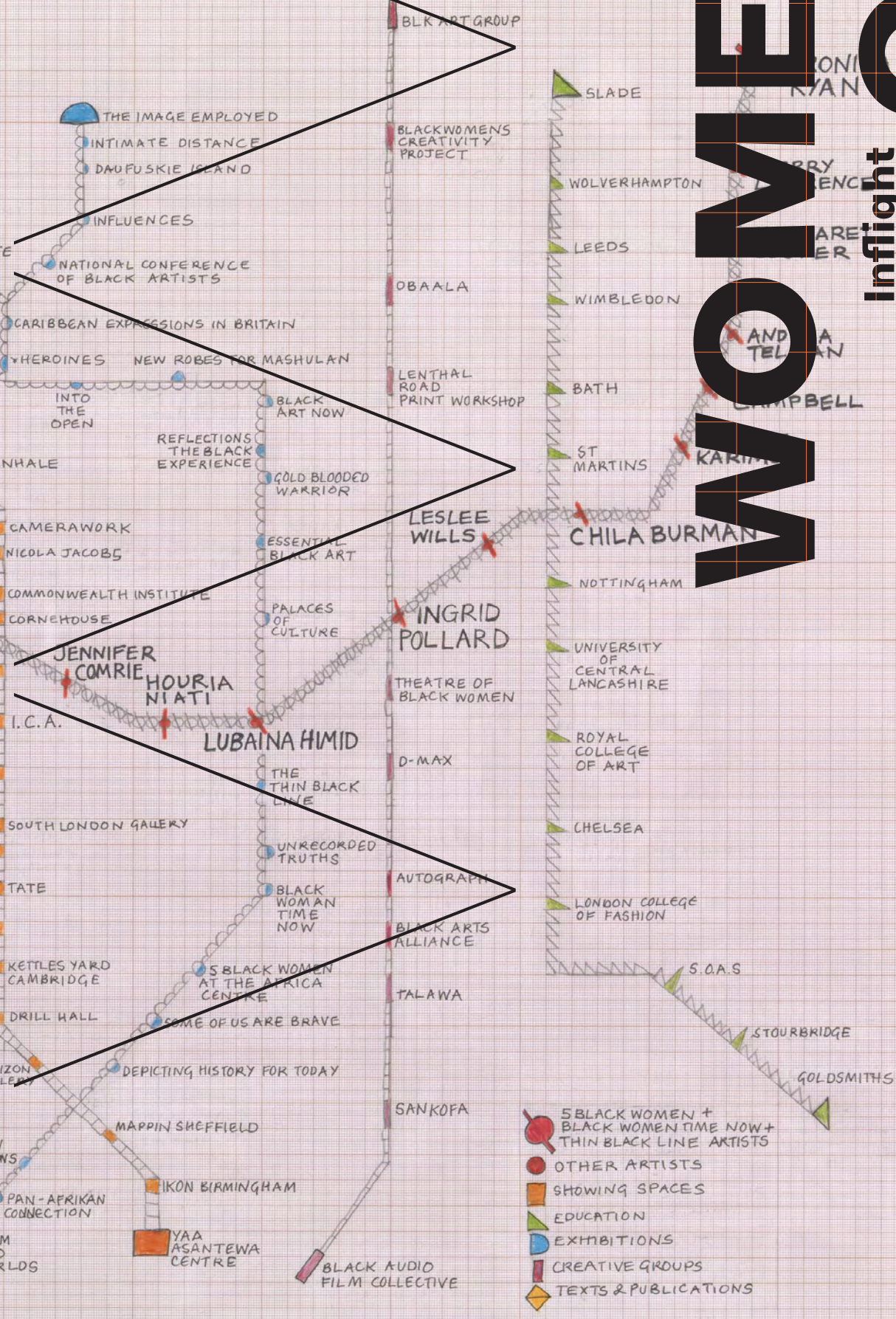


# CK LINE(S)



# WOMEN ON AIR

Inflight Magazine #4



Claudia Vera Jones (1915-1964)

In December she was met off the boat-train in London by two West Indians active in socialist, anti-colonial politics, and who drove her off through the thick London fog on a motorbike barely capable of taking even one of them. [...] In March 1958 she launched the *West Indian Gazette* or, to give it its full title, the *West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*. Like many such ventures, this was the product of colossal human energy (hers mainly) and minimal material back-up. The paper functioned as an organiser for West Indians in the UK, but in addition addressed issues more strictly particular to the Caribbean.

Bill Schwarz, "Introduction: Crossing Seas", in: Bill Schwarz (Ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003, 14.

A rather different tie between some of the working-class blacks and the wealthier stratum from abroad was provided though the arts. Jazz had by this time in the early thirties projected itself powerfully in America, and you had your Louis Armstrongs and Duke Ellingtons coming across on tour round the provincial capitals in Britain. Unlike the situation in America there were very few black entertainment areas where the whites could go to hear this stuff as they could in Harlem. However, when these big black entertainers went their rounds, it gave the local black boys a little prestige because the whites thought that they, too, might have this jazz thing in them. Naturally, therefore, you found the black seamen and others going backstage and shaking hands, even though they came from the most terrible slums.

It wasn't only the big-timers; there were vaudeville groups like the Black Birds doing their act in England and Scotland or a more serious set like the Fisk Jubilee Singers with their Negro spirituals. There were also a few personalities—mostly Afro-Americans—who had opened up little clubs in the West End of London. This was allowed by the censors for they recognized the group-consciousness of the West Indian and West African and accepted that there should be places of relaxation. One of the most famous of these was the **Florence Mills Club**, manned by **Amy Ashwood Garvey**; you could go there after you'd been slugging it out for two or three hours at Hyde Park or some other meeting, and get a lovely meal, dance and enjoy yourself.

Ras Makonnen, *Par-Africanism From Within*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press 1973, 130.

Ethiopian sympathizers at London meeting, created: 2 September 1935. With Amy Ashwood Garvey on the left. Photographer: unknown, © Bettmann / Contributor. Held by Getty Images.



Una Marson, BBC Producer, 1941

Besides cultural affinities, these individuals would have no work permit problems in England. Black music historian John Cowley has described the ease of which British West Indian-born, New York resident stars such as singer-comedian Sam Manning and band leading Trinidadian pianist Lionel Belasco were able to forego fooling around with the Home Office for work permits in 1934; Manning left Britain for New York City in 1938 but had made State-side audiences laugh before, playing a parody of Marcus Garvey in a 1927 New York-to-New Orleans stage revue *Hey! Hey!*—produced by the political feminist Amy Ashwood (the first Mrs Marcus) Garvey.

Andy Simons, *Black British Swing: The African Diaspora's Contribution to England's Own Jazz of the 1930s and 1940s*. <https://blackbritishswing.wordpress.com/2012/12/22/black-british-swing-the-african-diaspora-contribution-to-englands-own-jazz-of-the-1930s-and-1940s/>

Although [Una] Marson's arrival in London in 1932 coincided historically with that of C.L.R. James, the ideas and beliefs she brought with her set her apart from both the young—male—intellectuals of Trinidad in the 1930s and the later generation of emigrants in important ways. She had left Jamaica in the very year in which her first play, *At What A Price*, was staged in Kingston, to public acclaim. She had also, by the age of twenty-seven, established her journalistic credentials, founding in 1928 the monthly journal *The Cosmopolitan: a monthly magazine for the business youth of Jamaica and the official organ of the Stenographers Association*. Both her creative and her journalistic works already articulated her strong commitment to women's rights. [...] For her, the journeys to Britain were prompted more by an awareness of the need to see Jamaica as part of the larger colonial, Caribbean, and later African, picture. [...]

Indeed, London was not initially an open stage of opportunity for Marson and, as a black woman and a novice traveller, she was daunted by the hostility and the loneliness of the metropolis. Moreover, arriving in 1932, she came to Britain twenty years before mass immigration, before the flourishing of West Indian literary voices and before the recognised presence of a difference had 'creolised the metropole'. Her story cannot invoke the familiar images and narratives of shared crossings, of boats, railway stations and landladies. Rather its telling demands that we extend our history of this creolisation backwards, to account for the smaller but significant places of exchange and encounter between West Indians, Africans and Indians in Britain, such as the Florence Mills café in Oxford Street, London, run by Amy Ashwood Garvey from the early 1930s [...].

Alison Donnell, "Una Marson: feminism, anti-colonialism and a forgotten fight for freedom", in: Bill Schwarz (Ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003, 116.



pretending to keep them in the air

accident assassinate accurate acrid accord accede pee

access assess assets assembly

caress empress carcass

delay debris decay daily displace

factor factory fabricate agent

imitation indentation invitation implication limination

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Theresa Kampmeier



TOR Art Space, photographed by Theresa Kampmeier, 4.6.2019.



# #4 Stopover

base to confer, debate, and enjoy ourselves, while thinking about what's at stake, how questions and agencies have transformed over the last year. A time-out, to synchronize. An occasion to celebrate departed loved ones, to not be alone with memories.

TOR, the site of our pit stop, was once a gas station; today it is a carrier of metaphors, an intermediate zone for temporal use before its demolition. A sort of rare b-side of an institution, perhaps? A leftover tolerance on the backside of a streamlined, capitalised inner city. A space we could adopt, reshape and animate for a few weeks, to make a number of things happen—hold an exhibit, compile a library, convene seminars, workshops, a party, talks, screenings, have endless conversations. A working together, attracting others to join.

The idea of making use of spaces, transforming existing ones, creating new ones, making a living and a change, very much carries through the following pages. The importance to have, maintain, and organise places, frameworks, and opportunities that allow a continuity to negotiate and fight over common grounds. Making spaces vibratory. To imagine a restaurant or a nightclub in Manchester or London in the 1930s as a business proposition but at the same time as a safe space in which to conspire to liberate Africa; to imagine a restaurant as an art gallery—while working as a waitress—and proceeding to turn it into one; or to imagine a roving workshop that voyages across the continent revolutionizing art education—as well as a motherhood in Lagos. “Think fast, don't waste my time,” was one of our favorite command lines we learned from Bisi while driving with her through Lagos just a year ago—the line wasn't actually a command, but a way of making fun. Bisi travelled in a different time zone, she dreamt of camaraderie among the stars, accelerated towards a beyond, and has now abandoned her old vehicle—the aeroplanes may be too slow, sometimes.

Concentration and distraction intensify equally during a layover, and what can seem like a waste of time already holds out potential. We might do what we otherwise wouldn't, as we know it won't last. We won't be staying.

*“The ducks guarded the house [...] Mr Cornerstep: it was only the universe that was round the corner, a corner very free in creating the breeze for a thousands crows, as Pokuaa slept by lippy aeroplanes.”*

Kojo Laing, *Woman of the Aeroplanes*. New York: William Morrow and Company 1988, 1, 2, 191.

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*“His words misted the tall glass of akpeteshie in his hand: ‘Save that building there! I have lots of love buried under the old stairs! [...] We shall overwhelm you with kindness! I am using leaves to induce a divine gentleness whose power is limitless... I warn you not to pull that building down; besides it will destroy that pawpaw tree here [...] History never walks here, it runs in any direction. We have been building something different here for years and years, and you just want to come and discover a whole town by accident, then pull down a house that doesn't conform to building regulations [...]”*

*Women on Aeroplanes* as a project and research method seems anything but ending, although further destinations are as yet undefined and unsecured. “Up in the air”. So we are now in a space between departure and arrival—a lounge, perhaps. The stopover session in Frankfurt—the last stop on our first itinerary—envisions this social space as a

# DIASPORA AT HOME

With: Nidhal Chamekh, Bady Dalloul, Em'kal Eyongakpa  
Rahima Gambo, Laura Henno, Jumana Manna, Abraham Oghobase  
Wura Natasha Ogunji, Emeka Okereke (Invisible Borders)  
Chloe Quenum, Marie Voignier



**Barber Pop**  
— Populäre  
Kunst aus der  
Sammlung  
Iwalewaha

ifa-Galerie  
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cca laagos  
KADIST

Center for Contemporary Art, Lagos

Opening: 3 November 2019  
Exhibition dates:  
4 November - 22 December 2019

A group exhibition curated by  
Iheanyi Onwuegbucha (CCA, Lagos)  
Sophie Potelon (KADIST, Paris)

IWALEWAHAUS

08.06. —  
07.09.2019



**Yassine  
Balbzioui:  
MAD**

Untie to Tie  
untietotie.org

# Untie to Tie

**Navine  
G. Khan-  
Dossos**



Navine G. Khan-Dossos,  
Studio view, Athens, 2019.  
Courtesy of the artist

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**GATHERING**  
20-23 JUNE

**EXHIBITION  
OPENING 6  
JUNE**

**6.  
ZWISCHEN-  
LANDUNG/  
STOPOVER**

**WOMEN  
ON  
AEROPLANES**

**06/  
2019**

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# Content

## Inflight Magazine #4

**Edited by**  
Annett Busch, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet and  
Michael C. Vazquez

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**KULTURSTIFTUNG  
DES  
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Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, The  
Showroom and The Otolith Collective,  
London, and TOR Art-Space, Frankfurt/  
Main

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Page 10: Odun Orimolade, 2019, courtesy the artist.  
Pages 31, 32-33 and 34: Works by Lubaina Himid,  
*NIEPODLEGŁE. Women, Independence and National  
Discourse*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2018,  
exhibition views. Photo: Franciszek Buchner, courtesy  
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Page 36: Lubaina Himid, *Five*, 2011. Collection of  
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# Colophon

# Passenger List

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

**Lubaina Himid** was born in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in 1954, and lives and works in Preston, UK, where she is professor of contemporary art at the University of Central Lancashire. In 2017, Himid won the prestigious Turner Prize. She is currently working for her first solo show in the United States, *Work from Underneath*, at The New Museum in NY. *Invisible Narratives*, an exhibition curated by Lubaina Himid at the Newlyn Art Gallery in Cornwall, features work by Lubaina Himid, Magda Stawarska-Beavan and Rebecca Chesney. (March–June 2019)

**Theresa Kampmeier** graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Frankfurt Main in 2016. In her practice, recurring visits present a mode of engagement with tangible contexts, textures, and their potential agency, whether at the kitchen tables of dispersed accomplices or on research endeavours in China.

