothes' 480–481, 483
Scego, Igiaba 538, 540
Schomburg, Arthur 457

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 170, 395, 457, 468
Scotland 266, 295, 352
Scurlock, Addison N. 435
Scurlock brothers 454
Scurlock, Herbert 435
Scurlock Photography Studio 435, 454, 467–468
Seale, Bobby 392
Second World War 9, 137, 260, 388, 398, 445
Selassie, Haile 156
self-determination 21, 74, 211–213, 259–261
self-fashioning 1, 13, 593
self-invention 3, 92–93
self-portrait 4, 294, 313, 480
Senegal, Senegalese 464–465, 533, 537
sexism 433
Shadd Cary, Mary Ann 564–572
Shakespeare, William 289, 555
Shanghai 92, 100–101
Shawn, Ted 456, 459
Shero 5, 332–334, 339, 341
Shih, Shu-mei 534–536, 542, 546
Shirky, William 325
Sierra Leone 128, 379, 381–382, 458
silence 1, 21, 233, 302, 314, 324, 328, 367, 547, 600
Simla, Amrita 5, 331–334, 336, 339, 341
Simmons, LaKisha Michelle 584
Simpson, Wallis 99
Sims, Lowery Stokes 175
Singapore 367, 370–371, 374
singers 426
Sinhala 27–28
Sinhalese 26–27, 29–30
Sirk, Douglas 365–367
slave owners 196, 557
slavery 1, 4, 9, 97, 135, 149, 185–186, 195–200, 203–205, 234, 236–237, 265–267, 278, 379, 381–382, 390–391, 397, 420–421, 424, 426, 446, 556–557, 561–575, 586
slave ships 195, 198
slave traders 149, 196
socio-economic 3
Soho 80, 82
Somalia, Somali 9, 128–129, 533, 536–540, 543–546, 548–550
Sontag, Susan 505–507
South Africa, South African 2, 6–7, 47, 52, 129, 228–230, 232, 382, 396, 408, 415–417, 420, 423–428, 430–432
South America 2, 52, 381, 389, 528, 566–567
South Asia, South Asian 32, 128, 331–334, 336, 339, 528, 572
South Carolina 1, 17–19, 21, 313, 447, 557
Southern, Eileen 592
Spain, Spanish 177, 198, 225, 251, 260, 290, 381
Spring, Joel 210
Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan 2, 23, 26–28, 31–34, 128–129, 528
Stahl, John M. 365–366
Steyerl, Hito 312
Still, William Grant 94
stories 1–5, 8–9, 16–18, 20, 24–25, 30–31, 34–35, 48, 50–51, 60–61, 71, 76–77, 94, 108, 115, 147, 155, 158, 160–161, 166, 185–186, 195, 198, 200, 205, 221, 225, 230, 236, 245, 248, 254, 258, 280, 292–293, 295, 314, 333–334, 336, 338–339, 363, 365, 369, 379–380, 408, 436, 473, 476–477, 485, 488, 494, 498, 500, 509, 517–518, 520–521, 526–527, 529–530, 538, 540, 543–546, 549, 555–557, 559–560, 573
student 2–3, 7, 9, 16, 20, 29, 61, 93–94, 113–114, 169, 179–183, 209, 212–213, 313, 336, 401, 418, 436, 456, 462–464, 474
style 421
success 5, 41, 88, 93, 101–102, 116, 209, 267–270, 290, 293, 318, 374, 391, 418–420, 432

Sudan 128–130, 464
supershero 5, 331
Sweden, Swedish 74, 493
Swet Shop Boys 333, 339
Sydney 432, 434
Syria 129–130, 137, 292

Taller de Gráfica Popular [Popular Graphic Workshop] (TGP) 173, 176, 178
Tamil people 23, 26–32
Tanner, Benjamin Tucker 384
Tanner, Henry O. 384
Tanner Mossell Alexander, Sadie 380, 383–384, 386–392
Tanner Mossell, Mary 383
Tasmania 7, 428
Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Ilyich 96
teacher 7, 92, 115, 181–182, 209, 211–214, 436
Tennessee 213, 418, 571
tennis 417
Terrell, Mary Church 383–389
textiles 7, 13, 231–232, 455, 466–467
Tibol, Raquel 177–178
Tokyo 66, 92
Toronto 473, 478, 481
transient 2, 370, 372
transnationality 3, 8, 10, 69, 165, 172, 184, 254, 265, 347, 436, 534–536, 538, 540–543, 545–546, 549–550, 565
travel 1, 5–8, 17, 29–30, 47, 49–50, 52, 67, 69, 73, 93, 107, 127, 131, 176, 178, 197, 251–252, 266–269, 280, 302, 313, 329, 347, 379, 382–383, 386, 388, 390, 395–403, 405–410, 426–427, 432, 436, 439–443, 445–447, 453, 460, 463, 491, 507, 514, 530, 564, 572, 582, 584, 586–587, 598
Travel Noire 402–406
travel pass 426
travel writing 1, 8, 107
Trinidad 379, 382, 444
Truman, Harry S. 389–390
Trump, Donald 127, 131
Truth, Sojourner 186–187
Tubman, Harriet 186–187, 583
Tumblr 325
Turkey 51, 311
Turner, Lana 366, 369
Twa, Lindsay 464
Twitter 598
Tyler Rollins 348, 350, 354, 356

