

PLAYING THE ARCHIVE

PARIS

LONDON

DISTANT

~~DOWN TOWNS~~

archivisant

SOUND MONUMENT

BANDS

peya gundou

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Peter Cross

MOURNING

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I invent nothing, I repeat and insist: cultivating an archive of one's own

Note no. 2, February 2024

This text is a revised version of an introductory lecture given on Monday 4 March 2024 on the occasion of the opening of the first public session of the programme 'Distant Islands, Spectral Cities', entitled 'Weaving a spiral of archives in London', presented at Senate House (University of London), as part of the 2023/24 Banister Fletcher Global Fellowship. It was followed by interventions from Eve Hayes de Kalaf, Adom Philogene Heron, Natalie Hyacinth, Carole Wright and Julian Henriques, accompanied by the music and poetry of the artist Annotate (Aka Liam Spencer)^[1].

Olivier Marboeuf

History comes back to us in confusion, in gruesome film cuts and repetitions. There are no great writers but there is a DJ who massacres old refrains^[2].

To begin this day, I thought it was necessary to say a few words to explain what motivated my research for the Banister Fletcher Global Fellowship, 'Distant Islands, Spectral Cities', which extends over this academic year, and what led me to imagine a series of gatherings and conversations in Paris, and also in London, as is the case today, in search of traces of expressions and forms of life within the Caribbean diaspora. I truly asked myself the question. Why are you doing this instead of writing poetry or drawing? What are you still looking for after all this time? I tried to trace back the thread of events to answer to this question. It is fastidious and disturbing work. But it can become a bit more joyous once you accept to look with indulgence at the many attempts and reformulations of this very same thing that you have produced in different contexts,^[3] this little thing that sticks in the throat,

that haunts us but at the same time is something we care about. *Un lieu à soi* (a place of one's own). A place which, by virtue of repetition, becomes larger. And it then becomes possible to share it, to interpret it, to practice it collectively. *De l'entre-tenir*: to hold it, support it, care for it.^[4] Trying to name what you're seeking means trying to say *from where* you are seeking it, but also *why* and *towards where* you are seeking it. So I could begin by presenting myself – which in itself is an incomplete exercise that will always require new repetitions – and in this manner begin today's work, open up a few of the paths into this research and institute a first place for the words of my guests and for your words. I'll get back to this in the course of this research; presenting oneself in a time of absolutely ferocious storytelling and self-marketing already constitutes a statement of a relational politics, of a habitable place. And so I hope to populate this introduction with the presences and matters to which I feel I am indebted and which constitute the recalcitrant archive of my voice.

I was born a little over fifty years ago in the outskirts of Paris, where I spent a large part of my life. I pursued studies in science before becoming a self-taught editor, then a self-taught director of a cultural centre for visual arts and living literatures, a self-taught art curator, a self-taught film producer, poet and decolonial writer, etc. I could have begun by relating my history in another way, from another place. Much earlier. For example, by explaining that my father was born in Guadeloupe, a small island in the French Caribbean, a little less than fifty years before my birth and that his father was one of the many children born of a Black man and an Indigenous Caribbean woman, whose face I discovered for the first time only a few years ago. It was a small photo that one of my cousins had removed from an album to show me the incredible resemblance between the face of this female ancestor from another time and my Aunt Claire, who had just passed away. Aunt Claire had always been a soft, gentle and kindly presence. You had to listen attentively to hear the thin thread of her voice. She was the last living representative of an entire generation of my family, my father's generation. That particular day, we had just finished eating the Easter *calalou* on the terrace of the family house in Gosier, a town in Grande-Terre, Guadeloupe. The house was built on a slope and on the terrace side it was suspended over a void. At the end of an untamed path that was barely distinguishable, with thick vegetation extending its green tangle on both sides, you could discern the clear line of the sea on the horizon. I remember that Aunt Claire always said that what was important to her was always being able to see the water. 'The sea is history', wrote the great poet Derek Walcott from the neighbouring island of Saint Lucia.^[5] The meal was coming to an end. There were still many untouched dishes and not enough combatants to tackle all the love, since it was in this discreet way that we showed affection for each other there, with no grand demonstrations and no grandiloquent words, but rather with full plates. Everyone had left the terrace for the other, shady, side of the house to play dominoes. I had remained for a moment, telling myself that with the death of Aunt Claire, I had suddenly become an elder, an archive, even if I was actually younger than my cousins. Like many Guadeloupeans, most of them

