

Listen [here](#) for voice note: Note to self, purpose of my trip
Click [here](#) for audio transcript



**Gauteng,
South Africa**

Thursday 2 February 2023 - Flying to Johannesburg

I am flying to Joburg! I will be staying with my dad who lives in nearby Pretoria, which is great as I haven't seen him in around 5 years. This will be my first time 'working' in South Africa and not just visiting family, and since I've only been watching and programming African cinema since 2019, I've yet to bring my film work here.

Even though it has been a relatively short time in this field of African cinema, it's been a very busy time! I've always been interested in old films, but I didn't even realise there was an African film history until I saw Wend Kuuni (1982) by Gaston Kaboré at Il Cinema Ritrovato and it completely opened my eyes to non-colonial, non-traumatic, beautiful African drama. Since then I've been on a mission to watch as much as possible, and to present it to intimate audiences via my work in Black Cinema Project and other spaces. A key reasoning behind my



interest in retrospective African cinema is a desire to feel more connected to my South African heritage and the continent as a whole. Being a part of the diaspora, mixed race, Afropean, or dual/multi heritage, means I feel that I am of more than one space, of many cultures, and am aware that you can find home and connection beyond where you were born. I still struggle with the emotions contained within this idea, even though I know it intellectually.



During this trip I have been led by opportunities of access, my contacts, guiding points from curated conversation and events, current hot topics etc. I have had phone calls, texts, emails, voice notes, face to face interviews and tours. I tried to not be overly forensic, as I am not an academic but a curious person who is learning how to 'research' and to work artistically. I have had to learn how to collect my thoughts and create structure out of loose ideas. I have started journaling and requesting my friends and colleagues to have recorded conversations with me so I can vocalise my thoughts. As much as I have been learning about archives and film, I have also been learning how to translate my thoughts into this resulting report, which doesn't come naturally to me.

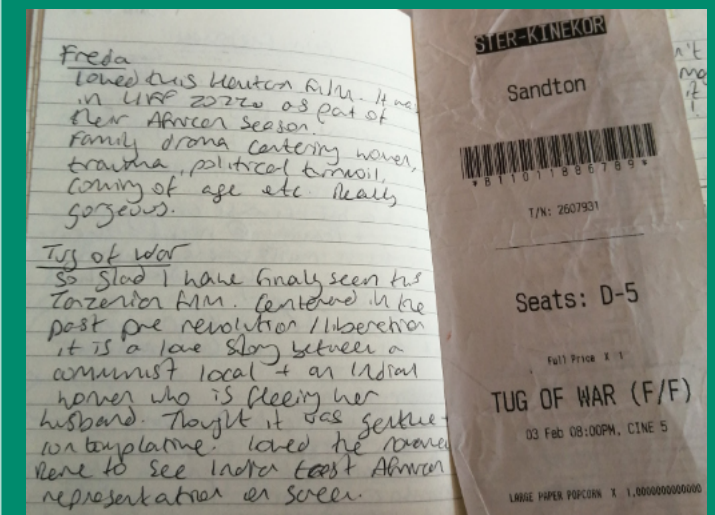
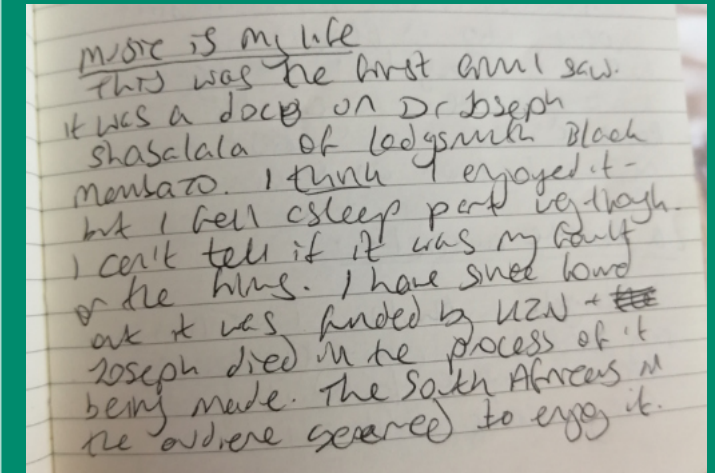
At the end of this trip I do not have all the answers, but I have a sense of what I want to know, and how I'd like to find it out. I have included key questions and thoughts

throughout this report, and I will use these as a focus point in my work going forward.