Ugochukwu, Zim 401–402, 404, 406
Umpierre, Luz María 255
Underground Railroad 420, 565
United Kingdom 10, 139, 314, 318, 476, 521, 555, 559
United Nations 9, 145, 380, 386, 390, 392, 446
United States 2–5, 7, 27, 31, 47, 50–51, 57, 93, 96, 98, 101, 113–114, 122, 140, 127–131, 139, 164, 167–169, 172, 176–178, 180–181, 183–185, 187, 207, 209, 213, 217, 221–222, 225, 244, 234–235, 238, 243, 249, 254, 256, 258, 260–261, 266–267, 269, 273–275, 277–280, 313, 283, 286, 311–312, 323, 332, 339–341, 357, 365, 371–372, 379–380, 382, 384–386, 388–390, 392, 397, 400, 406–409, 417, 425, 431–432, 435–436, 439–449, 458, 463–465, 473–475, 566, 476, 478–480, 485, 487, 556, 124, 565–566, 568–569, 124
Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) 443–445
Urbinati, Nadia 140

Valdes, Juana 5, 273–274, 277–281
values 8, 82, 141, 144–146, 255, 280, 342, 559, 568, 570, 596
Vancouver 434, 566–567
Vanderbilt, Gloria 85–86
Van Vechten, Carl 91–93, 99–101
Vatican, the 156, 292, 295
Vega, Manny 256–257

Veloso, Mary Jane 4, 217–218
Venezuela 130, 487–488
Venice, Venetian 62, 495, 500
  Biennale 62, 65
Verginaud Pierre-Noel, Louis 454, 457, 460
Vergne, Philippe 68
video 6, 59–60, 63–65, 69, 114, 133, 207, 225, 302, 312, 314, 318, 339, 364, 368, 370–372, 374–375, 400, 403, 405, 409, 486, 507–508, 517, 525, 528–529, 558
Villa La Pietra 8, 13–14, 16, 86, 491–492, 498, 500, 599–600
Villa Schifanoia 495, 500
violence 2, 4, 9, 23, 26–29, 31, 33, 47, 51, 59, 64–65, 89, 96, 113, 122, 127, 135–136, 143–144, 147–150, 157, 170, 197, 204, 211, 221, 234–239, 311–313, 328, 347, 352, 354, 356, 360, 368, 375, 396, 474, 511, 513–514, 523, 528–529, 559–560, 585–586
Virginia 18, 227, 418, 424, 432
visual culture 1–2, 332