had returned to *péyi gwadloup* after having spent their entire working lives in France. The island had slowly turned into a retirement home. The young left to find work and returned when they were old – *if* they returned. The inhabitants of this paradisiacal island were often ill. Many of them had high cholesterol, high blood pressure and often diabetes, which was probably the most ironic of all inheritances for the inhabitants of an island that for so long had enriched France through the commerce of sugar cane. The cancer rate was high, but it was a national taboo to suggest that this was perhaps due to the agricultural pesticides we'd absorbed into our blood. The violence of the plantation was recorded in the archives of the island's landscape. Monoculture had won out over a large part of the forests that had once covered the volcanic island. Or at least here, in Grande-Terre, a land of plains. Added to this marvellous history was the turbulence characteristic of a hurricane-prone region – as Adom Philogene Heron will perhaps tell us about later. Hurricanes occupied a special place in the memorial calendar. Hurricanes and plantations shared the same ability to reset Caribbean history to zero. For in the French plantation system, when a slave died, s/he was replaced by another slave arriving directly from Africa, who thus necessarily knew little about the history of the place s/he had arrived at and would soon disappear too.

After each hurricane, one had to evacuate flood water, repair the roof, the windows, and sometimes even rebuild the entire house. Life was scattered in all directions. The wounded had to be counted and sometimes the dead. What could be learned from such destruction, how could you transmit anything other than despair when confronted with bad luck? That question, ever lurking behind the colourful image of the island of Paradise, was difficult to answer.

I think there was something about this resetting to zero that I wanted to resist because these recurrent iterations always arrived in new forms. I wanted to invent other repetitions in which whatever had preceded would not disappear, but rather would be amplified, the way a DJ persists with the same segment of music, repeating it until it penetrates into our spinal cord. An archive.

My father had left the island to become a soldier, long before BUMIDOM,^[6] a programme created by the French state, which between 1963 and 1981 trained the massive arrival in metropolitan France of Guadeloupeans, Martiniquans, Reunionese and French Guyanese, thereby largely contributing to the emptying from these French 'overseas territories' of their most vital forces, at the precise moment when the desire for independence was at its peak. Eve Hayes de Kalaf will tell us about the voices of the Windrush Scandal,^[7] another bitter tale of Caribbean uprooting. I never met my paternal grandparents, nor the parents of my mother, who was born in Paris. Both my parents fled from their families and met in the capital of the French empire and then started a large family of their own. All of this could partly explain why I decided to imagine the possibility of situating places for Afro-Caribbean diasporic archives somewhere in the Paris region. But it would be a bit too literal and

not really the truth. Even if it is true that strictly speaking there are no places for Afro-Caribbean archives as such in France. This absence is probably one of the consequences of the pugnacity with which the French state has imprinted on all areas of life – in the bodies and even in the intimacy of each individual – the ideas of a universalism, the central figure of which would be a race-less, classless, non-gendered citizen. And, in the end, without any other history apart from the great national myth in which every French person is supposed to be steeped. *Bitterness is history* ('L'amer est histoire').^[8] My father was as much a soldier in the French army as he was a guardian of that French spirit and its strategy of effacement. But luckily, he carried within himself the irrepressible need to cultivate a garden. I admit that it made my brothers, sisters and I angry to have to spend every Sunday with our hands in the dirt, whatever the season. And when there was no more work to be done on our plot of land, my father would always find hedges to prune and flower beds to be weeded for all the elderly ladies in the neighbourhood, in the name of a mysterious Christian charity which never offered us even a glimpse of any reciprocity. I ended up believing that there was something we needed to be pardoned for vis-à-vis the one called Jesus. Wherever we were, my father would make the most of the smallest parcel of land to cultivate something. Later, I understood that the idea of the garden and its age-old rituals of subsistence were imprinted in his body, like the remains of a resistant archive, the ungovernable traces of the Creole garden – a place of survival, ruse and re-composition of a humanity that had become lost on the plantation. Despite the Republican pact, despite France having penetrated into his conscience, something had survived in him, somewhere. And I know that Carole Wright, who is with us today, will have things to say about this way of archiving through the subterfuge of gardens.