Friday 3 February 2023 Joburg Film Festival

It is always exciting visiting new film festivals and figuring what they are about from a curatorial, operational and audience perspective. I can't help but want to understand their internal processes as I have spent so many years in music and film festival operations. All I'll say is this festival had a particularly complicated booking process!

Joburg is certainly on the glitzy side of festivals, there was a beautiful VIP and performance space right in the middle of Mandela Square, red carpet and good socials. It was encouraging to see the programme spread across the city in Ster-Kinekor multiplex cinemas, having a wide reach and buy-in from the commercial cinema sector. The audience engagement for the



festival was interesting, and in the majority of screenings I went to the numbers were low to middle, BUT the audiences made up for it with running commentary, outbursts of laughter and general warmth.

The programme for the festival was varied, an especially good array of new South African films, international and also a whole classics strand - love! I only saw

four films as I arrived in the middle of the festival, and it was a challenge driving into Joburg from Pretoria and back each day given the load shedding (meaning no lights on the motorway). Also there was crazy heavy rain, flash flooding and generally Joburg can be sketchy at night.

There was a controversy during the festival, in which the South Africa's Film and Publications Board (FPB) denied the showing of Ousmane Sembène's seminal film, Black Girl (1966). The film press picked up the story and the FPB hastily reversed their decision, even though the festival had already screened the film without authorisation. Ill-informed and ignorant restrictions from this department harp back to the strict apartheid regime censorship board, in which films were only allowed to be shown that reinforced white supremacy and a strong conservative society.

How is it that we are still working with certification boards that do not

understand the cultural value of films, or even the nuance of film content and its artistic intention?

What does it mean when non-cultural official bodies are responsible for the certification of and banning of film?

It is interesting to me that this is not only a problem with new release films, but archived work that may have 'problematic content' but requires the contextualisation of the time and can serve as a learning tool from the past.

It makes me think about the challenges we face in the UK when screening African films that haven't been BBFC rated. If the films are without a rating we need to submit a form to the local authority licensing department to request a rating to screen the film. In Leeds this can take up to 8 weeks and requires attendance at a hearing. Luckily in our local authority we do not have to pay for this process, but I know that this isn't the case for other parts of the country. This

process doesn't only apply to African films of course, but any non commercial or international film, where it is already harder to show these due to expensive licence fees. But as a programmer of African cinema this is a regular barrier we have to face and an extra complication.

The solution? From a cinema perspective it is easier when the film is already BBFC rated, a process which costs approximately £400 reduced charity rate. Who could front this cost? If more of the larger UK distributors picked up African films they should be covering this cost. But the reality is African films are rarely taken up, even if things are slowly getting better. I am embarking upon a project to screen African Heritage films in the UK, and it is clear to me that I should pay for them to become BBFC rated films so that the legacy of the project to screen these films across the UK, has a longer reach and serves future programmers of African film heritage.

Saturday 4 February 2023 Meeting Dr Aboubakar Sanogo

On the last day of the Joburg film festival I managed to catch up with Dr Aboubakar Sanogo. He was in attendance of the festival as he programmed the African classics stand, and it was fortuitous that we were in the same place at the same time as we had been planning on meeting up virtually for a while. Dr Sanogo is an Associate Professor in Film Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada and North American Secretary of FEPACI. I had wanted to meet up to understand more about the African Film Heritage Project (AFHP) and its plans. Samra and I (in Black Cinema Project) wanted to understand more about the films that were chosen and those that were not chosen for restoration and redistribution. Once we learned about the AFHP I knew I had to speak to Dr Sanogo to find out more. During our conversation, the main things I learned about AFHP was that they are aiming for approx. one film per country, the films are

all from 1889-1989, there is a lot of work being done behind the scenes to get the rights and film elements together. The main reason there isn't more public information is down to finance and resources. A simple website is in the pipeline, but really all energy is being put towards the internal work.