With an interest in documenting and creating contemporary channels of communication, **Temitayo Ogunbiyi** creates mixed-media artworks. Her approach is often site-specific, and explores botany, human adornment, and patterning (textile, habits, and repeated gestures)—informed by history, current events, and her interactions with particular places. She uses drawing, sculpture, fabric, and collage to fragment and reorder this source material, which often includes personal anecdotes. Recently, Ogunbiyi has been creating renderings that combine



hairstyles with botanical forms. She is currently developing these works into public sculptures.

**Odun Orimolade** is a multimedia artist and academic who engages her practice from a multifaceted perspective of transdisciplinary approaches, research and collaborations. Her work spans a plethora of interests linked by space, the intangible, orientation and behavioural tendencies. She keeps an open texture to her practice, favouring drawing as a connecting point. She also creates mentorship avenues and contributes to various community projects. Orimolade lives and works in Lagos and lectures in the Fine Art Department, Yaba College of Technology where she currently serves as the Sub-Dean of the School of Art, Design and Printing.

**Marika Sherwood**, born in Budapest in 1937, saved by Christians there, taught in London schools from 1965 to 1968. She found the lack of research on the history of Black peoples in the UK very upsetting and set about doing some research. Always without funding. Her first book was published in 1985. She co-founded the Black and Asian Studies Association in 1991. She is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London.

**Bisi Silva** was the founder and artistic director of the Centre for Contem-

porary Art, Lagos (CCA Lagos), which opened in 2007 with the aim to promote research, documentation and exhibitions related to the work of African artists on the continent and abroad. Bisi Silva, a true woman of the aeroplanes, has curated numerous exhibitions, and was the heart, soul, and brain of ASIKO, “an innovative programme designed to redress the frequently outdated or non-existent artistic and curatorial curricula at tertiary institutions across Africa.” In the meanwhile, she has escaped into different spheres...

**Michael C. Vazquez** is a writer and editor. Before joining the magazine *Bidouin: Art and Culture from the Middle East*, he was the editor of *Transition: An International Review* at what was then the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard. Currently he is editing the first comprehensive monograph on the Iranian avant-garde theatre auteur Reza Abdoh, due Fall 2019.

**Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa** is an artist and researcher who works with a variety of forms and practices, with a distinct sensitivity to what happens between the lines. She is a Research Fellow in Fine Art at the University of Bergen and Convener of the Africa Cluster of the Another Roadmap School.

Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *You will receive answers to the smallest prayers*, 2017, pencil on paper, 10.2 x 7 cm. This work was featured in the inaugural edition of Bisi Silva Projects: *Gallery of Small Things* in Lagos, Nigeria.

I.

In 1999, I travelled from my residence in London to visit my home city of Lagos in preparation for a project I was planning to implement a year later. Not long after arriving, I had a conversation with a mid-career artist about the local and international art scene. I recall that the artist responded to my mention of documenta X with a blank and bewildered expression. He seemed oblivious of documenta and the exhibition's status as one of the preeminent sites for the display of contemporary art. In my incredulity and naïve persistence about what I considered—presumptuously—to be his ignorance, he replied in a somewhat irritated tone, “I am sorry, Bisi, but I have not heard of it.” In reflecting on this experience, I am now inclined to ask, why should he have heard of documenta? Here the words of the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o are apt. After observing changes to the literary curriculum in Nairobi that privileged 'Third World' literature, Wa Thiong'o affirms that such changes reflected the truth “that knowing oneself and one's environment was the correct basis of absorbing the world; that there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre. The relevant question was therefore of how one centre related to other centres.”<sup>2</sup>

I highlight this exchange because in the 1990s, the lauded benefits of globalisation and its tenets of openness, fluidity, and notions of interconnectedness implied that it affected or impacted everyone in the same way. Today, however, the fallacy of such thinking is obvious—that what may be considered landmark events in the Western art world register as such to only a small powerful minority of the world's population. At the inception of Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos (CCA) in 2007, not only had my location changed, but also my frame of reference had shifted considerably, and I was more cognisant of the reason why an event such as documenta might have been inconsequential to artists working within a Lagosian milieu. The contemporary art scene in Lagos had not yet witnessed the effervescence that is visible today. It was still at an emergent stage with cultural activities split, on the one hand, between the European institutions with a local presence such as the British Council, French Institute, and Goethe Institute, and on the other hand, a collection of galleries that focussed exclusively on commercial activity and a few artist initiatives.

In developing CCA our interest lay in prioritising experimental artistic practices including performance art, fine art photography, and video art, focussing especially on the conceptual possibilities of these mediums. These artistic forms were mostly absent within the mainstream of the local art scene. We wanted to provide a discursive platform that embraced critical debate and exchange. One goal was that CCA would become a curatorial laboratory of thoughts, a space animated by a plethora of activities including talks, panel discussions, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, and publications that responded to local needs while remaining connected to the global art ecology. At the core of CCA's ambition was an attempt to make expansive and self-critical forms of curatorial enquiry a priority in the context in which the history and practice of curating contemporary art was non-existent.

As the organisation grappled with the challenges of its environment, this tabula rasa—despite a rich landscape of local habits, customs and vernacular culture—from which to work provided the freedom to develop and implement new models where needed. The challenges gave away the questions including of what type of curatorial formats and methodologies might be developed to harness our activities? How could an expansive approach to curating take place within our immediate context as well as across the continent in order to effect radical transformation in artistic thought and presentation? How might unconventional approaches to curating catalyse social, cultural, and structural change? At the time these concerns were somewhat lofty and produced no easy answers. We realised very quickly that there was a fault line in terms of knowledge and practice, whether artistic or curatorial, and there was an urgent need to address gaps in art education. As with other

countries across Africa, Nigeria inherited a British colonial educational system. Whilst independence ushered in a new era in which self-determination was the corner stone, the colonial educational system remained intact and its legacies remain discernable today—barely changed and largely unchallenged.<sup>3</sup> This stagnation is in stark contrast to the reforms that took place during the early 1960s in Britain and many other Western countries where art education underwent significant changes. As artist John Aitken notes, “the British art school system was radically overhauled in 1963. A new degree equivalent qualification was established that highlighted the integration of theory and practice, in contrast with vocational emphasis of the National Diploma in Design.”<sup>4</sup>

The absence of critical theory and the limitations of basic art history in the curricula coupled with the continued prioritisation of

# Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers<sup>1</sup> to Bloom<sup>1</sup> Bisi Silva

skill over process provided the impetus for CCA, Lagos to initiate curatorial project with a pedagogical focus. The programme was designed to provide a space in which art and culture would ignite ideas and discourse—a space in which *learning to unlearn* became a necessary foundation for the Àsikò art school.<sup>5</sup> Àsikò is a Yoruba word that translates as “time” in English. The word is appropriate for the title for such a project, given that many of the themes and questions we seek to explore shift across temporal registers. For example, the first three editions moved from considerations between history, aesthetics, and the materiality of art, and sustained explorations of archival practice.

Àsikò does not exist in a historical vacuum but is part of the lineage of non-formal art and art education initiatives created across the continent since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first wave was made possible through the consolidation of European colonisation and the implantation of Christian missionary organisations. Workshops figured prominently during this period, and they were less about producing artists and more about the necessity to train artisans who could create religious sculptures, painting, and murals for the growing number of converts and the time. Nonetheless some of the talented students would eventually become great modern artists such as Ben Enwonwu and Ankinola Lasekan from Nigeria, and Gerald Sekoto and Ernest Mancoba from South Africa. By mid-century, the format and vocabulary had changed. Still controlled by Westerners, several independent art ‘schools’ sprang up in the 1950s and 1960s including Pierre Lods’ Poto Poto School in Congo Brazzaville, Frank McEwen’s ‘Shona’ art workshops in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and the Mbari Mbayo Oshogbo club spearheaded by Ulli Beier and Duro Ladipo in Nigeria.

By the 1980s, the first triangle artists’ workshop (which was developed in New York by artists Anthony Caro and art patron Robert Loder) took place in South Africa. Organised by artists David Koloane and Bill Ainslie, they incorporate triangle’s more egalitarian and democratic model, inviting formally and informally trained African and international artists to work together intensively, sharing meals, and jointly participating in discussions and presentations over a two-week period that culminated in an exhibition. This was a new model in Africa, and as Nigerian art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu observes, “whereas other African workshops sought to re-invent an imaginary pre-contact African artistic unconscious,” this new format of flattened hierarchy was already visible in Oshogbo where “Beier had the task of encouraging the emergence of post-colonial artists who are able to negotiate the terms of their relationships and engagement with post imperial modernity and indigenous traditions.”<sup>6</sup>

ii.

In developing Àsikò, it was clear that while pre-existing pedagogical models could be mined for inspiration, the programme had to be developed through a hybrid, experimental, and fluid structure in order to account for the varied levels of experience on the part of the participants. Relative to other art pedagogical programmes, we sought to distinguish Àsikò as the outset through a strict criterion of selecting only participants who live in Africa, so as to redress the limited opportunities for emerging artists and curators to travel across the continent or globally. Àsikò is not a workshop in the conventional sense of bringing together artists to make work; it is not a residency for individual research because artists are required to turn up early every day and work with the group well into the evening including Saturdays. It is not an art school because it has no consistent facilities, and it is not an academy because we have no fixed curriculum. Yet, Àsikò borrows aspects of all these models. The programme embraces the language three-parted structure that combines elements from laboratory, residency, and workshop models whilst the open call for participants emphasises a focus on the “critical methodologies and histories that underpin artistic and curatorial practice.” Àsikò eschews a ‘master’ teacher hierarchy in favour of a changing and diverse roster of facilitators and guest speakers who are invited less to ‘teach’ and more to share, exchange, and, in turn, to learn.

This approach allows us to respond to the failure of postcolonial education systems on the continent, by equipping artists with skills and knowledge that counter the market-orientated gallery environment of most African cities, the moribund art institutions of the state and the outdated curricula of tertiary education institutions. As organisers we had our own challenges. Àsikò was positioned as an advanced course and the first edition in 2010 in Lagos sought to align artistic practice and cultural production with a 50-year celebration of Independence across 17 African countries by considering the idea of postcolonial history and its impact today. *On Independence and the ambivalence of promise*, the curatorial premise for this inaugural edition explored mechanisms through which to anchor and share perspectives on a common subject. We also chose to explore questions related to history of Independence in Africa by focussing on photography given the medium’s role in visualizing postcolonial transformation throughout the continent.

For the first edition, our aims were twofold: to include research as a starting point for artistic exploration and to introduce new forms of photographic practice that were more conceptual in nature, going beyond the more familiar documentary reportage and street photography. The response from the participants through positive and engaged, also revealed shortcomings because few of the artists had experience in research-based practice or critical theory. Although we anticipated this being a challenge, we had not realised the extent to which this would impact the initial curriculum. Important adaptations were therefore included in the second edition, which also took place in Lagos, in 2012. As a result, the second edition of Àsikò, titled *History/Matter*, sought to respond to the experiences and limitations of the first edition in which there was a disconnect between the claims artists were making about their work, and the final material form of the art work itself. In presenting History as a wide open subject it could be taken from personal recollections to landmark historical events that impact the collective, whilst matter focussed on the significance of the medium, the process and the materials used and various options that could be employed. Although the programme was initially geared towards visual artists, we quickly saw that this was inadequate. We realised that, in most countries, artists had not developed the habit of producing work in dialogue with curators and this presented an opportunity to address the paucity of curators as well as the lack of curatorial education (at least outside of South Africa).

In 2012, Jabulani Pereira from South Africa joined the programme to become Àsikò’s first curator-participant. The inclusion of emerging curators in Àsikò offers a unique opportunity to think about the programme in terms of ‘living exhibition’, where both artists and curators acquire skills and strategies relevant to their respective interests, while also devising ways for these interests to coalesce in the form of a collective final project at the end of the programme. The equilibrium between process and discourse—difficult to harness in the first edition of Àsikò—proved satisfactory in *History/Matter* as highlighted in the final project. Curated by Pereira, *Living Construction: Time. Form. Daily* demonstrated a deeper understanding of how different materials and medium interact—especially through the incorporation of technology and the performative. In addition, the exhibition imbued participants with the confidence to move beyond medium specificity once the initial tensions between curator and artists were overcome. Consequently, in a condensed space of time and as the programme evolved through later editions, artistic practice began to respond to and inform curatorial practice.

As we prepared for the third edition, curiosity and interest grew across the continent. We, in turn, felt a need to widen the parameters of the discursive space, to engage directly with different localities and their histories. From 2013 onwards, Àsikò assumed an itinerant structure, roving from country to country each year with a goal of engaging other Anglophone countries, as well as those part of the Francophone and Lusophone world. Subsequent editions of Àsikò thus took place in Accra, Ghana, Dakar, Senegal, Maputo, Mozambique, and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The third edition, titled *The Archive: Static, Embodied, Practiced*, took place in Accra in



Did you ever have a favorite heroine in fiction, in reality, in history? And who would that be?  
 Captain Kathryn Janeway of the Starship Voyager.  
 (One, two questions, answered by Bisi Silva in *Inflight Magazine* # 3)

Odun Orimolade, *A New Frontier*, Collage, 2019.