At any rate, whether we want it to or not, colonial history returns by way of unexpected paths; sometimes it emerges violently, as the great Martiniquan poet and political figure Aimé Césaire predicted in his time.^[9] For my part, it wasn't the history of distant islands that led me to understand and even feel the reflux of the colonial poison, the persistence of its stagnant water in which we all had to bathe. It was rather my childhood, my adolescence and then my adult life in the *banlieues* of Paris. Without telling us, our bodies had archived the maps of the racial contract. Our skins sensed beforehand where we had the right to be. We breathed in from afar the sharp perfumes of the forbidden places. Our sweat knew too much and tempted the devil for thighs that had been electrified by the shouts of James Brown. Our lips dreamt aloud, wanting to produce other fluids, through the magic of an improvised and collective alchemy. Our tongues knew the taste of the dividing line between our desires and the crudest of realities that shattered inside us at dawn on the first train. You had to supply muscle and keep silent. But our angry bodies had decided otherwise, architectures of spectral cities, designed using all the techniques they'd invented to produce space, to speak loudly, to laugh and breathe, to not remain in place, to not disappear either. It was from this place, the Parisian *banlieue*, and from this period, the beating heart of the 1980s, that

I've always begun to recount, and even to repeat, the vast history that brings us together today, on each new occasion, at each new twist in the spiral of time, adding in other protagonists, other places, other voices. I've come to accept that perhaps I wasn't so much searching for places for archives, but rather that I was turning the archive into a technique for the construction of particular places, places that spread out through words and rumours, images, hallucinations, through sounds and music, places that are always more vast, nationless *péyis*, gaseous *péyis*.

Obviously I have slews of good reasons to come to the United Kingdom and to London, in particular to try to produce this new loop of thought, to slide with you into the interior of certain trajectories of the British Caribbean diaspora, its fights and its dramas, its life force and alliances. I am highly conscious that here, as in France, times are difficult and that behind the celebrations for a few dark-skinned kings and queens, behind the economy of tokens and the extractions of Black elites, behind the varnish of institutions, racism is writing a new chapter in its long history. Because despite the toppling of certain statues that suddenly became embarrassing, Black lives still aren't worth enough to last as long as others, to escape from violent deaths, psychological suffering or disease.

Before coming back to London, but also to the port city of Bristol, over the course of the day, I'd like to say a bit more about this rather strange desire to institute places in Paris, where the archives of a diaspora that did everything possible to limit its visibility and even became the national champion in the art of producing model French citizens, could reappear. *Amen!* In fact, the times are not conducive to imagining places capable of welcoming such stories and to placing them on the turntable of the future – we'll speak again with Julian Henriques this afternoon about this need to play the archive: how, why, for whom? Because our monuments lie at the bottom of the ocean, but they can also be found in a street in New Cross in South London, or a community hall in Nanterre, Créteil or Corbeil, in the working-class banlieue of Paris, anywhere where music defeats reason from the obscure mouth of a sound-system-storyteller.

2024 is thus an Olympic year. In Athens, Rio and also London, we now know that the organisation of the Olympic games is an endeavour that isn't limited to planetary and festive sports, but that it is also an efficient means of cleansing a city of some of its old stories and undesirable presences. We are not duped. Our bodies are bits of mobile and sensitive cities. And this persistent desire for an archive probably has something to do with the terraforming^[10] of the Parisian Northeast, which is tranquilly putting the finishing touches on the creation of a new planet, '*le Grand Paris*', an immense star that would seem to have digested the strange and resistant zone that only a short while ago was known as 'la banlieue'. It wasn't the right moment to be clever with archives that might bring up bad memories, faces too dirty to be kept anywhere except at the edges of the national