Further info: [Martin Scorsese Interviews on AFHP Archiving and restoring Africa's film heritage: Visions and Challenges](#)

The fact that this is such a MASSIVE project of African and International significance, and yet it is still under-resourced is surprising and disappointing. I realise that this might seem like a niche or specialist interest area to so many people, but I do think it reflects our problem with a lack of interest and value in both African cinema and also film history. From a Western perspective, just like so many other instances, it is as though Africa is one country, a small country at that, with minimal

significance. Yet we are all involved, Africa's history is all of our history.

Screening African films in Leeds and across the UK has the same issues. People hold it up against the Western canon and expect to be able to review or analyse these films within this context. The African context is unique. It is also exhausting work, you often find yourself having to justify 'why African' before you even get to talk about 'why this film'.

In addition to this, the majority of funders for the restoration of African work seem to be European and North American. The AFHP is supported by UNESCO and Scorsese's [Film Foundation](#), alongside other contributors. Why is it that African countries and the commercial sector don't seem to value African heritage and film history?

Why isn't African money being invested in African film and heritage?

I understand there is a Maslow hierarchy of needs dynamic in place here, in which film heritage might not be able to be at the top. However, if we keep accepting money from the West for our own culture, are we perpetuating a problem and not addressing our own lack of value in our art?

How can we better improve awareness of, access to, and value of the film archives and film heritage on the continent?

**Monday 6 February 2023
University of Cape Town Special Collections Archive**

One of the archives in South Africa that I'd heard about before arriving, was the University of Cape Town's Special Collections. I remember seeing the news in April 2021 about a [fire in the library](#) and international panic about the loss of archives. I contacted the archive to ask about films in their collection and what was the current situation. They responded with a wonderful email telling me that they hadn't lost all of their collection, and they

shared with me an [article](#) detailing where they are at two years on.

I guess natural disaster is always going to be a risk, especially to materials that are non digital and require very specific environments to survive. The case of this particular archive and fire just reminds me how vulnerable archives can be, and with the looming and present threat of climate change, and the fact that Africa is disproportionately affected by climate change - I am so aware that this is going to be a growing issue for archives going forward. The pressure to digitise is immense, and time is not on our side.

**Tuesday 7 February 2023
June Givanni Lost Archives Zoom Event**

I attended a Zoom event hosted by the [June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive: Footage Lost and Found: A Conversation on Africa's Displaced Film Archives](#). Special guests included four eminent African filmmakers, Jihan El-Tahri

(Egypt), Ali Essafi (Morocco), Nii-Kwate Owoo (Ghana) and Jean-Marie Téo (Cameroon) in conversation with Nikolaus Perneczky (Queen Mary University of London). You can listen to the event [here](#).

During the discussion lots of interesting points came up. It was said that there needs to be political enforcement (laws) to make a change in mindset and perception of archives. The last amendment to copyright law was the [1978 Berne convention](#).

Does there need to be a revision in copyright law?

Although interestingly South Africa has just implemented a ['controversial' copyright amendment bill](#) in 2022 that took 7 years to achieve. It seems this bill mirrors UK and USA copyright clauses, but I'd like to speak to a copyright expert to understand better what this new bill now means, and why some people are so upset about it.

In the session Jihan thought that we should shift the mindset through making films. Break the funding systems by involving archives in film ecology. I'm really interested in how we use art and artists to better support archives. For example, [The Cemetery of Cinema \(2023\)](#) by Thierno Souleymane Diallo is a reflective documentary on the filmmakers search for the first film from Guinea. The film demonstrates the undervaluing of archives and cinema history of the country, all whilst 'filling the gaps' in archive with new artistic interpretation. I think going forward this approach will be something I will try and support. I am often contemplating what my role is in this struggle, should I retrain and become an archivist? Should I keep programming and raise awareness of heritage films in the UK? Is there a way I can use my curatorial, project management and multi cultural background to develop connections and grow initiatives?

What is the role of African filmmakers and programmers in supporting the African archive?