I still don't have the words to write about you. So many thoughts run through my mind these days. Are people forgetting you? Are you being you already being erased from projects that you initiated? How? How can you and your belief in us, your laughter and your smile, continue to live? I often wish I could have just one more session with you. Then I remember the last time we discussed my work and I remember you saying to me, "It's all coming together now." Will we be alright? Did I receive what I was supposed to when you squeezed my hand the last time we saw one another and you told me that you were so glad to see me? With your smile as wide as ever, and your skin glowing, I left after that long squeeze, thinking I would see you the following week. Four days later you had gone. And among your last words were, "It's morning already." How do we embrace and seize this our morning without you? Who will continue to bring us into places and spaces and platforms? How do we do these things for ourselves now? Who will be the Bisi for the younger generations of artists who didn't meet you? And how do we continue to build upon what you fought for, and remember your legacy as a beginning never to be forgotten? Based on all you shared in the past, I can imagine your response: Be open. Be generous. Keep working. Keep researching. Keep archives. Invest in yourself. Sometimes you need a good eighteen months to just work. Don't rush. Define your own parameters (I paraphrased this one, but it's a feeling that I always got from you—the idea that no one should tell us who we are. That's our work!) Just tell them what you want!

Temitayo Ogunbiyi

collaboration with The Foundation for Contemporary Art, Ghana, an artist run organisation. The foundation's base at the W.E.B. Du Bois Centre provided a fitting opportunity to begin an exploration of the contemporary uses of archives and the history of their formation, while also encouraging participants to explore the artistic and curatorial possibilities of archival research as a method of inquiry. In 2014, *Àsikò* moved to Dakar, elaborating ideas and concerns established in the previous edition by beginning with an analysis of the final project presented in Accra. Titled *A History of Contemporary Art in Dakar in 5 Weeks*, this edition highlighted, on the one hand, the temporal limitations of our engagement with any one city, and on the other hand, opened up the possibilities for individual responses to be taken into deeper consideration as we moved southwards to Mozambique in 2015. In Maputo, a 'utopian' colonial city, we engaged with the pervasive architectural legacy of Portugal, visited home/studio/library of one of its most celebrated artists Valente Malangatana as well as the recently inaugurated monument by South Africa ANC government in recognition of the vital contributions in the struggle against Apartheid by the nine Frontline states.<sup>7</sup>

For the sixth edition of *Àsikò* in 2016, Addis Ababa was a fitting place to conclude the first phase as well as consolidate the experiences, interactions and discourses of the preceding years. We continued to focus on and explore the themes and issues that had been addressed over the previous five years: colonial history and postcolonial reality, decolonial theory, identity, 'Africanness' and pan-Africanism, materiality, the archival, locality vs globalism, the body and sexuality, among others. Within the curatorial segment African exhibition histories and art history continued to be an urgent point of focus, as well as a potential area for the writing of new art histories that emanate from the local.

All in all, during *Àsikò*'s yearly five-week programme, participants and faculty created an interactive social space. The intense and intimate nature of the initiative naturally enables it to function as a community. But the faculty and participants also make conscious efforts to extend their work and dialogue into the broader local communities through collaborations, visits to archives, museums, studios, and cultural sites, as well as during excursions to different cities. This dynamic echoes a long-standing dimension of cultural production on the continent. In the introduction to *African Art and Agency in the Workshop* (2013), a seminal publication on the history of the workshops across Africa, editors Sidney Littlefield Kasfir and Till Forster highlight the social ethos of workshops that occur on the continent, noting:

"A workshop is not a place where individuals accidentally meet, and either exchange ideas or not. It is a social institution that fosters particular modes of reciprocal interpretations and, in general, social interaction. These modes are seldom as obvious as they would be in a class, where a privileged and more powerful person teaches others right and wrong. The interactions taking place in a workshop are often much more subtle. Artists in workshops learn much more *through* others, not *from* them."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the sentiment of learning *through* others has become a staple of the *Àsikò* experience. Throughout the six editions, artists and curators formed social and intellectual bonds with each other, as well as with the various facilitators, often resulting in long-term collaborative thought and practice. As the programme moved from one city to another, different sites played important roles stimulation networking opportunities, research inquiries, or mental and physical discovery be it through the library at CCA, Lagos, the Olympic swimming pool in Dakar, or the excursions in Ethiopia to the ancient cities of Lalibela and Axum. Among the unique characteristics of *Àsikò* are its pan-African identity, its roving nature, and its openness to collaborating with other pedagogical programmes such as the standalone Global Crit Clinic (GCC). This two-week programme devised by artist/academic Kianga Ford and Shane Asian Selzer was an intensive fine arts pedagogy and studio critique initiative. GCC participated in three editions of *Àsikò* from 2012–2014, and significantly contributed to *Àsikò*'s curriculum module through a focus on artistic professional development.

### III.

In contrast to many of the workshops and residencies across the continent initiated and overseen by artists, *Àsikò* positions itself as a pedagogical project framed within an expanded field of curatorial practice. The publication *Àsikò: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa*, also developed within this curatorial field as a kind of group exhibition on the printed page. The book is an appropriate format given the durational and spatial limitations of physical exhibitions, especially in a context where audiences can be small and opportunities for exhibitions to travel are often limited. By contrast, the capacity of a publication to reach a wide audience across space and time is expensive. Curated by myself in close collaboration with editor Stephanie Baptist and designers Nontsikelelo Mutiti and Julia Novitch, the ambitions of this book stem from a desire to historicise recent art and curatorial practice in Africa by laying bare key issues and ideas pertinent to pedagogy on the continent. It is our hope that this publication will inspire further discourse and the development of new spaces in which culture and learning can continue to bloom.

There is great reason to be optimistic about the possibilities for art on the continent. As we attempt to answer one of our key questions—what futures for artistic and curatorial practice and pedagogies?—it is pertinent to conclude with a vivid example of the art academy as a catalyst for change and transformation. One of the more radical 'futures' taking place in Africa today can be found at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, particularly the Department of Painting and Sculpture. During *Àsikò* 2013, which took place in Accra, the participants' excursion to Ghana's second city Kumasi included a visit to the MFA final degree exhibition. There we met the lecturers Kari'kachā Seid'ou, Kwaku Kissiedu, and George Ampratwum and some of the graduates who spoke eloquently and critically about their work. It was obvious that the graduate students had thoroughly absorbed a range of critical theory—both Western and African in its orientation—as well as different methodological and conceptual approaches to art making. The quality of work and thought in Kumasi today, by many accounts, started with a "small revolution" in 1996 (on which Seid'ou was part) where students staged "unannounced performances, silent happenings, textual paintings, poetic bricolage, exhibitions on trees, publicly posted political cartoons, etc.," and which has now grown into a full blown cultural revolution.<sup>9</sup> Since 2013, the Painting and Sculpture Department has implemented a two-year MFA programme in Curating. But more boldly, the department has created a project space called BlaxTARLINES, which is positioned as a site of artistic and curatorial exploration. Their impressive end-of-year projects include notable exhibitions such as *Gown Must Go To Town* (2015), *Cornfields in Accra* (2016) and the recent exhibition *Orderly Disorderly* (2017). The large-scale and ambitious projects—some with as many as 80 participants—include present and past students and lecturers, as well as invited artists all presenting work at the National Museum of Technology in Accra.

BlaxTARLINES' exhibitions and smaller projects are transforming the art scene through collaborations that are both local and international in their scope and audiences. The department's activities provide a good example of the way in which artistic and curatorial pedagogy can be developed by engaging from within the institution but also reaching out to the wider population, ever challenging traditional educational orthodoxies that have stifled cultural production in Ghana and across Africa. Whilst artists may be aware of and even participate in global contemporary forums like documenta today, we must not lose sight of the possibilities inherent in projects like xx and BlaxTARLINES, their capacity to express, following Wa-Thiong'o, "the particularities of our different languages and cultures very much like a universal garden of many-coloured flowers." For as the Kenyan author elaborates: "The 'floweriness' of the different flowers is expressed in their very diversity. But there is a cross-fertilisation between them. And what is more, they all contain in themselves the seeds of the new tomorrow."<sup>10</sup>

1 Bisi Silva, "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom" was first published in *ÀSİKÒ: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos 2017, xii–xxiii. Reproduced with the permission of Iheanji Onwuegbucha, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos.

2 See "Moving the Centre: Towards a pluralism of Cultures," *ibid.*, 9.

3 The Rhodes Must Fall movement started in 2015 in South Africa at the University of Cape Town. The activists demanded the removal of statue of Cecil Rhodes, an end of institutional racism and decolonising education.

4 John Aitken, "Understanding Orthodoxies," in: Mara Ambrozic and Angela Vettese (eds), *Art as a Thinking Process: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, Berlin: Sternberg Press and Università luav di Venezia, 2013, 21.

5 The programme would only officially become called *Àsikò* in 2013 for the third edition.

6 Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Rethinking Mbari Mbayo: Oshogbo Workshops in the 1960s, Nigeria" in: Sidney Littlefield Kasfir and Till Forster (eds), *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*, Indiana: Indiana University Press 2013, 172.

7 The Frontline states were active from the 1960s against the Apartheid regime of South Africa. The nine countries were Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

8 Sidney Littlefield Kasfir and Till Forster (eds), *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*, op. cit., 17.

9 *Contemporary And (C&), Platform for International Art from African Perspectives*, "Department of Now," Print Edition No. 7, 47.

10 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom" in: *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, op. cit., 24.

# Amy Ashwood Garvey: Vibratory Spaces Marika Sherwood & Emma Woikau-Wanambwa

shifting landmarks

in the streets  
in the gardens  
on the benches  
in the parks  
on the walls  
on the ground  
in the air  
on the line  
between us  
all there  
encounters like you

**Marika Sherwood** I'm a historian, so I know nothing about culture and art—except the things that interest me, of course. I came to researching the presence of Africans here very late in my life. I'm not a born historian, I don't have even a degree in history, but I was so appalled at nobody knowing anything about the presence of Africans in Britain, when I came here as an immigrant in 1965—I come from a Jewish family and what was left of us went from Hungary to Australia in 1948—that I thought, "Something has to be done!" And of course, the universities weren't doing anything at all. I asked my friend Colin Prescod of the Institute of Race Relations, who was teaching at the Polytechnic of North London, to do some research or other. I was a counsellor to students there—I was a trained psychotherapist. I kept pushing Colin and eventually he said to me, "If it's so important you'll get on and do it!" So I sort of took a step back. "I don't know how to do any history research", I told him, and he just said, "If you think it's important you will find out". And slowly I did.

I knew what was taught in school in the old colonies. It was about the glories of Britain, the kings, the queens, how wonderful the industrial revolution was... Nothing at all about the social class differentiation, or the racial differentiation.<sup>1</sup> So for me, when I came here, the shock was enormous. This wasn't what I was taught. I had to try to understand

what was going on and I learned how people had been brainwashed in the schools here. Such ignorance! Hungary didn't exist, never mind any part of Africa. The Caribbean? Where was that? It wasn't even the Caribbean, it was the 'West Indies'. And I suppose as a trained psychotherapist I knew how absolutely crucial this was. So I began doing research. I must be honest and admit that I have not focused on women, as there is just too much to do. It is only just a year ago that the first Black Studies department in this country was opened. Imagine that! This was at Birmingham City University, in September 2017. And they don't get nearly as much funding as they need, given all the research that they know needs to be done. I've done all sorts of bits and pieces of research. For example, in 1993 I was invited to Liverpool, a city I'd never been to, to advise when the first slavery museum was being set up there. I surmised that there had to be a black population because it was and is a large port, and I had already learned that some of our black population are the descendants

no agent floats around by herself  
and if it's gravity attaching her to earth  
defying gravity sounds like  
whose voice  
at the front  
listen to see the invisible  
resound on the ground in the chatter of  
pilots and birds  
the flight is delayed because she wants to  
stay in transit  
touch and go



this is touch and go  
text, safe representation is akin to a  
guy on the couch who controls the  
world from his TV  
text, progressive writing moves with a  
woman in flight  
ongoing ongoing  
this is the everyday  
holding up this building  
turn the doomed fuel station  
into a landing strip  
a touch-down beacon

of seamen working on British ships in the late 19th and early 20th century, who were discharged at the ports where their ship docked. They had to try to get new jobs on ships. The trade union, the National Union of Seamen, didn't want any Blacks employed. The shipping companies wanted to employ them, as black seamen were paid much less than their white counterparts to do the same job. The Union, instead of campaigning for equal wages, fought to preserve all jobs for Whites.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, there was quite a large black population in Liverpool. Then I discovered that a wonderful man, Pastor Daniels Ekarté<sup>3</sup>, had set up a sort of community centre for the black population at the church he founded there in 1931. Nothing had been written up about Pastor Daniels' work! And why he had to do it! I began to research and write up Daniels Ekarté—who was born in Calabar and who had himself come to Liverpool as a seaman—and that taught me just so much! I realised there must be very similar stories in every port in Britain. Had there been any research done? You're joking! Of course not. A little bit at Bristol, a little bit in South Shields but nowhere else. And, well, that's where the black populations started! In sort of 'modern' times, at least.

But the black population in Britain dates back almost 2000 years, I think. With the African regiment, which was part of the Roman Army that invaded Britain in AD 43. It was a mounted regiment. They landed somewhere in Kent and had gone all the way North to what became Hadrian's Wall, where there are some tombstones with North African names from this time. When they were demobilised, because it was rather a long way home—you couldn't go to Heathrow to get an aeroplane—they settled here and married local women.