photograph. Already in Paris, we'd lost ground over the last few years and a few of our strongholds too. It wasn't the 'third places' [*tiers-lieux*] that had flourished on the sites of squats and factories shut down with the help of the organic products and cool concerts that would replace them. The beautiful machinery of gentrification had cleaned up what remained of the working-class neighbourhoods of the capital, any desires for autonomy and lives built on no model. Now, the time had come to settle accounts with the banlieue, formerly disreputable, formerly unpopular, always too loud, too dirty, too communist, too Arab, too African. Formerly, because now everything was different. As had happened elsewhere, the magic of the Olympic Games served as a smokescreen and an armed force for this delicious hunt for the poor. Everything became beautiful and marvellous. Paris would always be Paris, but much more vast. The most amusing part of it all, the most extraordinary too, was that our lives (which had never had much value) had suddenly become marvellous images, black minerals that compelled ecstasy on condition that other hands than ours seized them, on condition that other mouths than ours pronounced our twisted words, for a better presentation, with the correct accent. All of this was so exciting, so moving! And it was the same for what we had thought were our archives, in a rather confusing and hardly scientific manner. They too were gentrified. Veritable little kittens! Meow! The docile little creatures were celebrated, once the thick layer of filth had been cleaned off what we called skin, flesh, what we called the heart of the archives – their flow, their heartbeat, their inner conflicts. The way you clean a stolen mask, scraping off the cloth and secretions that covered and filled it so you could contemplate its empty and silent form in a glass case in a museum. The time of the Black archive had finally come! Accompanied by the reset to zero of the history that we knew so well, it was finally going to appear, shrouded with mystery, for a new first time. A new hurricane was going to scatter our lives. Maybe it was our fault too. We hadn't known how to create an archive in the correct manner, or rather the correct manner didn't correspond to what we'd wanted to do to preserve the vitality of certain gestures, certain voices, certain stories and images that were dear to us and whose insistent presences we felt within ourselves. Stuart Hall says about diasporic cultures: 'think of how these cultures have used the body – as if it was, and it often was, the only cultural capital we had. We have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation.'^[11] Hall speaks of the 'canvas' rather than 'subject' of representation as if to signify that it's not just a question of working with the (in)famous visibility of minority bodies, on the image of the self – what was going to become the great affair of the politics of diversity in art, fashion, advertising and all those who had finally amalgamated these three worlds into a single entity – but rather working *from* the self. That is how I understood it, in any case, as the necessary self-production of an archive that is terribly – perhaps even fatally – indissociable from the body, which is simultaneously the motif, tool and site of enunciation. The loom and the code of forms of presence. Working in the depth of self, *beneath* images. That was our only chance to avoid ending up completely emptied of the last thing that we had left. And it was a rather slim chance. At any rate, I didn't see

what else I could think from the heart of a large family from the poor Caribbean diaspora, dragged about from place to place all over France. It seems to me that we never had even the beginnings of the privilege to sit down for a moment and catch our breath, to be at enough of a remove to be able to reflect on what sort of trace our lives would leave behind us; in other words to imagine an archive, however small it might be. We were too busy with the urgency of finding a place to live and making ourselves invisible in the peacefully racist landscape of a France that was unrolling the red carpet for our amnesia. The ability to forget is the key to becoming French, voluntary ignorance a national sport. We weren't from here and we didn't come from anywhere. But where were we going? As Stuart Hall's words remind us, the diasporic Caribbean archive begins to invent itself from a continued history of dispossession that transforms the body into the site of a cultural capital that is mobile and fragile. An archive of one's own. This is perhaps the only reason that could explain why, decades later, I found myself thinking about the future of a Caribbean archive – me, someone who had never dedicated much interest in my professional life to practices of preservation and had even willingly often held myself at a remove from all those archival stories, judging them (perhaps incorrectly) to be a bit too dusty and fetishistic. In truth, I simply felt more interest in stories than in archives. The word 'archive' sounded a bit too administrative and related to the police for my tastes. It immediately reminded me of that state that had always judged us responsible based precisely on archives over which it alone had sole powers of production and conservation – and also the power of dissimulating anything that could help with the idea of counter-narratives. Much earlier I had read with a certain enthusiasm the remarkable work of the French historian Arlette Farge, impressed by the manner by which she had been able to reconstruct the history of the people of 18th-century Paris by using police records.[12] It was thus possible to turn an overly voluble archive of state violence against itself or simply to recognise in the negative imprint of a state-controlled machine the traces that remained of the minuscule lives that had resisted it. An elusive history of the street, of cunning. But it wasn't enough and even if there wasn't much interest in emergent forms of Black heroism, we were entitled to seek out traces of our existences beyond what could be found in police stations and the private diaries of colonists.