There was also mention of "peripheral" archives and other collaboration points in archival practice. For example regional archives and also political connections. Included in this category would be the new documentary [the Labudovic Reels \(2022\)](#) which analyses the history of footage shot by Yugoslavian cameramen as part of the Non-Aligned Movement - footage shot in Africa and other places - held in Serbia's national archive in Belgrade. I can't wait to finally see this film, screener anyone?

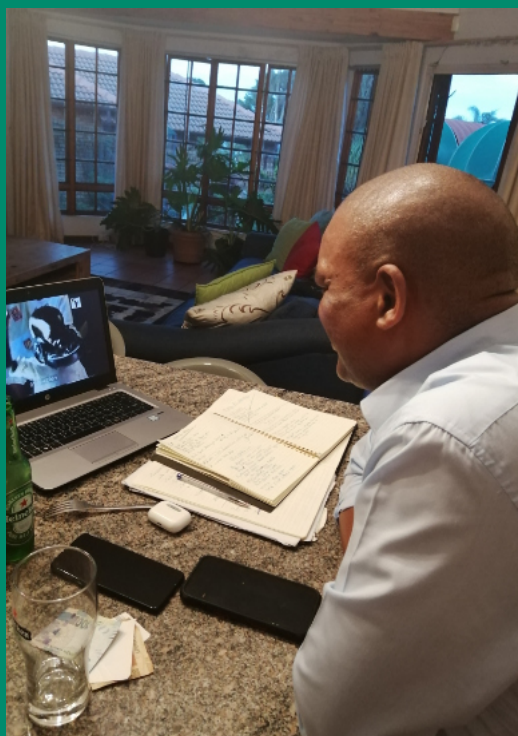
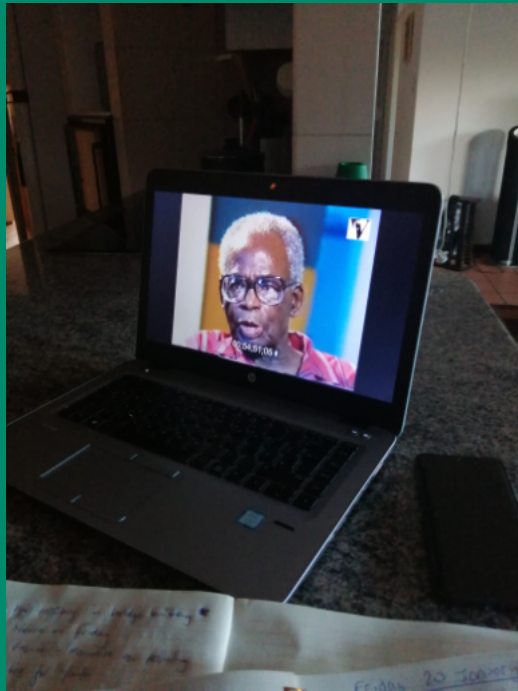
Monday 13 February 2023 Meeting VILLON Archive

I was approached by [VILLON Archive](#) which is a collection of works by Peter Davis and other filmmakers and photographers. The archive is commercial and Peter manages the rights for all of the content. I spoke with Alex, the new

archive manager to find out more. Peter Villon is 90 this year and his collection is 60 years old, he made a lot of films for the UN and travelled all over the world, and he spent a lot of time in South Africa interviewing anti-apartheid freedom fighters. Once he got a bit older he decided to start a commercial archive and collected other people's footage in order to manage their rights and ensure financial return to the filmmakers. The actual archive is in Canada and a lot of filmmakers I have spoken with who use archive footage are aware of or have spent a lot of money using VILLON owned footage.

In the process of looking through their collection I came across a film called '[Oscar Mpetha Free](#)', about my Great Grandfather. I wasn't so surprised to see him given he has his [role in South Africa's political history](#), (he was known as the father of South Africa's trade union movement), but the film was two hours long and was centred on his release from prison. Alex showed

me parts of the footage over the zoom and I realised it featured lots of my family members. I then got a screener and my dad and I watched the film. It was an emotional watch,



the footage showed Oscar's homecoming, his attendance at a political rally, an interview and also family life back at the house. I could recognise my aunty, uncles, cousins and grand-aunt.