There are populations descended from the Roman Army all over the territories they conquered. Some archaeologists are now finding North African pottery in other parts of England, so I think it's quite likely there were African soldiers in other regiments, as well. But there is hardly any research about Africa and Africans in Britain between the Roman period and the Tudor period. There are now two books on the Tudor years, both of which start a bit before and end a bit later. One is by Onyeka<sup>4</sup>, the other by Miranda Kaufmann<sup>5</sup>.

In the absence of university departments, it falls to individuals like me, who work part time to earn ✓

touch and move  
humming along and echoing back  
we collect losts and interrogate founds  
what is in your carrier bag today my dear  
what are we filling our pockets with stories for  
what if a critter jumps down from the net  
midflight  
an invitation to caress  
a personal story  
skip skip skip  
touch ground unground

touch the ground  
kiss it  
killed it  
there is some space in my luggage for your story  
are we going the same way  
then bring it in there  
a touch-over  
a plane in reverse  
crosses borders as easily as the one that just goes up and ahead  
go ahead  
even if the distance crossed is irreversible  
the plane can flow back to the same point twice  
or thrice she can  
have you been  
have i been where  
up in the light

all carried by waves  
in waves we come and fly  
a planter of bombs  
a nanny of bombs<sup>1</sup>  
a shooter of stars  
we have them all on board  
to defy this history's gravity

even if the community of the women on the  
aeroplanes  
hasn't arrived  
it sure is crossing borders inside my head  
planted inside me is a fuzzy

enough to be able to do some research. There's just no funding for research. People say, "Marika, your first book came out in 1985 and you've had six or seven books published and untold number of articles—nobody ever offered you a position in a university?" But I'm the last person a university wants. This white woman saying Africans have been here and done this and that...? No, thank you. "Don't you get research money?" Well, I have received a total of £3,000 since they stopped me teaching in 1985. Thirty-three years ago! It's mainly community organisations that are doing the research now, and of course they need a lot of funding, both for the research and to set up archives. Some local archives are very helpful, some are not. Some archives are lost. These are all problems you face as a historian. But also, relatedly, I think there are problems that have to be addressed at a somewhat different level: what is taught in our schools. To this day, most schools and most of the national curricula say nothing about the African presence here. Africa simply does not exist, even now. What does that do to the black kids growing up in our schools? And what does it do to the white kids? So I think, the need to change the school curriculum is absolutely essential, and I will stop there.

**Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa** Last year, long after I had started working on Amy Ashwood Garvey, Annett told me that the *Women on Aeroplanes* project had somehow begun with a photograph from the 5th Pan-African Conference, held in Manchester in 1945, which is, coincidentally, on the cover of the book about that conference that you and Hakim Adi edited<sup>6</sup>. In that photograph, you can see Amy Ashwood Garvey seated in the middle of the

podium, chairing the first day of that historic meeting, but she is misidentified as Amy Jacques Garvey, Marcus Garvey's second wife. The picture is taken by John Deakin, a Soho nightlife photographer who was sent to cover the congress for *Picture Post*. Now it's part of the Getty Images Archive and to get a printable copy would cost around 400 €.

I had no idea that this image had inspired this project. I myself, in trying to think about what to do for this exhibition, had begun by looking more broadly at women who had been active in anti-colonial movements in London—which was historically, of course, an extremely important centre for anti-colonial organising. People from all over the world met here, brought to the city by study, by work and by exile from the colonies.

fuzzy line of flight  
read along like me  
all here  
where it explodes  
to make space for something new

<sup>1</sup> Venu Chitale speaks of a woman who used to be her friend's family's nanny for seventy years and then went to produce explosives in the war because she had the steady hands needed (in: "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle", 1942/1942, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/women-pioneers/walking-the-line>).

Theresa Kampmeier

A lot of the blacks were frustrated in Manchester at that time; those at the University had no facilities beyond the bar for relaxation, and in town the Africans and West Indians who lived in the area also had few places to go. So I called a meeting and made an appeal: "The Indians and Chinese have restaurants, what about us?" "We have no objections but we have no money." "All right" I said. "I'll do it." So through my savings I was able to get a license for the Ethiopian Teashop; it was a building for which I only paid £4 per week and it had a basement, first and second floors; prices in property were very low, because Manchester had receded greatly during the period before the war, and things hadn't picked up again.

European countries to intervene to stop the invasion, which of course did not succeed—and that in itself is a very interesting story. And Amy was among the founders of the International African Friends of Abyssinia, the major campaigning organisation. So I looked into her a bit. Not very much, I confess, partly because I'm not a fan of Marcus Garvey. I think his talking about the need to be proud, to be African, for African unity—that was absolutely fantastic, and he was clearly very good at spreading the message. But he declared himself King of Africa! To me that said "There's something a bit wrong with you, Marcus Garvey. You clearly did not do whatever reading you could have possibly done at that time. How on earth can you as a West Indian, living in the USA, someone who has never been and will never go to Africa, declare yourself..." I just thought, something's gone wrong in his head. I don't know if that pushed me away from Amy, because I know she had left Marcus but in a way she continued to support him. I didn't understand what that was about.<sup>11</sup>

[...] After reconstruction, I was able to fit in twenty-two tables, eleven on the ground floor and eleven above. In the basement I installed two toilets, and used another part as a coal room. I also rigged up a primitive fridge. The running of it was also straightforward; I found a Hungarian woman, Mrs. Adler, who was one of the many Jewish refugees in the city. (We met at the international club.) She took over the place from eight in the morning until five, when I came back from the University. I then joined them in the preparations because most of our trade was done in the evenings up to midnight. Originally I had calculated that if I was able to take £10 a day for four days that would bring in £40 between Monday and Friday; then if one was able to take £20 per day over the weekend (the English worker is paid on Friday), it would bring us about £100 a week. Well, this is exactly what happened for about three months, then suddenly a jump, and we skyrocketed to £50 per day. I felt ashamed that I

seemed to be becoming a bloated plutocrat overnight; however, it was a godsend from the business angle that I was kicked out of the Co-operative College, for I was able to give myself full-time to the new work. I now proceeded further down Oxford Road four blocks, towards All Saints Cathedral and nearer the University. There I found a tremendous building for £8 per week—four floors of it. It took me some £3,000 to renovate this, and I called it the Cosmopolitan. What distinguished it were its murals. You see, I had a good friend who was an Austrian Jew (I'd met him by chance in London) and just at the time I needed him, Jean appeared in Manchester. I told him, "It's not a question of money, but racial prestige. We have to make these white folks know that we are enlightened. I want you to go

gram, as well. And even after they divorced and she broke with the UNIA-ACL, she still shares some of its founding beliefs. At the same time, she continues to use and to trade on her connection to him throughout her life. When he dies in 1940, for example, she starts writing this biography of him, which she carries around and rewrites but never finds a publisher for; she sets up organisations in his name right up until her own death in 1969. So she does come back and back and back to Marcus Garvey, but at the same time she does go off and do all sorts of other things.

Amy must have been one of the most widely-travelled women of her generation. She seems to have been nearly everywhere at some point, always with different names, different job titles. There are places where she is described as a sociologist, others where she's identified as a writer or researcher, others where she's a theatre producer. But she shows up in all sorts of different places and—maybe this is a bit "Marcus Garvey-ish," as well—she meets groups and founds groups but does not necessarily stick around to see things through.

I'm thinking of the 1960s, when she went on a tour of the Caribbean. She visited women in different

I was particularly inspired by Nydia Swaby's 2014 essay on Amy Ashwood Garvey, which describes the different social spaces that Ashwood Garvey set up during her time here, and argues that these spaces themselves played a significant role in developing and sustaining anti-colonial and anti-discriminatory struggles.<sup>7</sup> Ashwood Garvey's first venture was the International Afro Restaurant, which opened at 62 New Oxford Street in 1935.<sup>8</sup> A year later, together with her partner, the Trinidadian calypso singer Sam Manning, she opened the Florence Mills Social Parlour, a jazz club at 50 Carnaby Street.<sup>9</sup> In the 1950s, she launched the Afro Women's Centre & Residential Club (later known as the Afro Peoples Centre) at her home, Number 1 Bassett Road in Ladbrooke Grove.<sup>10</sup> I was taken by Nydia's arguments about the underrecognised role of such spaces in political movements, and about the aesthetic dimensions of political activism. That's where I began.

**MS** Out of all of these people from all of these conferences I'd researched, Amy was the only woman. There had been a huge outcry among the black population here in 1935 when Italy invaded Ethiopia, because Ethiopia was still independent and there weren't many independent countries left in Africa. They organised a campaign to try to get the

**EWV** I think there is this complication because Amy was actually there at the beginning. She was the co-founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the African Communities League (ACL)—she and Marcus started those organisations together in 1914, long before they got married. Even the Garvey-ists concede that Amy was a co-founder. Although the couple did not stay together for long, in the end, and Amy went off and did her own thing.

**MS** Wait a minute, I think it is important to emphasize that they are Jamaicans. And they were Jamaicans living in the US. That's part of this very complicated history, too. Who and what are you if you are a Jamaican living in the US at that time? There wasn't yet a mass migration from the Caribbean to the United States. I do wonder what that was like. Sorry, go on.

**EWV** I was just responding to your remark about how Amy left Marcus Garvey, but in some sense continued to support him. There are aspects of his political program that she was heavily involved in developing, that's without question. It was her pro-

to town on this." Well, he did and it took him four months to complete it. He created murals of humanity, showing the contribution of each, whether African, Scots, Welsh or Austrian; he showed the common humanity through depicting the gardens of the world from Japanese style to English. But it wasn't all just decorative. Take the mural on the Poles; one part of the canvas showed the death of Poland in Europe with the cannons and the invasions, and then in the New World we could see the Pole reappearing, but this time what was portrayed was the typical immigrant Pole leading the charge against the blacks. I had him write above this, "Whiter Mankind??" It made a big impact on the Black American soldiers who were pouring into England at this period, and they reached also to the picture of the big Texan with his hat and his pistols, drawn as a threat to the darkies.

It was of course fortunate that Manchester became a base for many of these black troops once America had entered the war, because when these black boys heard they came like wild men. It now took all my time, and I had to buy 58, Oxford Road which I used as a central base. This is where I did all my 'white-market' operations—I won't say black-market! I made a big item of goats, because at that time they were not rationed, but we also used turkeys and other meats. My job was to keep the two restaurants supplied. We formed a link with chaps from Cyprus (they became fraternal members in our Pan-African Federation later); I tended to use them as managers, and employ a few Indian waiters and Chinese. So it really was Cosmopolitan. We had two Chinese cooks whom I had brought over from Cardiff in charge of the Chinese menu which was some thirty dishes, and the Indians made curry dishes.

them all together and it was tape-recorded and the tapes are still available at the British Library<sup>12</sup>. I was supposed to edit it, but... The final book<sup>13</sup> contains some of the speeches and some historical material from me. There were conflicts at this gathering, very polite ones, because some of the people who were there had been communists and others had not. Mind you, the British Communist Party, compared to the one in New York, did absolutely nothing about racial issues. Or colonial issues, until the 1950s. So there were members of the Party who found this very difficult and the group that was set up for Caribbeans was sort of, I would say, almost segregated in some ways.<sup>14</sup> It took the Party a long time to really become communists, if you like. And some of this came up in the interchanges at this meeting, because in bringing together everybody we could find who had known Claudia, we had stepped right into that.

**EW** But to come back to Amy Ashwood Garvey, which also connects to how I met Marika: I was in New York in July and at the very last minute, thanks to the efforts of Nydia Swaby, I was able to visit Patricia and Phillip Maillard, who are the daughter and grandson of Lionel Yard, who wrote the first biography of Amy Ashwood Garvey<sup>15</sup> and who went to Bassett Road in the 1970s when the house was

countries, spoke with them about their place in society, encouraged them to become politically active and organise, and then kept on moving. I suppose an iconic example might be the Afro Peoples Centre in London. Hamilton Kerr, a white British Member of Parliament, helped her to get a mortgage on the house, but then wasn't around, and the Centre wasn't able to keep up the repayments. Kerr himself was pressured by the British Government to distance himself from Amy Ashwood Garvey because of her relationship with Claudia Jones, who was an active communist—

**MS** She was a communist but not an active communist! There's a lot on Claudia Jones—when I realised that the older West Indians that I had met through my years here were beginning to die, I said to Colin Prescod, "We really need to gather these people to talk about Claudia because they'd all worked with her, and they're not going to be here much longer." This was in the mid 1990s. Claudia herself had been dead for thirty years. But as you know, she had founded the first major *West Indian Gazette* in 1958, and Amy Ashwood Garvey was involved at the beginning. In any case, we did gather

Soon, however, the two restaurants were not enough, and so I opened another, *The Orient*, near the University, and this was only curries. Finally, I opened a club. It was difficult to get a drinking licence, and the easiest way was to open a club and we called it *Forum Club*. This again had a good cuisine, and I added the element of music here with performances by the great calypsonians like Lord Kitchener. A number of my African and West Indian colleagues helped with the organization: Jomo Kenyatta, for instance, at one time was in charge of the *Cosmopolitan*; George [Padmore] helped out with another small place I acquired called the *Belle Etoile*. But the crucial thing was planning the menus and the supplies, and once we had organized this, the thing went like clockwork.

Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press 1973, 136-138.