Later, I appreciated Monika Wittig's famous phrase: 'Make an effort to remember; or, failing that, invent.'^[13] It says everything you need to know about the method of minority archiving. Even if obviously the challenge is not to invent 'in general', but rather to organise a space for imagination from a 'particular' body, *from* lived moments and gaps, *from* presences and ghostly images that inhabit it. And also *from* certain needs to avoid traumatic repetitions. The invention in question here is an act of reparation. Our archive requires a bit of imagination, it's as simple as that, in order to weave together again disparate threads of dispersed stories, interrupted by a thousand economic, administrative, political and law-enforcing hurricanes – and even perhaps by the benevolent powers of dispersion, the academic hurricanes and artistic hurricanes that progressively began to use us as available resources. 'Inventing' our archives was thus not at all a peaceful or trivial activity, for it was those archives that came to us, knocking violently on the door, on the roof and the shutters

of our double consciousness, over the course of long nights of anguish. Our imagination had always emerged from tightly gripped stomachs. It was the stories that invented themselves within us, laying siege to our bodies. On this confused path to finding reasons to envisage an archive, I also try to keep in mind my reading of the works of Sam Bourcier, an emblematic figure of queer studies in France and member of a collective that itself aims to create an LGBTIQ+ archive in Paris. Bourcier's lively and uncompromising interventions confirmed my feeling that imagining archives, or even imagining a place for archives, could emerge from a desire for living practices, or as they write, 'archi-living' [*archivivante*] practices.^[14]

On the path to implementing this living archive, the way in which Saidiya Hartman used documents for her book, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*,^[15] has also long been a precious compass, with the strength of its imagination situated in the necessity of always (re)producing possibilities for life, practising them and resuming interrupted trajectories. To imagine is to return by way of a detour. In another book, which we'll hear some excerpts from today – Jay Bernard's collection of poems, *Surge*^[16] – I discovered yet other ways of reinvigorating traces of life from a place of mourning. *From* details of tragic reminiscences, *from* bodies that have paid the price of exile and injustice, *from* the dignity of the dead who died badly, *from* the imperceptible actions of ravaged families – a hand gesture signals something that we don't fully understand, but it means 'that's enough' and perhaps a mother's gaze doesn't want to see and turns toward a corner of the room – from discrete fragments of stories without witness a voice calls out. It calls for presence, for a return to the places of the archive, to the scenes of crime but also of joy, as will be the way for those who will be walking with Natalie Hyacinth tomorrow in New Cross, the vibrant and wounded heart of the history of the Jamaican and Barbadian diasporas, and the rich hours of Blues parties and sound-systems. And we could have also taken a walk with William 'Lez' Henry, Colin Prescod or even Stafford Scott; we may do so on another occasion, in another place, because we have to accept that not everyone can always be seated at the same table at the same time, that there is and always will be many tables, many focal points of relation that function in parallel with this same practice of weaving together threads from different places. I will try later today to recall some of those places, and some of those people who accompany me from afar, in thought, or who will join us at another time and in other circumstances in this infinite conversation.

I believe it is important to respect the need for a certain distance, as was the case when my friend Ntone Edjabe, of the South African collective Chimurenga, asked me several years ago to participate in a working group with the objective of creating a cartography of Black imagination and its history in France for an exhibition at the BPI (Bibliothèque Publique d'Information, Public Information Library) at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. And I refused. Even though he had assembled a competent team and even though I was very familiar with the neighbourhood of Les Halles, and with the library itself, where I had spent long mornings with all kinds of strays who finished their nights with their heads in the morning paper, and even though I had known the Pompidou Centre when it was still bisected by an actual street that served as its ground floor, with old Arab men playing endless games of checkers. I refused.