The finding of personal content in a commercial archive definitely brought up some strong feelings about ownership, rights, custodianship and access. The film I watched had to be watermarked, lest I shared it without permission. And although the archive offered me 'family rates' to use the footage, it was still an uncomfortable experience having my own family in someone else's hands. Perhaps the means should justify the end, as Oscar's release was a moment of cultural significance so therefore it should be publicly available.. ?

When should personal archive become public archive, and vice versa?

It reminds me of discussions I had around right of access when the film Sambizanga (1972) by Sarah Maldoror was made illegally available on youtube for so many years much to the frustration of the family. Part of me feels grateful that the film was available, because I could access it and therefore become invested in its restoration and re-release. But I guess even though there are differences in these cases, in that my family's footage is 'legally' owned by someone else, and Maldorors film was illegally available, both render feelings of powerlessness and exploitation. It made me wonder what it means to be a custodian, or a rights owner. Is it possible to ethically look after personal content with no personal connection to the work?

How much should personal and cultural connection be a factor in rights ownership?

I also realised I don't know how consent and release forms work. I want to know more about

apartheid laws and consent, I wonder if my family signed anything?

Did apartheid era laws affect consent forms and release forms for Black subjects in films?

Tuesday 14 February 2023 Meeting with Brenda Kotze

Today I had the warmest Zoom meeting with Brenda Kotze, audio-visual archivist at The National Film, Video and Sound Archives of South Africa. We met on Zoom for around 2 hours, and only talked about the archive for half of the time. Brenda has been at the archive since the late 80s, having come from medicine, communications then HR. She started at the archives before liberation, so she has seen significant changes. She believes archive film and film history isn't valued at all in the country. When the ANC took over in '94 there was an interest in preserving audio visual heritage, but as funding became reallocated to more pressing concerns such as housing and health it meant the archive suffered. There isn't a strong political will and now, and there isn't the budget for expensive archive equipment. Brenda felt it is an African problem in general that there are often issues more pressing to spend budget on, but she does believe that there are

financial potentials to make revenue for the government out of the archive. I came into the archive the following day to meet Brenda in person, and she was just as brilliant.

Brenda also told me that the archive has received funding and support before from National Audio Video Archives of France and the British Sound Archives. They have collaborated on projects such as digitising the audio recordings from the Rivonia trial for a film 'The State Against Mandela and the Others'. Aside from this contributing to the conversation I had with Aboubakar about the West being the core providers of funds for archive, I appreciate that this project was artist led, and is a good example of what Jihan requested, which is filmmakers using archive in film innovatively to support archives.

A lot of our conversation was about identity, Brenda is retiring in three months (much to the tragedy of the archive) and wants to spend more time with her 'mixed race' grandson. It was wonderful to talk to her about



South African 'mixed' identities post-apartheid and how one should be able to define oneself by all cultural experiences and attributes, not just black and white. Something I am still working on!

We also reflected on our own personal relationships to archives and what rights we have to work with personal content. Brenda was of the opinion that video content such as interviews begs the question

“How is it possible to hold intellectual property over someone else’s story?”

Towards the end of the conversation, Brenda told me working in the archive she had "the privilege of seeing footage and learning about history that isn't out there." and "I wish filmmakers in SA would make new stories reflecting on the history." I was recommended to look into contemporary poetry coming from and reflecting on archives by my

friend Labeja Kodua, such as 'Surge' by Jay Bernard.

**Wednesday 15 February 2023
Meeting with Trevor T. Moses**

I feel really fortunate that I was able to meet with Trevor T. Moses, ("the T stands for trouble"), recently retired film archivist at The National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria. The actual location of the archive is on a beautiful plot of land with green hills, what a gorgeous place to work! Brenda arranged our interview and I am still unsure how the archive is going to survive with both Brenda and Trevor leaving. Trevor has an encyclopaedic knowledge of fiction content in the archive and was so willing to share with me what he knows.

Trevor told me that South Africa has one of the oldest film industries in the world (officially started in May 1896), and the oldest on the African continent. He gave me a list he made of South African film industry highlights from 1896 - 2018, an

amazing document with so many interesting facts. It was interesting to learn that in 1999 when M-Net bought a film library from PRI Media there was a huge digitisation project that transferred all the feature films from 1997-99 to digital, then proceeded to show them on TV and release them on DVD. This taught me another route to digitisation, procurement.