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

"Hello, West Indies!  
This Is Una Marson Calling..."  
Garnette Cadogan

A word to home—a simple call across the waters to say not merely how we are doing, but what we're doing, and to reassure loved ones that, indeed, we are well and are doing good. But even more, a chance to close the distance through the warmth of a human voice. It's World War II, and people in the Caribbean are hungry for news from and about the people who have left for Britain to join the war effort. They crave the voices of those whose sounds no longer populate their streets. So, they tune into the BBC to catch some news, maybe even capture some measure of hope. And to hear their own on the programme *Calling the West Indies*, with its mix of personal messages to relatives and friends, stories of the contribution of West Indians to the war effort, and music? A palpable excitement.

One can catch a glimpse of what *Calling the West Indies* might sound like by going to

YouTube to find the 1943 film special, "Hello! West Indies." West Indians in Britain step up to the microphone in a BBC studio, and talk about their service in the armed forces and in civilian jobs. The first to speak, a poet and playwright and journalist, the first black woman broadcaster for the BBC, is the occasion's luminous host: "Hello, West Indies. This is Una Marson, calling you from London." Her bright voice makes her an apt emcee, but also adds to the spirit of uplift—boosterism, even—that suffuses the film reel. "I'm going to ask some of these West Indians here to tell you something about our work in this country," she promises. Royal Air Force pilot; Air Traffic Control aircraft-woman; ambulance driver; Navy air-sea rescuers; Auxiliary Territorial Service plotting officer; nurse; lumberjacks; Jamaica; Trinidad; Bermuda; Barbados; St. Vincent; Antigua; British Guiana (now Guyana); British Honduras (now Belize)—professions and places are introduced, one testimonial after another, piling up evidence that leaves no doubt that West Indians were crucial to the British war effort.

At the center of the ambassadorial efforts is Una Mason, bringing speakers and audiences together. This was a role that characterized her entire career—building bridges between home and the exiled. In her poetry (poems about black pride and alienation: “Kinky Hair Blues”; “Nigger”; “Quashie Comes to London”); in her plays (*At What a Price*, about a girl leaving the country for the city in Jamaica; *London Calling*, about a woman leaving Jamaica for London, then returning home by homesickness); with her activism (at the League of Coloured Peoples, highlighting issues of radical feminism); in her participation in international women’s organizations (International Alliance of Women, where she championed the rights and struggles of black women worldwide); in her welfare work (supporting the young through Jamaica Save the Children Fund); and, most of all, in her education efforts (to inform Jamaicans about their heritage, to fund the education of poor children, to combat a colonial vision with a Pan-Africanist re-education, to promote a broad variety of Caribbean writers)—she was an outstanding advocate who kept returning to Countee Cullen’s poignant question, “What is Africa to me?”

There’s a well-known photograph of Marson, sitting at the center of a distinguished gathering, which includes T.S. Eliot, Venu Chitale, George Orwell, and William Empson, all involved in the BBC monthly radio program, *Voice*. She’s the only black woman in the room, a state of affairs all too familiar to her, and one that shaped her work and activism, both of which pushed to create rooms in which black women would be seen and heard. (In 1935, at the 20th Annual Congress of the International Alliance of Women Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, where she represented Jamaica, she was again the only black woman in the room, and she challenged white feminists to include the concerns and struggles of black women in their advocacy). Her earlier poetry shows

strong marks of her colonial education—Romantic echoes abound—but her time in London (1932–1936, 1938–1945) helped move her more actively along a vector of Pan-Africanism, and she worked tirelessly to present original work from Caribbean voices across the region that would give people in the metropole and beyond a sense of what it meant to hear *home* in the voices on the radio. On programs such as *Calling the West Indies* and its successor, *Caribbean Voices*, she featured writing from Derek Walcott, Sam Selvon, and V.S. Naipaul, she contributed to a richer sense of Caribbean nationalism and black internationalism. For that reason alone she deserves our close, sustained attention.

Through her travels and her multifaceted work she intersected with Haile Selassie (she was his secretary in London during his years of exile), Jamaican poet and folklorist Louise Bennett, Marcus Garvey, Amy Jacques Garvey, Jomo Kenyatta, Andrew Salkey, Samuel Selvon, Venu Chitale, Harold Moody, and other crucial figures in the history of anti-colonialism, Pan-Africanism, and anti-racism. To enter into the archives through her work and movements is to enter into an important history through a room with her at the center, us peering over her shoulder to learn from her, following her concerns and championing the causes she spent her life fighting for—particularly, the need for us to be at home in the world. At a time when the Windrush generation who helped build Britain are being treated with ingratitude and disdain, many being abused and even deported to countries they no longer know as home as a result of Theresa May’s “hostile environment policy,” the life and work of Una Marson is all the more urgent and deserving of our attention. Let’s return to the archives in search of her, so that there will be work that calls across the distance—many distances—to announce, “Hello, West Indies.”

what is the sound of your voice<sup>1</sup>

something is cooking

kindness in leaves

i misread help for meat

no, meat for help

some suggestions for doing without meat

is what venu writes to the british

because it is her job

and introduces indian vegetarian cuisine

where nothing has gotten wasted

even outside of wartime

then and now

please don’t think this is just an oriental

legend

she says so in the home service

underlines that she has an english friend

cuts the fried tomato, and the curry, too

wonders if you will be interested to know

what an indian housewife would do

and see yourself in your kitchen

through eastern eyes

on the radio

completely derelict and rescued what he could of her papers and her many unpublished manuscripts and took them back to his house in Brooklyn, where they remained until his death in 1986. Some of those documents were traceable but not everything, because strange, mysterious, unresolved, unanswered questions exist as to what’s happened to that archive since.

One of the things that I wanted to have a look at while I was in New York was the FBI file on the West Indies National Council—an organisation that supported the movement for West Indian independence in the 1940s, and which, according to the Schomburg Center’s database, contained references to Amy Ashwood Garvey. But I did not have time to look at it because I needed to go see the Maillards. I was trying to think if there might be any other place in the world where I could find this FBI file when I noticed in the database entry that their copy had been donated by you, Marika. Which I think is very interesting—that they didn’t have it already, I mean—that it was donated to them by you.

Of course, I knew who you were, so I wrote an email to what I know now is simply your desk at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. I didn’t realize that don’t have an official position there. And I asked, “Do you happen to know of any other places, short of making a Freedom of Information Act request to the FBI, where I can have a look at these documents?” And you replied, “Come to my house! I’ve got a file on Amy if you’re interested in having a look at it.” So at the beginning of August 2018, on a swelteringly hot day, I drove down to where you live in Oare, in East Kent, and you generously opened the door and showed me that file, and so much more.

One of the many sobering things about meeting you was learning what it had taken for you to do this work without any institutional support. In my work, I am constantly returning to the question of the institution—whether the education system, the museum, the archive—how they are produced and controlled and what gets in and what gets left out. My mind boggled to think of what it has cost you, materially, to do this work. As you were saying, you received a grand total of £3,000 of research funding in a career of forty-something years. £3,000 over forty years... Our whinging about Arts Council budgets for making exhibitions at The Showroom starts to pale into insignificance.<sup>16</sup>

a year later

no more recipes

but stories about women

because thanks to the war they now shape the world

<sup>1</sup> According to the entry about Venu Chitale in the British Open University’s database Making Britain: Discover how South Asians shaped the nation 1870–1950, Venu Chitale “joined the BBC in 1940 when the service expanded to broadcast different Indian languages including Marathi, her mother tongue. From 1941, Chitale assisted George Orwell in his work as a talks programme assistant for the BBC Indian section of the Eastern Service from 1941–43. She broadcast on his series of talks Through Eastern Eyes as well as his 1942 magazine programme Voice. She also broadcast as part of the series of talks The Hand That Rocks The Cradle, which focused on the role of women in the war effort. Like Indira Devi of Kapurthala, she also broadcast on the Home Service, where she served as a news-reader at the height of the war. She contributed to programmes such as Indian Recipes and the Kitchen Front series, which was produced by Jean Rowntree. Orwell was particularly impressed by Chitale and she was often complimented for her speaking voice. She became a fulltime member of staff as the Marathi Programme Assistant in 1942.” The entry on Chitale marks a few more events, before she dies in 1995: her involvement in the India League, her friendship with first prime minister Nehru’s sister, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, her return to India in 1950 and marriage. And a side note is added: “She published several novels and died in 1995.” (<https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/venu-chitale>)

Theresa Kampmeier

Anyway, when we met last August you asked me if I'd looked into a number of other women that had been involved in the Pan-African movement whose names I didn't know. And I was wondering if today you would be able to talk more about some of the women who were involved in these movements—Pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism, civil rights—all of these struggles that inevitably overlap, actually, because they were all happening simultaneously. For example, the partner of George Padmore—

**MS** Dorothy Pizer, a white woman. In the Pan-African movement, I remember, there was the man born George Thomas Griffiths in what was then British Guiana, who after the Italians invaded Ethiopia renamed himself Ras Makonnen after Haile Selassie's father, the general who defeated the Italians the first time they invaded, back in the 1890s. Makonnen was very much part of the Pan-African movement and he moved to Manchester, we don't know why. I think, but I'm not 100% positive, that he set up a very small factory there, making hand-

bags. I am certain that he opened a restaurant that didn't racially discriminate, so it didn't exclude Whites. There was a lot of racial discrimination in those days. And Makonnen had a partner, though I can't even recall her name; I don't even know if it was ever mentioned. I have kept all the material—most of my notes from the National Archives here and in America are hand-written, but they are all at home. Everything I have photocopied is at home, and you are all welcome to come and look. When I die, they will all go to the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, so they will be available there.

The collection of documents and interviewing people and recording the interviews—this must be done by local groups, and they should be applying to their local police forces for surveillance documents. As far as I know, all political organisations would have been under police surveillance, especially in the 1940s, the 1930s, because that's what the government told them to do. Of course, no police force that I have approached has ever said, "Yes, here you are." Usually, the response is,

- by -

Venu Chitale

HOME SERVICE: TUESDAY, 21st JANUARY, 1941: 10.45-11.00 a.m.

When I was getting ready to come over to England a few years ago, an English friend said to me, "Really, you will have to learn to eat meat, you know, otherwise I don't know how you will manage to exist." It may sound rather silly but her remark made me feel quite pessimistic. I thought vegetables, lentils and rice would be almost unobtainable in this country.

Venu Chitale, "In the Kitchen in Wartime. Some Suggestions for Doing Without Meat. Home Service, Tuesday 21 January 1941, 10.45-11.00." p. 2. <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/women/The%20Kitchen%20In%20Wartime%20-%20Venu%20Chitale%20-%202021-01-1941.pdf>

I have been over here now for several years, and have kept myself as fit and fed as in my own country without meat or fish. As far as my diet is concerned I have hardly felt the war at all. I must admit, of course, that I rather miss the onions.

Perhaps, whenever you hear somebody mention "Indian food", you say "Ah, curry!" Of course, we do have a lot of curry, but a great number of our savoury dishes do not contain even a pinch of curry powder.

You make so many tasty dishes of meat and fish, so perhaps you don't trouble much about lentils, for instance, and vegetables. We, on the other hand, live entirely on pulses (that is, things like lentils) and grains and vegetables. They must not only be nourishing, but also appetising and tasty.

"What makes you think we would have them?" Even the Metropolitan Police says this. To them, I said, "Look, I've found some of your reports in the Colonial Office files. And one of those reports is from a member of your staff who was at a conference in Trafalgar Square. And this particular police officer reports that the square was so crowded that he had to stand at the back of the crowd so he was only able to recognise the people who were up on the stand—and he lists the people he is recognising..." So that tells us something about the level of surveillance. The police were very polite, but my request was dismissed. You will be equally dismissed if you ask under the Freedom of Information Act, or if you ask for the MI5 files, because they would have been part of this surveillance. There is nothing released, for example, on Claudia Jones, on Amy Ashwood Garvey, on George Padmore. The files on George Padmore will probably fill this room! He was so active and he knew absolutely everybody who was active in anti-colonialism and anti-racism around the world—the government would have wanted everything.

the rest.<sup>17</sup> Some pages have been removed and there are lines, whole paragraphs, deleted. But we learn from these documents that they were paying people: there were people in the Gold Coast who gave MI5 the names that Padmore and Nkrumah were using to correspond with each other, because they would have guessed that they were under surveillance. After all, Kwame Nkrumah's office here in London was raided. And it's very interesting, the way they raided his office, as it was very similar to the way Colin Prescod's home had been raided. One day, Nina went off to pick up the children from school; arriving home, they found that all of Colin's files and filing cabinets and his desk and all the drawers had been opened and everything scattered about. And that's exactly what Nkrumah found when he and Joe Appiah went to their office. Everything was opened and papers scattered around, so it's not only that they're not trying to hide that they are surveying you, they're sending you a message.<sup>18</sup>

The MI5 files on Kwame Nkrumah that have been released only go up to the very beginning of 1953—way before independence. They haven't released

We know, for example, from these MI5 files on Nkrumah, that his discussions with Padmore about different steps to take towards achieving independence and how should we do this and this and this

were all looked at and copied. What we don't know is what the government did about it. This tells you something about what those struggles for independence meant and continue to mean. Because it wouldn't only have been Nkrumah's correspondence. It would have been all those struggling for independence or against racial discrimination, so the government could consider what steps it could take to prevent anything these activists wanted to implement. Is that why the government will not release papers on any of the British activists from that era? They don't want us to know about this.

The latest response from the Central FOI Unit was, "We have to have the permission from all these people." I wrote back saying, "I'm asking you for files from the 1930s and 1940s, all these people are long dead." I haven't heard back. But this is how information is hidden. Unless community groups go out and find the people who were active in those struggles and record them—and ask them, "Have you kept any of the records, anything at all? Where can we collect it?"—we won't know the history.