Despite my knowledge of the geological strata of the Forum des Halles, the surface of which had welcomed one of the multiple beginnings of break dance in France, and its underground levels where on Saturdays interurban RER train lines A and B crossed, and with this all the beauty produced by northern, southern, eastern and western banlieues, I refused. It wasn't the right moment for me and probably not the right place. But this refusal was nevertheless one of the sources of this questioning that has led me here today to ask myself how to create an archive and transmit it to all those who are now moving onto the dancefloor we call 'diaspora'. When Ntone invited me to participate in his Parisian project – and later I finally wrote a text that appeared in the exhibition's newspaper, *imagination nwar*, which I will get back to later – he wasn't naive. In fact he knew a lot about the challenges and tensions that were occurring in Paris. He had the advantage that being an outsider sometimes affords, an advantage that I have today in London. But like Ntone, I have neither the desire nor the means of innocence and I well know that I am beginning to speak after many people who have already contributed to the imagining and creation of archives similar to the ones I have envisioned with my accomplices, some of whom we will obviously speak of and others whom I hope you won't forget to bring to our attention, because today is merely a new repetition of what they tried to do – brilliantly, sometimes secretively – both in great institutions and in much smaller local communities, in a certain destitution too. We know this. Let their work be honoured. *

Translated from the French by Liz Young, edited by Shela Sheikh

[1] For more details about the event and participants, see <https://www.london.ac.uk/news-events/events/distant-islands-spectral-cities-weaving-spiral-archives-london>.

[2] Olivier Marboeuf, 'Grow, where you can, how you can, grow', available at <https://olivier-marboeuf.com/2019/01/01/comme-un-lundi-pousse-ou-tu-peux-comme-tu-peux-pousse-fr-eng/>. Originally published as 'Pousse, où tu peux, comme tu peux, pousse' in Kader Attia: *Les racines poussent aussi dans le béton*, exhibition catalogue, Editions Mac Val, 2018.

[3] The question of an archive of one's own probably first appeared in my professional trajectory in the mid-1990s, with éditions AMOK, through which, with Yvan Alagbé, I published books that attempted to recount history from the perspective of diasporic troubles, the bitter memories and precarious alliances of immigrants, solitude and the invention of dignified lives. Amongst them are *Nègres Jaunes* (Yvan Alagbé, 1992–95), *Les exilés, histoires* (Kamel Khélif and Nabil Farès, 1999), *Algérie, la douleur et le mal* (Collectif, 1998), *Une ville, un mardi* (Olivier Marboeuf, 2000) or the famous collection *La Vérité* (1997). Traces of colonial denialism and the power of speculative archives continued to inhabit me when I curated the exhibition of the Reunionese artist Yo-Yo Gonthier, 'Outre-Mer, mémoires coloniales' at the Espace Khiasma in 2008, and then a few years later, in 2011, Vincent Meessen's 'My last life', an exhibition that resulted in the film programme 'Hantologie des colonies' and also served as the starting point from which I developed the performance 'Deuxième vie', which reinvents the origin of my family name. In 2011, when for the first time I discovered a body of archives dating from the beginnings of cinema in Guinée-Bissau through the intermediary of Portuguese filmmaker Filipa César, I wrote a short essay, 'An ecology of darkness' that was included in the catalogue for the 4th 'Encounters Beyond History' symposium that César organised in 2015 in Guimarães, Portugal. In this science-fiction essay inhabitants of the future were already organising a jam session, using images of African struggles as a point of departure. A scratched record of wounded memory that still turns in the text written for Kader Attia's exhibition at the Mac/Val in 2018, 'Les racines poussent aussi dans le béton' ('Roots grow in concrete too'), the music of which is still resonating up to this present attempt to create a genealogy of this desire for an archive of one's own.