One of the biggest parts of our conversation was on the South African Censor Board, or Publications Control Board (PCB). I had understood that apartheid's oppressive policies permeated all aspects of life, but the film censorship was truly unhinged. For example, the children's book 'Black Beauty' by Anna Sewell, about a horse, was banned because of its 'offensive title' alone. Trevor gave me a censorship history timeline from 1913-2011, and also a list of PCB banned films prior to 1994. What I have learned from this list is the PCB REALLY did not like Sidney Poitier!



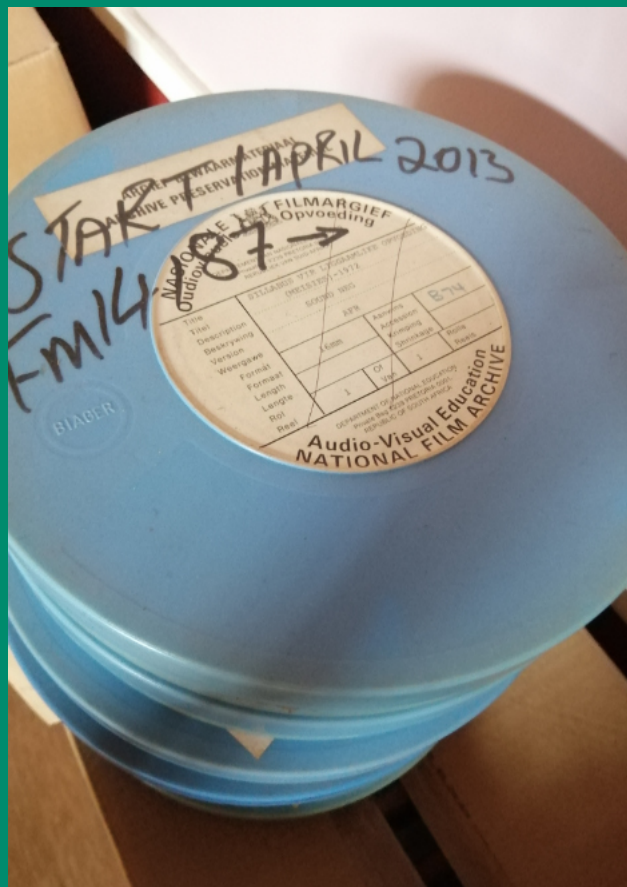


South Africa also has an interesting history of cinema and newsreels. TV wasn't introduced to the country until as late as 1976, so cinemas were important places for people to receive information, although media was tightly controlled. Newsreels were shown in cinemas from 1913 until as late as 1982. People used to use drive-in cinemas (until 2012) and interestingly despite apartheid, cinemas officially became 'multi-racial' from 1986, due to a threatened worldwide ban on film distribution in SA.

There are two instances that stand out to me in the censorship timeline that have rigid blanket statements about the conduct of South Africans. In 1965 Elmo de Witt's 'Debbie' received a high age restriction on a simple tale, as "No Afrikaans girl ever gets pregnant out of wedlock"; and in 1970 Mario Schiess' 'Onwettige Huwelik' was almost banned because supposedly "there has never been, nor will there ever be an unlawful marriage in SA". These justifications so confident in being able to speak for all South

Africans remind me of when I was working for Sport Heroes Walk Against Aids, a charity relay race across the country with SA sports celebrities. We went to a different town each night spreading the message of 'know your HIV status' and 'safe sex'. We were confronted by a town leader who, during our presentation in the Town Hall, cut in to say " but we know that no-one in this town EVER has unprotected sex or sex out of marriage", completely undermining our cause. This was in 2010.

In addition, learning about the censorship board also makes me think about the recent mess up with Black Girl at Joburg Film Festival and the lack of artistic context or value in the deciding process, just politics and conservatism. It seems to me that so many of the problems I am ruminating on with the archive relate to legislation, official bodies and policy. I have an assumption that delving further into law and suchlike is going to be too dense for me to understand or get my teeth into, or have minimal opportunities



to make change. But I guess that might be the British in me, with our nanny state and acceptance of authority. Perhaps I need to find the South African in me, and mobilise!