**EWV** There is this thing Foucault writes about in a 1977 essay called "the Life of Infamous Men"—about how certain people only feature in the historical record in the context of their encounters with "power."<sup>19</sup> And so often the best (or only) sources of information that we have about such people are the archives of those that sought to oppress them at the behest of the state. The FBI archives, for example, contain a wealth of information. In some cases, it is one of the primary sources of information about particular oppositional movements like the West Indies National Council or the UNIA. Which is highly problematic! Getting hold of the FBI files, for example, is really useful—there are copies in the Robert A. Hill Collection at Duke University, which is an enormous archive of Hill's researches into Garvey

and Garveyism and many other things—there is a lot of material, 300 boxes, it's huge, and I was only able to spend a short time there. There's only a small bit in the FBI files he acquired that is related to Amy Ashwood Garvey or to the role of women in the UNIA, but the documents he did gather are super interesting. The FBI files are an amazing source of information, but it's such a weird thing and also really problematic, because the sources are not, of course, supporters of these movements but rather those who were infiltrating them, intercepting their mail, copying their letters, in order to discredit, dismantle, and undermine them. At the same time, because the state has often been successful in destroying such organisations—or because such organisations have lacked the resources to create and preserve their own archives—because so much has been lost, we, as researchers of these organisations, often find ourselves reliant on this material, the archives of states that were actively working against them. This is something that I think about a lot.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, this is one of the discussions I've been having with Nydia Swaby over the course of this past year has been precisely this question of the mechanisms whereby people do or do not make it into the hegemonic historical record. How do people fall out of the main body of the story? What are the processes by which this occurs? You said something very interesting the other day about Amy Ashwood Garvey's "homelessness" being an important feature of her biography—that this very homelessness makes it difficult to locate her in the hegemonic narratives of the movements in which she participated, because it's simply not clear where she belongs, who she belongs to. I was just wondering if you were willing to share a few of your thoughts on that.

**MS** Well, in a way it's something I avoid thinking about because it is quite close to me. In London,

I wonder if you will be interested to know what an Indian housewife would do if she were in Britain today with the commodities that are now available on the market.

For one, she could prepare potatoes in at least nine or ten different ways; and rice in as many ways too, thus providing a variety. For a complete meal she would choose; rice, oatmeal or wheat-flour, potatoes, lentils, carrots, and two green vegetables.

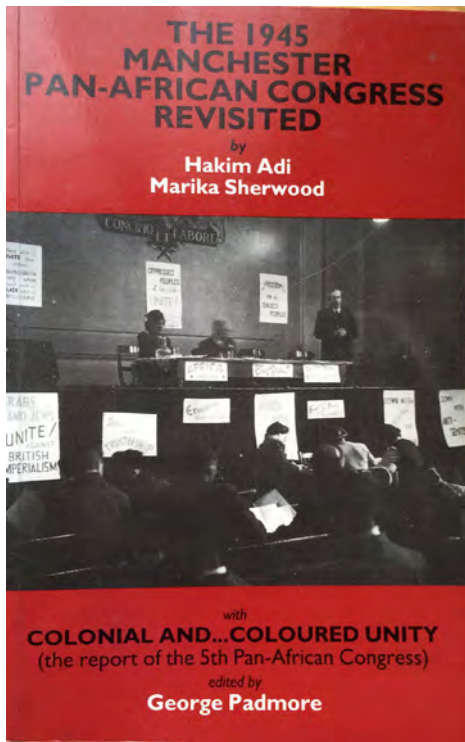
I cook the beans until tender - butter beans, haricot beans or any beans I can get. Then mash them fine with a fork, adding some mashed potato, and a little <sup>white sauce</sup> ~~sauce~~ to hold the mixture together. Then add pepper, salt and flavour with sauce or parsley; shape into thin sausages, roll in breadcrumbs and fry till brown. I pile these "sausages" on to a nice heap of mashed potato, and pour a thick gravy over the lot. For the gravy I use one of the non-meat gravy preparations, but of course there are many other gravy preparations on the market too. A little fried tomato goes very well with this dish, and a green vegetable completes it.

Vegetable pies and hot pots are other important savoury dishes in our flat, but I find that they do only for supper dishes, as they are not as substantial as a meal with lentil cutlets or bean sausages.

where I lived for several decades, I felt relatively at home. But when I moved down to this village in Kent in 2001, I was a total stranger. That you and other "people of colour" come to visit me ensures that I remain seen as a total stranger, especially as I have kept my Hungarian name. Though I speak English, and I suppose I sound like a Londoner to them, I am a stranger. Well, where am I at home? I'm at home among my books and my African carvings and my Hungarian embroidery—that's what I am at home amongst. But I am a white person. What on earth is it like if you're a black person? You might have your house, you've got your family here, all of that you have. You're resident here. But can you be at home, here? Was Amy Ashwood Garvey, who lived some of her childhood in Jamaica, some time in Panama, because a lot of West Indians had gone there when the Panama Canal was being built because there was a lot of work, which was not well paid but it was better paid than what you could get in Jamaica. So she's there and then she's in Jamaica, she's back in Panama, back in Jamaica. And then goes to the US. Who was she? How did she see herself? How did she feel? How was a Jamaican with a Jamaican accent seen? Did she change her accent to

an American one? To a New York one? She comes to London with this mixture of accents, but is she American? Is she Jamaican? Amongst whom does she feel comfortable? She wouldn't have felt comfortable among Jamaicans because she wasn't really Jamaican. Maybe among followers of Marcus, but she had left Marcus... It's one of the things that concerns me about immigration in general.

I have no family left in Hungary at all. Some died during the Holocaust, the older ones are all dead, and I had a cousin who was murdered. But Hungary, in a way, is where I am from. Am I at home in Budapest? Yes and no. I left it when I was ten years old, I'm now eighty-one. But it's my home city, in a way. It's where I was formed, I guess, by World War II. But at another level... I took my son there to visit. I took my son with me many times and his two daughters, and to this day they are resentful that I didn't speak Hungarian to them, when they were growing up. "But why?" I asked. "You gave us Hungarian food, you gave us Hungarian novels translated into English, you've shared your beautiful clothes. But you didn't teach us the language, so we can't be at home when we are in Budapest with



you.” Which is interesting... My younger granddaughter was the top student in every school and university she was in—it is not that she isn’t accepted; she is settled and part of this culture, but she is resentful that I didn’t teach her Hungarian so she could be strongly and positively Hungarian as well. Which is interesting, and which I think raises many questions.

**EWV** I think you put it well the other evening. You said something like, “It has to do with which country claims you. If you’ve been this much of a nomad, who claims you at the end? And would the Jamaicans want her? Would the British want her? Would the Americans want her?” Amy Ashwood Garvey was a woman on an aeroplane *avant la lettre*. And one of the difficulties of researching her is this nomadism, her not having a “place.”

**MS** She spent her life traveling. She was here, there, there, back here, there, there, back there. She wasn’t settled anywhere at all, no, absolutely not.

London, December 2018

From a conversation at The Showroom, part of the public program around the exhibition *Women on Aeroplanes* (October 3 2018 – January 26 2019), featuring new works by Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa as well as Lungiswa Gqunta and Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum (see *Inflight Magazine* # 3). In *Carrying Yours and Standing Between You*, Wolukau-Wanambwa presents the archive of her researches on Amy Ashwood Garvey over the last year, using selected texts, images, draws out and reflects upon the many and varied mechanisms that have resulted in Ashwood Garvey’s historiographic marginality.



1 See: Marika Sherwood, “Race, Empire and Education: Teaching Racism”, *Race & Class* 42, 3, 2001, 1–28. “Racism in Education?”, *Race Equality Teaching* 22, 3, Summer 2004, 6–8.

2 See: Marika Sherwood, “Nationality and Employment Among Lascar Seamen, 1660 to 1945”, *New Community: A Journal of Research and Policy on Ethnic Relations* 17, 1991, 229–44.

3 Marika Sherwood, *Pastor Daniels Ekarté and the African Churches Mission*. London: Savannah Press 1994.

4 Onyeka, *Blackmoores: Africans in Tudor England, Their Presence, Status and Origins*. London: Narrative Eye 2013.

5 Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*. London: Oneworld 2017.

6 Hakim Adi, Marika Sherwood, and George Padmore, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*. London: Beacon Press 1995.

7 Nydia A. Swaby, “Amy Ashwood Garvey and the Political Aesthetics of Diasporic Social Spaces in London,” *Symbolism* 14, 2004, 59–74.

8 Ibid, 64.

9 Ibid, 64.

10 Ibid, 69.

11 I have two biographies of Amy on my shelves: Lionel M. Yard, *Biography of Amy Ashwood Garvey 1897–1969, Co-founder of The Universal Negro Improvement Association*. New York: Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History 1989. Tony Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist, and Mrs. Marcus Garvey No. 1, Or, A Tale of Two Amys*. Dover, Massachusetts: The Majority Press, Inc. 2007. Also an article by Rhoda Reddock, “The First Mrs Garvey: Pan-Africanism and Feminism in the Early 20th Century British Colonial Caribbean,” *Feminist Africa* 19, 2014, 58–77.

12 There are seven recordings, which can be found by searching for Claudia+Jones+Symposium in the British Library’s catalog, <http://cadensa.bl.uk/>.

13 Marika Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*. London: Lawrence & Wishart 2000.

14 This section of the Communist Party of Great Britain was usually referred to as the “West Indian Branch”. See, e.g. Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics*. London: Lawrence & Wishart 1986, 56.

15 Lionel M. Yard, *Biography of Amy Ashwood Garvey, 1897–1969, Co-Founder of The Universal Negro Improvement Association*. New York: Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History 1989.

16 *The Women on Aeroplanes* exhibition at The Showroom Gallery was awarded a grant of £12,000 by Arts Council England, and received financial support from The Showroom, the Otolith Collective, the Women on Aeroplanes project and a number of other funders. For more details, see <https://www.theshowroom.org/exhibitions/women-on-aeroplanes>.

17 The MI5 files on Nkrumah are at the National Archives: KV 2/1847 – 1851. See also, Marika Sherwood, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War: The West African National Secretariat, 1945–48*. London: Pluto Press 2019.

18 Joseph Appiah, *Joe Appiah: The Autobiography of an African Patriot*. Accra: Asempa Publisher 1996, 167.

19 “What rescues them from the darkness of night where they would, and still should perhaps, have been able to remain, is an encounter with power: without this collision, doubtless there would no longer be a single word to recall their fleeting passage. The power which lay in wait for these lives, which spied on them, which pursued them, which turned its attention, even if only for a moment, to their complaints and to their small tumults, which marked them by a blow of its claws, is also the power which instigated the few words which are left for us of those lives: whether because someone wished to address themselves to power in order to denounce, to complain, to solicit, to beg, or because power desired to intervene, and then judged and sentenced in a few words. All these lives, which were destined to pass beneath all discourse and to disappear without ever being spoken, have only been able to leave behind traces—brief, incisive, often enigmatic—at the point of their instantaneous contact with power. So that it is doubtless impossible ever to recapture them in themselves, such as they might have been ‘in a free state’; they can now only be located when seized in the declamations, the tactical partialities, the imperative falsehoods which the power games and the relations with power presuppose.” Michel Foucault, “The Life of Infamous Men,” in: Michel Foucault, *Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris & Paul Patton. Sydney: Feral Publications 1979, 79f.

20 For a groundbreaking exploration of this problem, see Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26, 12, 2, June 2008, 1–14.

# Towards a time and a place where the work is the work

Lubaina Himid in conversation with Annett Busch, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet and Magda Lipska, recorded in the morning around a kitchen table and in the evening at a museum, one rainy sunny day in Warsaw<sup>1</sup>, November 2018.

## Before

If you want to understand why the work that I make looks like it looks, the secret is in these words: “trained as a theatre designer.” Trained is not quite the right word. I left that theatre design course in 1976 and what I’ve learned in all those years since is, audience is incredibly important. And that carries on through the work that I make now. I have a total belief that the work doesn’t work until it’s in the space and audiences are kind of breathing their own life into the work. Bringing their own experience and mapping it over my experience, over the top of bigger, much more traumatic experiences. And nothing really works unless these conversations are happening.

I left school and found out that I was inadequately trained to do anything useful, so I decided to do something useful which was to be a waitress. And as you can imagine, actually, I wasn’t a very good waitress either, but then again I learned that restaurants, like markets and streets and museums, are also theatrical places where human beings interact with each other and drama happens. And if you work as a waitress in the same restaurant for many years, as I did, whilst I was doing bits of pieces of kind of designing things—I designed the restaurant’s interior, the menus, tables, and all the rest

—you learn to watch people and to listen to them. Not in the way a writer listens to dialogue. But to listen to how they behaved in their space. They were performing in that space, and in a way, we waitresses were the audience for their performance. Men would come in with women at lunch time, however men are at lunchtime with women, and then come in the very same day in the evening with a different woman. And we waitresses were young women, we began to understand lots of things about how people perform in spaces.

What I did in that restaurant was, I set up, in a way, a gallery. We’re talking 1976 in Britain. This is a time where restaurants were places you went to eat a meal. You couldn’t go in a restaurant in Britain at that time where I have a meal, you have a cup of coffee, and you have a beer. You went to restaurant to have a meal, and if you wanted to drink you had to go to a pub. You couldn’t do this French brasserie kind of thing. Then at some point after I had become involved in this restaurant, we needed something on the walls. And there wasn’t much money. So I asked friends of mine who I’d gone to art school with to exhibit in this space. And I began to realise that the work on the walls could initiate conversations between groups of people who had gone out to eat and who didn’t have anything to say to each other. So I understood that art could make conversation happen.