Wales 74, 99, 292, 352
Walker, Margaret 180–181
war 1, 3–4, 9, 18, 23, 27, 47, 50–51, 72, 83, 95, 108, 122, 127, 131, 137, 147–148, 155–160, 176, 179, 243, 258, 260, 292, 295, 311, 372, 380–381, 385–386, 388–389, 398, 420, 443, 445, 511, 537–540, 544–545, 549, 556–557, 563, 572, 124
Washington, Booker T. 178
Washington, D.C. 7, 17, 47, 51, 95, 168, 172, 178–179, 233, 386, 417, 432, 435–436, 453–454, 459
Washington, Fredi 4, 243–246
Waters, Ethel 245
Waters, Maxine 207–208
Waugh, Evelyn 156
Weir, Kathryn 354, 357, 360
Wells, Ida B. 383
Wells, James Lesesne 179
Werker, Alfred 245
West, Western 93–94, 100–101, 136, 140–146, 148–150, 166, 175, 221, 371, 419, 425, 449, 455, 457, 459–461, 467, 566–568
Wheatley, Phyllis 186–187, 435
White, Charles 181–182
White, Clarence Cameron 94–95
Whitney, Anne 268
Wilders, Geert 139, 147
Wilkerson, Isabel 20
  The Warmth of Other Suns 20
Williams, Cora 587, 589
Willis, Deborah 8, 71, 86, 268, 304, 599
Wilson, Woodrow 556
womanhood 2, 5, 7, 21, 28–30, 41, 45–46, 48, 52, 58, 63–64, 73–74, 76, 83–86, 91–92, 94–95, 102, 135, 140, 143–145, 147, 155–156, 158–160, 163, 168, 171, 175, 177, 186, 197, 199–200, 203, 205, 208, 235, 247, 254–255, 257, 261, 266, 268–270, 278, 286–289, 292–294, 303, 319, 331–332, 340, 366–367, 369, 379, 387, 396, 401, 409, 415–417, 419–420, 422–423, 427, 433–434, 436, 441–442, 445, 449, 468, 479–480, 485, 495, 498, 518, 520, 533, 538, 540, 544, 555, 558–560, 567, 571, 585–586, 589, 593, 596, 601
women of African descent 436
Wong, Ming 6, 363–365, 367–372, 374–375
Woodson, Carter G. 178, 459, 468
World Trade Center 123, 187
writing 1, 6, 8, 20, 47, 71, 74, 92, 95, 98, 107, 114, 159, 161, 165, 179–180, 237, 248, 251–252, 257–259, 270, 293–294, 311, 369, 392, 440, 461, 464, 506, 512, 533–535, 540–541, 556, 559, 563–564, 570, 582, 591, 601

Xirsi Siyaad, Cabdulqaadir ('Yamyam') 548
Xiuzhen, Yin 2, 57, 66–69
  'Portable Cities' 57, 66–69

Yale University 48, 93, 101
Yau, Elaine 589
Yiddish 48, 50, 84

Zeman, Milos 146
Zenobia 291–293

# This book need not end here...

## Share

All our books—including the one you have just read—are free to access online so that students, researchers and members of the public who can't afford a printed edition will have access to the same ideas. This title will be accessed online by hundreds of readers each month across the globe: why not share the link so that someone you know is one of them?

This book and additional content is available at:
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153

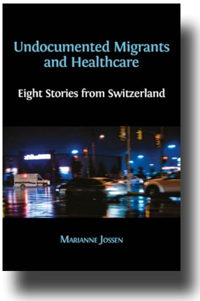
## Customise

Personalise your copy of this book or design new books using OBP and third-party material. Take chapters or whole books from our published list and make a special edition, a new anthology or an illuminating coursepack. Each customised edition will be produced as a paperback and a downloadable PDF. Find out more at:

https://www.openbookpublishers.com/section/59/1

Like Open Book Publishers
Follow @OpenBookPublish
Read more at the Open Book Publishers **BLOG**

# You may also be interested in:

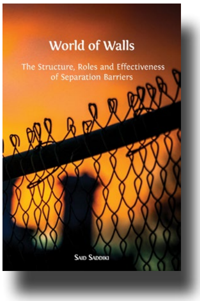

Undocumented Migrants and Healthcare
Eight Stories from Switzerland
Marianne Jossen

## Undocumented Migrants and Healthcare

Eight Stories from Switzerland

*Marianne Jossen*

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0139

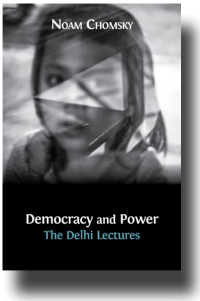

World of Walls
The Structure, Roles and Effectiveness of Separation Barriers
Said Saddiki

## World of Walls

The Structure, Roles and Effectiveness of Separation Barriers

*Said Saddiki*

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0121


Noam Chomsky
Democracy and Power
The Delhi Lectures

## Democracy and Power

The Delhi Lectures

*Noam Chomsky*

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0050

# Women and Migration

## Responses in Art and History

### Edited by Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano and Kalia Brooks Nelson

The essays in this book chart 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 Caribbean Diaspora, refugees and slavery through the various lenses of politics and war, love and family.

The contributors, which include 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 feature in this substantial treasure-trove of women's joy and suffering, disaster and delight, place, memory and identity.

This collection appeals 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.As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found here:

www.openbookpublishers.com

*Cover image: Sama Alshaibi, Sabkhat al-Milḥ (Salt Flats) 2014, from the "Silsila" series, Chromogenic print mounted on Diasec, 47 in. diameter. Courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery.*

*Cover design: Anna Gatti*

GLOBAL INSTITUTE FOR
ADVANCED STUDY
NYU

OpenBook
Publishers

ebook
ebook and OA editions
also available

OPEN
ACCESS