[4] The expression *entre-tenir* evokes a community that supports each other through reparation but also conversation (*entretien*), as a 'holding (*tenir*) between one another (*entre*)' that continues in our care (*entretien*) for it. Collective speech is understood here as care that incurs no debt. See note no. 1, "'Entre-tenir": a living archive of emancipation', January 2024, <https://www.london.ac.uk/institute-paris/research/banister-fletcher-global-fellowship/entre-tenir-living-archive-emancipation>.

[5] Derek Walcott, 'The Sea is History' in *Selected Poems*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

[6] Bumidom, or the Bureau for the Development of Migrations in the Overseas Departments, was a public French organisation tasked with accompanying the emigration of inhabitants of French Overseas departments to mainland France. It was created in 1963 by Michel Debré after his visit to the island of La Réunion in 1959 with General de Gaulle. It ceased to function in 1981. Bumidom was officially presented as a tool to curb overpopulation in the overseas departments – principally the islands of Reunion, Martinique and Guadeloupe. Over the course of twenty years, Bumidom displaced a little over 70,000 people, half of whom were from Reunion. The candidates (both women and men) for this departure towards the dreamt-of mainland would in fact be regularly confronted with the humiliating ordeal of being hired as unqualified workers. As Sylvain Pattieu emphasises, 'The existence

of Bumidom functioned in tandem with the persistence of certain forms of racialisation, understood as a process of construction of social reality through the production of categories linked to race. These rely more, compared to the situation in other countries, on a territorial benchmark rather than an ethnic one, even if the two overlap. They are thus characterised by the relations of the French Republic with its overseas citizens.' Sylvain Pattieu, 'Un traitement spécifique des migrations d'outre-mer: le Bumidom (1963-1982) et ses ambiguïtés,' *Politix*, 2016/4 (n° 116): 81-113.

[7] The 'Windrush Scandal' is a British political affair that began in 2018. It concerns people who were detained, deprived of their legal rights, threatened with expulsion and, for some of them, wrongfully expelled from the United Kingdom by the Ministry of the Interior, despite the fact that they were born as British subjects and had arrived in the United Kingdom before 1973. Amongst them, many hailed from the Caribbean and belonged to what was called the 'Windrush generation' (so named for the *Empire Windrush*, the ship that transported one of the first groups of Caribbean migrants to the United Kingdom in 1948.) To understand the sources of this scandal and its repercussions, one can consult the Internet site for the Windrush Scandal Project, which presents itself as a three-year research project that seeks, 'for the first time, to produce a scholarly examination of the so-called Windrush Scandal within a fully transnational framework, one that properly considers the agency of a wide variety of official and non-official actors from both sides of the Atlantic and the role of the post-colonial and Commonwealth contexts of international relations.' This Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project led by the Institute of Historical Research, the UK's national centre for history, based at the University of London's School of Advanced Study (SAS), brings together a wide range of resources, with a strong emphasis on oral history and numerous interviews. See <https://windrushscandal.org/>.

[8] I take the liberty here of playing with the sonic resonances between *l'amer* ('bitterness') and *la mer* ('the sea'): 'the sea is history'/'bitterness is history'.

[9] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1972]).

[10] For an insider ethnography of Forest Gate, a neighbourhood in Newham, east London (the location of London's Olympic Park), see Joy White, *Terraformed: Young Black Lives in the Inner City* (Repeater Books, 2020). As I try to do, White connects music, politics and the built environment. Many thanks to Shela Sheikh for sharing this valuable reference with me.

[11] Stuart Hall, 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?' in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent, Bay Press, 1992, pp. 21–33, at p. 27.

[12] Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans les rues de Paris au XVIIIème* (Éditions Gallimard, 1992).

[13] Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (Éditions de Minuit, 1969).

[14] Sam Bourcier, 'La fièvre des archives' ('archive fever'), transcription of a talk at the University of Philology, Valencia (Spain), autumn 2018, <https://trounoir.org/La-fièvre-des-archives>.

[15] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

[16] Jay Bernard, *Surge* (Chatto & Windus, 2019). Thank you to Jacqueline Frost for having drawn my attention to this book.