## what we wanted to see in art galleries and what we were not seeing

*There’s something about the idea of a conversation we find in your paintings but it’s impossible to say what the conversation is actually about. The image of an unknown conversation opens up a space where, depending on the mood of the day or something specific that happens in terms of politics, and then the conversation changes again. That was a kind of driving idea, to have a conversation with you about the different notions and moments of changing conversations and how you think about these.*

Those conversations are of course different in different decades. And depending where I was living, geographically, or how I was earning my living, the conversations are different again. Then after winning a Turner Prize—my life is the same, but the changed status meant there were then other conversations. My conversations with the gallery that represents me are strangely different because they’re having so many conversations now with people who are collecting the work. So they’re asking me questions that art historians have never asked. Which is interesting.

For example?

Well, for example there is a whole history of me talking about the work in terms of being Black, in terms of being Black art, but they asked me "Why hasn't anyone ever talked about this work in terms of being a woman?" There are lots of really interesting sorts of questions that I've never been asked. And it's strange, because their job is to sell work and make money, and yet they were the first people who were relaxed enough to think that there's something going on in every single one of these paintings, cut-outs, installations, the whole lot, that no one is talking about.

As to the kinds of conversations that I am actually interested in, I think back to the women that I made certain exhibitions with—*Thin Black Line* (1985) and *Five Women* (1983) at *The Africa Centre, Black Women Time Now* (1983/84)—where the way I did it was to have conversations around the kitchen table. And I was saying, "I like what you've done already and I like the way you are—the way you're relaxed about a strategy". But that's just because they're artists, so they don't have a strategy, usually. Hopefully. Until we were just talking about—in those days—what we wanted to see in art galleries and what we were not seeing. All these women making incredibly different work from each other. They were all art-school trained, I wasn't doing some kind of crazy community project. I wanted to put this work in showing spaces, not always art galleries.

I was saying to these women, "This is the place, will you make something for me? The thing belongs to you, but it has to be in conversation with the other work on the wall, and you won't necessarily know what that's going to be." I wasn't suggesting collaborative practise, but we were very concerned that the work would be in conversation with the audience and that the audience was actually an audience of Black women. Which wasn't necessarily the case, but that was definitely my motivation, that this work could only work if it was going to speak to Black women. And then everyone else can access it, as well—it doesn't make it exclusive, in fact it kind of makes it more inclusive.

That's why the work changed from being more work in reaction to circumstances—really satirical work like those cut-out men. With that work I was kind of speaking to those men and I thought, "Is it pointless"? It's sort of pointless. Laughing at them is useful and funny but is it actually going to shift anything?

### the most incredible piece about punk

*Freedom and Change* (1984) was all sorts of things. It was a conversation with Picasso. It was a declaration that I would be concentrating my time on moving the conversation about who Black women are and what we can do, what we talk about and how we are a lot of things. It was a piece about moving forward but those cut-out men were still there, even though I was trying so hard not to work in that way at that moment. The piece comes from a piece by Picasso called *The Race*. It doesn't mean race it means a race along the beach.

In his version, two women, white European women, are running along the beach and you know that by the time they get to the end of the beach they won't have any clothes on because their dresses are kind of coming apart as they run. Because I'm a very respectful person, I put the clothes on the Black women in my piece very firmly. As they are running along the beach, they are kicking sand in the faces of these cut-out men, they bury them and tread on them on the way past and they have these vicious dogs with them. Of course, there is one woman leading the way and the other one kind of having a great time, so there was always the serious one and the one that's there for fun.

That was part of my trying to say: you can lump us together, but we think differently, we talk differently, we strategize differently, we come from different places, there are some key aims that we share for equality and independence. It's a kind of transition piece. The dogs are made from thin bits of wood and the dresses are pieces of paper and the sand at the bottom is my early attempt at printmak-

ing. I got a potato and I cut the potato in half and I cut a shape in it and I dipped the potato into the ink and I went *dot dot dot dot dot*. It combines printmaking and painting, and the paint I used for the women is car paint. I'd never done that before and I've never done it since. If you get close to it, you can see the pencil lines. I'd got this sheet that had belonged to somebody else and I strung it up in the studio and drew the thing out in pencil on the sheet. I spray painted and then I glued all their dresses down. The card dress which is the black-and-white one and the paper dress, which is a bit more sort of flimsy if you like.

I knew how to use jigsaw—this kind of cutting out is very easy for me. I was using all those kind of botched-together skills and last year when I was talking to somebody about this piece in France, she said to me "I'm 30, and I really feel that this is the most incredible piece about punk." And when she said it, I realised that I'd never looked at this piece properly. I'd seen it on show maybe three times since I made it in 1985, and I'd never understood it in that way. For me it was very much about who I am and what I was doing and what I was trying to do. And she was looking at it as a material object and understood the speed with which I had put it together and its energy, I guess, the here-today-gone-tomorrow-ness of it. And actually I never expected this piece to be still in existence, it wasn't meant to last this long. None of the pieces that I made at that time. They were much more in that tradition of a theatre piece, like a prop, where you make the furniture or the costumes or whatever and then for the next play you take that apart and you make it into something else.

### because you've been an audience you know you're not other

*How does imagining an audience shape how you work in the moment? I mean, how does it work, to imagine an audience?*

I am the audience. At the minute I'm painting a very large painting of some women in an architect's studio who are trying to figure out how to build things that are also boats. These women are in conversation, moving models around and looking at colours and so on. I know what I want the painting to look like, so I can imagine myself going into a space—whether it's a studio space or a showing space—and thinking, "What's going on here? Why is that woman doing that?" Or, "I have never seen a woman doing that in a painting before." That kind of understanding. If I go in there, I can stand back enough to be the gallery-goer. Because all my life I've been the gallery-goer, so I know what I feel like when I see a Rembrandt or a Georgia O'Keeffe or whatever.

When you're painting you kind of have to do that anyway. You have to imagine somebody else made that piece. When I've made something, normally I think "Oh my god, I'm not sure this is right at all." So you imagine what you might say to another person. "Is there something going on between these two women in this painting? Why is this space so odd? Why does it feel floaty? If there's this kind of light on the sky and this kind of sky on the sea then that's kind of uncanny, because those two things won't happen at the same time—does that matter?" So you wouldn't say to someone else, "Actually this is rubbish." You might say it to yourself. But then it's my rubbish so I'm just going to do it. It's all about that, I suppose. I think that's what most artists do. Talking to themselves and talking to audiences that are like themselves which is why there's so much work in art galleries that isn't really speaking to anybody, because it was too much speaking to the artist. It can take a big leap of imagining for some people to get into that language, because it was never meant to be speaking to them in the first place. You know?

*There is something very interesting going on in terms of representation in this zigzag you just described, between speaking to yourself and being in conversation with yourself and with others at the same time which then all together becomes an audience. To speak for yourself, with others, to others. Whereas you hear all the time, for example from people who edit for television, that something is too complicated for an audience. "The audience" is used like a monolithic bloc, a projection, a reason to simplify.*

Because you've been an audience, you know you're not other. There's this extraordinary—I mean it's across art galleries and editors and TV people as you say and all the rest of it, the othering of audiences. It doesn't make any sense, because we're all different people at different times—you see things or you read things in relation to who you are, and that can change with the days of the week.

But as I'm constantly saying, in terms of museums, it is absolutely yours, because you pay the taxes and everything belongs to you. The first thing they need to say on the door is, "This is your house, come and look at what's yours, which we are keeping safely for you, because we can keep it safer than anybody else, because these things are fragile or old or beautiful or whatever, but don't forget that it's yours." But of course they don't do that. They could double their audiences, I think. But I'm always talking to them and saying these things. Maybe they'll get it one day.

I mean it's true that officially, legally and all the rest of it, if I paint a painting I own it, but I really believe that the minute I've painted it, it's up for grabs. When I'm saying people own things in museums I mean that the things the museum owns, they own, if you see what I mean. Of course, "owning" is an unfortunate word. "sharing" is a better word but that still has a sense of ownership, like what percentage of something is yours... True sharing is quite difficult. Strangely, I find that if you use a loaded word like "owning," then everybody does relax, actually. Whereas sharing is still a bit too complicated for people, I think.

### there needs to be tonnes of uncertainty

*One moment you're doing work as a curator and the next as an artist and then having conversations with friends, real and imagined—all these elements are layered. And it remains true that to put something into a space is always a weird thing to do. But it's never final, the case won't close. It remains in process...*

I mean, it is a strange thing, when you put work in a showing space. It's like: "I've said this now. I never have to say this again. I don't even need to pick up a paint brush again because I've done it." It's not a closed conversation, exactly, but there's a sort of imaginary inability to deal with this anymore. And then moments later I realise I could say it better.

Because you're dealing with something without words—you can't stand in the gallery, you can't hear the applause. You have to believe in some crazy kind of spiritual way that these conversations are happening, if only because you have had conversations with artworks yourself and it made a difference to you. Thinking about art and making art that can talk to many people at the same time, many kinds of people, all at the same time, that can have its own life. To kind of think in that operatic way, thinking at many layers and levels at once.

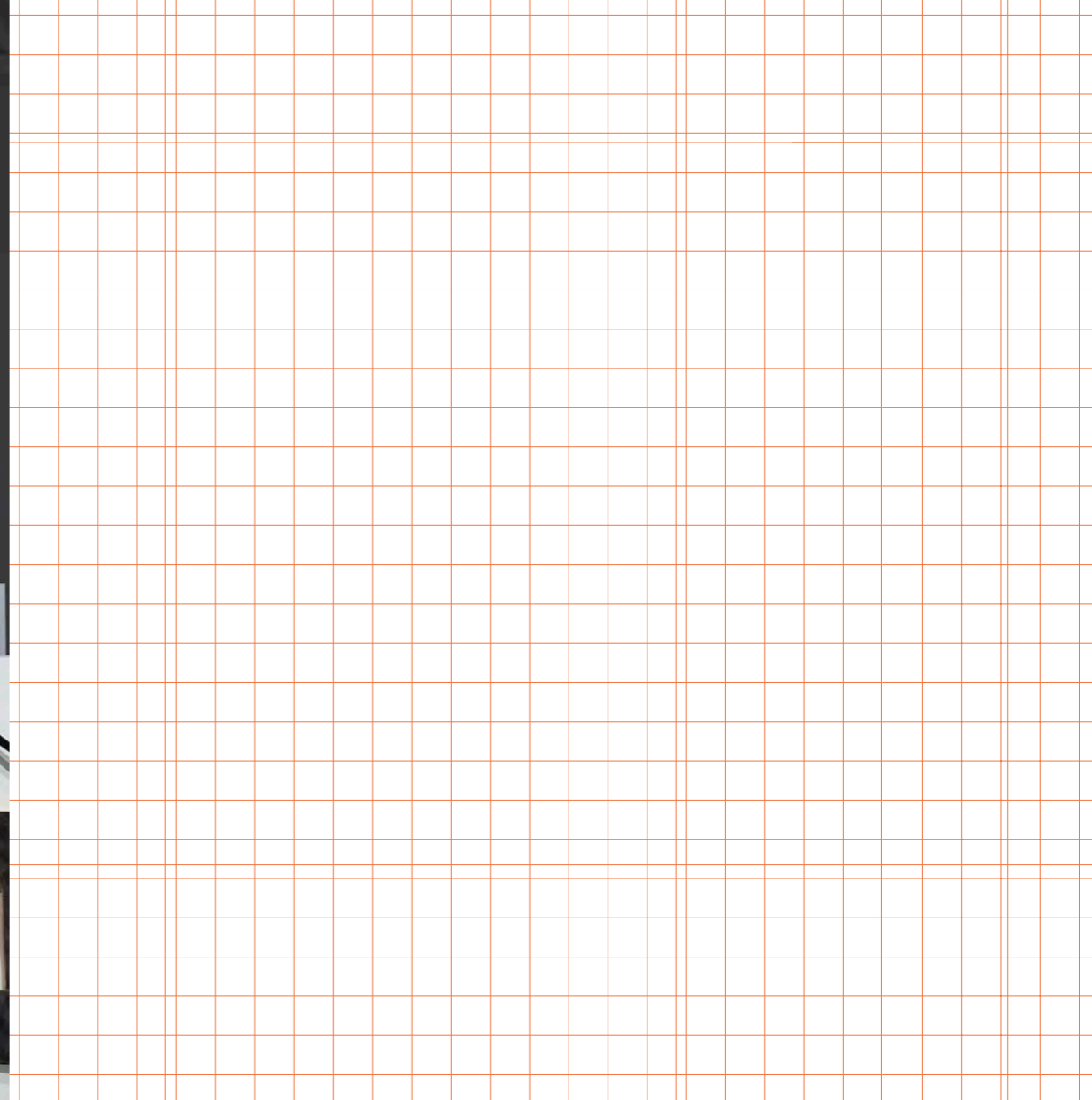
### Does that grow easier with time?

Yes, and that's unfortunate, because older artists—like me—can have a kind of, well, smugness and complacency. You know, "I know this because I've been doing it for forty years." But just because you've been doing it for forty years doesn't necessarily mean you're right. I don't teach undergraduates anymore for that very reason—you can be too right, in a way. Making and teaching, there needs to be tonnes of uncertainty. And you must never be afraid to fail. Of course, a career you can look back on looks very tidy and neat. Mine is looking unspeakably neat these days, but believe me, it was not. So I think there's that danger.

Lubaina Himid, *We Will Be*, 1983, exhibition view NIEPODLEGŁE. Women, Independence and National Discourse, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2018, photo: Franciszek Buchner, courtesy Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.







Lubaina Himid, *Freedom and Change*, 1984, photo: Franciszek Buchner, courtesy Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.





Lubaina Himid, *Five*, Acrylic on canvas, 2011, 150x120cm.  
Collection of Griselda Pollock on loan to the City Art Gallery, Leeds

whatever they're looking at, to come across this and feel like they've arrived home. And by doing that, without even having a conversation about it, I managed to persuade the Tate to buy works by these women who had been in my shows in the mid-1980s..

Making the show in Tate was good, really. I wanted to make a great big show, but of course the big shows don't always work. They look as if the job is done. And there was another great thing: in my mind I also wanted to make a big text panel, so people could understand that these artists were central to that time and connected. But this amazing woman, who was the head of communication, she said "Well, the chief curator, the director of the gallery, Penelope Curtis, doesn't like more than 200 words as an introduction. In fact she prefers 180 words, so your 7000 word essay is never going to happen. And the labels have to be well less than 100 words". And she said, "Why don't you turn that into a drawing and then you can hang the drawing as an artwork and people can see this." And the reason she understood it was, because she had seen the shows in their venues, all those decades before. She understood the energy and the interconnectedness of these women who were connected to theatre and poetry and art schools and all kinds of things but you wouldn't necessarily know that, and she just gave me this gift.

*There was that conversation between Griselda Pollock and you over quite a long period, about how to become part of the public art space—which is quite different than the strategy to deal with the Tate?*

Quite different, yes, because it came out of something different. I had painted a series of paintings but I was broke and I needed money badly and she was one of the few people I knew with a proper job. And I said, "I really need some money. Can I sell you any one of these paintings from this series *Revenge*?" And she said "Yeah, I'll buy it, and I'll give you this many thousand pounds for it." Very few thousand pounds now, but exactly the right amount of thousand pounds at the time. But she said, "I don't want to put it in my house." She has a nice house with paintings and all, but that painting, *Five*, wasn't a pleasure and the reason she was doing it wasn't a pleasure, either. So she said she would buy it, but she was testing something, as well to see how much power she had, to get them to show it. And I think in the first instance she got them to show it for years and they weren't allowed to take it down, either, but the problem is—it isn't a problem, of course, but—they never had to buy a piece of work of mine...

*And later, they never did?*

No. And now it's sort of too late, because it would cost too much for a gallery like that. Museums can push the price down but still, they could have got it for paying-a-bill kind of money. They show it off now, you know. So in any case, she discovered that she did have power and influence, and was able to then bring in all sorts of conversations. She could teach around it, which is why she wanted it up all the time, so she could be doing a class and she'd know it would be there when she got there. Really, she was fantastically smart.

#### the revenge is us

*Mentioning your series of five paintings, *Revenge* (1992), to stay with the title for a moment—usually, the notion of revenge involves a definite direction, an object. *Revenge is taken on or against.*, but once again, your *Revenge* paintings look like a series of conversations...*

The revenge is us, still carrying on. Rape us, kill us, enslave us—you could do all that, but we're still here and we're still in your space because you were in our space. You were in our place and now we're in your place. And the revenge is about still being here. It's like that cut-out, *We Will Be* (1983). I see true revenge not as "You are punching me so I punch you", but "You punch me so I think of some way that hurts more than if I were to punch you back. It doesn't matter if it takes me ten years, I'll think of it." Not very nice. But I never pretended to be nice. There's that phrase, in English anyway, about revenge...

*... a dish best served cold.*

Yeah, that's the best revenge. Try to imagine the greatest punishment for centuries of attempting to annihilate the spirit of a people—or actually, a people. So the paintings are conversations but they are also depictions of us as women who have different strategies for doing the same thing. My way is slow negotiating and so I slowly negotiated some change and other people are much more fast and direct and quite often that worked in the moment or was reflected on and then made to work in the long term. There is no use trying to all do it the same way, because we can't work it out, we're painters, artists, we can't. We're not economists. And economists are often wrong, anyway. There's more than one question, so there is more than one answer.

Another answer would be that in the world I was living in, white men were taking all the space and all the money and all the time and all the energy and I wanted to respond like a British caricaturist. In that tradition. I wasn't going to be a violent person and engage in mass murder or physical violence in any way. And the way that I could take my revenge—you have to understand I was only twenty something—was to laugh, really, and to show that I had the courage to mock, to be mocking.

*There is something that is quite open within these pictures—I am neither drawn into them emotionally nor am I excluded from them, but I feel that I am invited to stay around. It's not psychological, more of a figuration in space and a thinking of a space for conversation, because there is no explanation of what these figures actually do or think.*

It would be pointless, otherwise. But also, I suspect that the conversation changes because audiences bring different experiences. In the beginning, when they were first exhibited, —you might have thought when you saw the paintings, *Blimey! Never seen two Black people in a painting before.* Not in Britain. Because you wouldn't have ever seen that.

*That's really fucked up.*

But there weren't any. There were plenty of paintings by Black people in the galleries and on the walls, Frank Bowling... lots of older men. A few, anyway. Really a few. But you'd never see two Black people in a painting together and I know you'd never see it because I'd been going to galleries in Britain since I was a child and I never saw it. I painted something that I'd never seen. So then that's the conversation. Like, let's say *Five* was talking about, thinking about, what it meant to be Black in Paris, but also about America and about slavery and all that.

Later, when you do see more paintings of Black people in a gallery, it's about not being on show. It's about, there's room for you at that table, draw up a chair. So you're in there and you can always enter the conversations that are going on. And I think that's a more likely reading of it now. We're all used to seeing ourselves a lot more in film or on television or in pictures. It's not such an exotic thing anymore.

*Do you think that your position has changed a lot with the Turner Prize?*

Well, superficially, people are more interested in talking to me, they are more likely to do what I ask them to. But I'll only really be able to tell you in ten years' time, to know whether it made any kind of difference. More people know about the work but the questions are not that different. The questions are still all about, "Why are you using acrylics and why is there so much turquoise and what's the meaning of orange and you know, the rough edges of the collage or why are you juxtaposing this pattern onto that pattern"—those conversations are not taking effect. If you ask a painter painting questions, they'll give you answers that are related to painting, but if you ask painters questions about politics, you get inarticulate answers because they don't speak like politicians or political

activists. They're not referencing that history and dipping in and out of that theory so it's not so effective. But that's the way it is. So, I'm talking more.

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### towards a time and a place where the work is the work

*You said in your talk that times change. What does art mean to you today? What sort of agenda do you see for Black artists?*

When I started, I called myself a Black woman artist and there's no way that I'm ever going to change that. I'm not going to say, now I've won the Turner Prize, that I don't want to be known as a Black woman artist, however much that tends to box you into a corner. It's also a dangerous place to be. You define an identity for yourself and then for forever we're not talking about collage, we're not talking about the blue paper or the acrylic paint. We're talking about Black politics, and that's a dangerous thing to do, but I started doing it and so I'm going to carry on doing it. When I think about the younger artists that are working now and the artists in the 1950s that were working then, some of whom are still alive today—if they don't want to define themselves as Black artists, if they want to be known because they are sculptors, because they are filmmakers, I think that is a move in the right direction.

But every now and again someone has to keep saying “And how is this reflected in the wider discussions of things? Are those people still being left out of the conversations?” I would hope that there would be a day when you wouldn't have to have that discussion, but you can only not have that discussion when it doesn't matter anymore. Not everyone has to do it—artists are artists and all artists mostly want to make art. And I don't think artists should be boxed into categories. You might talk about Polish artists if you're talking to British people but within that history and within those series of practices you wouldn't lump...

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*There was a label for a very long time: Eastern European Art.*

But somebody else gave you that title. You didn't name yourselves “artists from the east” because it's ridiculous, it doesn't make any sense. So yes, of course it's important to move towards a time and a place where the work is the work, and it moves you because it's the work. But sometimes some of us are there as a kind of reminder that there are bigger... not so much bigger but *everyday* issues. The everydayness of not being recognised for the contribution that's been made, whether by enslaved people or poorly-paid workers. It's important that that's acknowledged, every day. You can't think of Britain without understanding that it is what it is and was what it was because it needed the free and the poorly-paid work of everyone to make it.

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<sup>1</sup> The public lecture given by Lubaina Himid, “Pandora's Box: Collage, Cut-outs and Caricature” took place in the context of the exhibition NIEPODLEGŁE. Women, Independence and National Discourse, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, curated by Magda Lipska.

## Two or three questions Elvira Dyangani Ose

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

I recall vividly the first time I ever read Audre Lorde. Her words have always struck me. My childhood was full of stories about Miriam Makeba, Gloria Fuertes and María Nsue Angüe. I owe to my mother and auntie Berta my passion for storytelling and oral traditions—for all the narrative and performativity surrounding *the word*.

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*Which work of her art / literature / music / photography keeps resonating with you?*

“Freedom” in *Sister Outsider, Essays & Speeches* by Audre Lorde and *Ekomo* by María Nsue Angüe.

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

Some of Audre Lorde's most essential writings were only published in Spanish recently. My English wasn't proficient enough to understand specific nuances until the mid-1990s.

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*Is there a work you would have wanted, but never managed to see properly? In a well-equipped cinema, or in a museum? At the original performance instead of listening to the record?*

Even though I came across María Nsue Angüe—one of the few modern female writers in Equatorial Guinea—on several occasions, I would have loved to have had more conversations with her about Bantu Existentialism and postcolonial literature. Her work never brought her the accolades she deserved. Perhaps, one day...

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

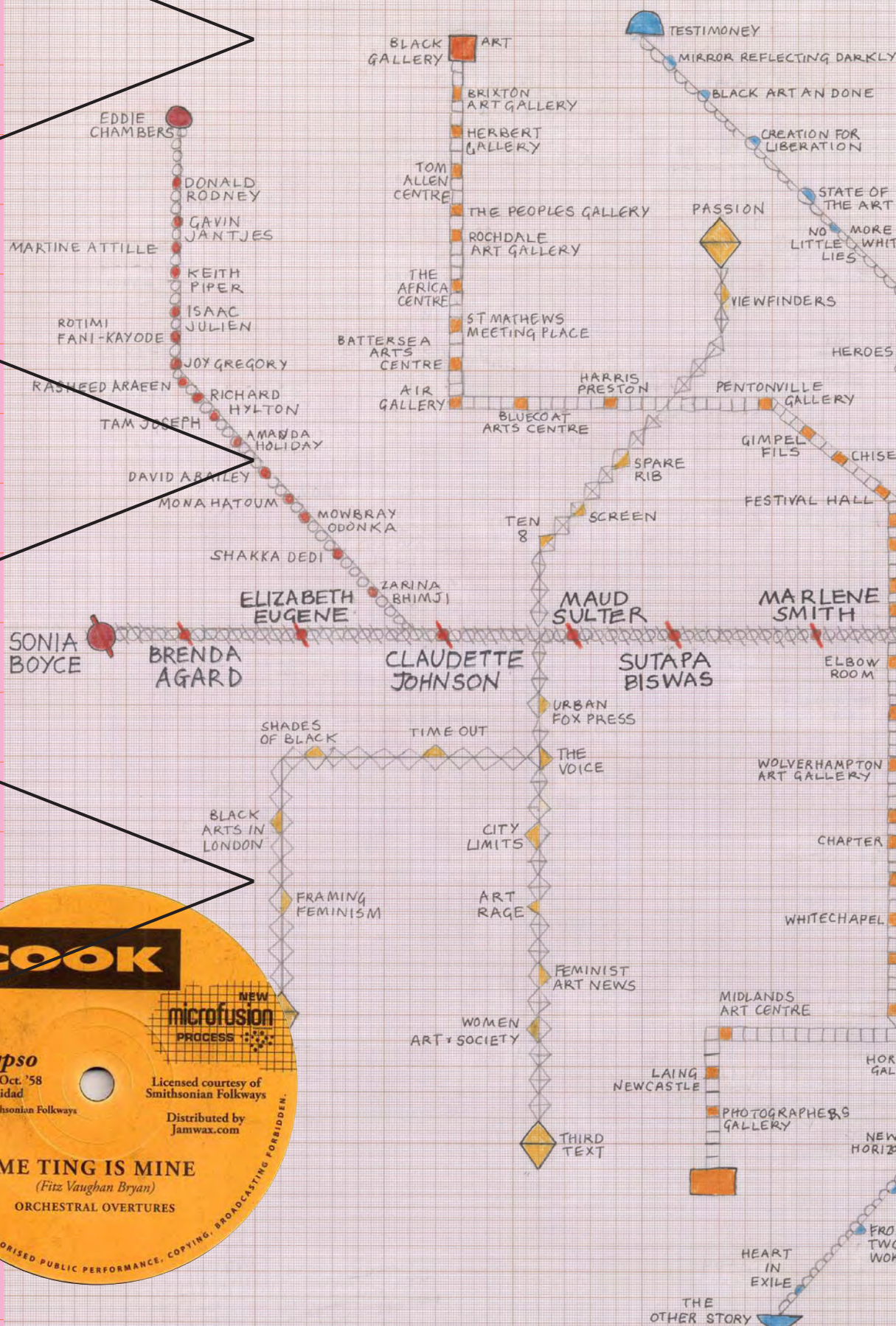
I have many... some quite mundane.

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*And who would that be?*

Impossible to pick just one. Recently I read again, *The Passion According to G.H.* by Clarice Lispector. I have always felt both deeply disturbed by and attracted to G.H., the protagonist of the novel. Or, is it perhaps Lispector's approach to writing that attracts me the most?

# THINBLACK



MOMENTS AND CONNECTIONS DURING THE 1980S FOR THE WOMEN ARTISTS FROM 5 BLACK