I wasn't able to look at any newsreels whilst I was in the archive due to the viewing table being out of action, but Trevor gave me the shots list for the Mirror newsreels from 1977 - 1984, and it was fascinating (although not surprising) to look through and see absolutely no mention of politics or civil unrest. It was like reading a lifestyle magazine with features on sports, Miss World and light international topics. What about the gaps in the archive that we know exist, but we can't see? How is that represented in the archive and talked about?

What is missing from the archive and how can we creatively fill in the gaps?

Perhaps it's a good starting point in how we use archives today, and an interesting place for filmmakers

to approach using film archives in contemporary context.

Thursday 16 February 2023 Meeting with Masego Mmutle

Listen [here](#) for interview with Masego
Click [here](#) for audio transcript

Today I spent the afternoon with the head of preservation, [Masego Mmutle](#), also at The National Film, Video and Sound Archives. She was incredibly inspiring! Masego fell into archives by accident, she didn't know what an archive was when she first took the job as an intern, but she threw herself into it and learned everything she knows from shadowing the late, great [Melisia Shinnars](#). Masego gave me an introduction to preservation, how it works in her department, what are their issues, and what are their future plans.

In summary, budget is one of the archives biggest problems, they also don't have connection to the government internet system so they can't upload their digital archive for public access, they thankfully aren't affected by load shedding, but they do have air con



problems in their vaults. They have management who are not particularly engaged with the archive, and they lack so much standard equipment. Also being a state archive, they have to go through a lengthy procurement process for all purchases, and there also are limited or no suppliers in the country for specialist equipment so then they are also dealing with a challenging import process.

However, despite all the above, Masego and Brenda both had a positive and hopeful outlook on the future of the archive, and the family-feel made it feel like such a warm place to work.

The lack of finance and resources at the archive I was kind of expecting, but it was definitely worse than I anticipated. Over the course of the day, Masego started the morning thinking she was going to the [FIAF Annual Congress in Mexico](#), and by the afternoon had been informed by her superiors that there wasn't the budget. A particular shame as the key topic

this year at FIAF is Women in Archives. Apparently, the management are more likely to be able to travel and represent at conferences, despite the fact they are not necessarily equipped to talk about archive work.

NOTE: As of 31 March 2023 Masego has now confirmed to be going to Mexico!

Saturday 18 February 2023 Time with dad

Since I've been in SA I am mostly working from my dad's house, planning my work around load shedding schedules, taking sunbathing breaks and the occasional trip to the local outdoor swimming pool. My dad, Oscar Mbabala Mpetha, works in government in Social Development and has spent most of my time here flying around the country and problem solving. We have made time together on weekends and evenings when we can, and it has been great to catch up - we see each other around every 4/5 years.

My trip having a film focus has a strong synergy with a project my dad is working on. He wants to make a documentary about his Granddad, Oscar Mafakafaka Mpetha. He is working with a local camera guy to go and collect as many stories and interviews with the elderly who knew Oscar, as unfortunately so many people are passing away. It was interesting to talk with him about how film archives are used in film, and after watching the VILLON family archive film together it has given me an extra purpose in my research into archives, so find any family footage possible, for example in British Pathe. In addition to this, my Great Grandmother Rose Mpetha also contributed to the struggle, and I will be looking for representations of her in archive as well.

I watched an amazing short documentary, You Have Struck a Rock (1981) by Deborah May, all about the protest against the issuing of passes to Black women. It used archive footage and



photographs and it made me think of Rose Mpetha (who was in attendance), her role in the struggle, and how in archive evidence of her struggle is less available as compared to her husband. A google search brings up much more about Oscar than Rose.

Where do women exist in the archive?

But also there is massive respect for women in South Africa, historically, politically and culturally which feels so different to the UK.

My dad is a natural storyteller and family historian, and I asked him to send me some voice notes about Rose specifically. He went to Cape Town and spoke with his Uncle Themba, Rose Mpetha's son, and his aunty, Granny Esther, and they sent me some stories. I like the idea that by recording my dad and family, I am contributing to the archive of my great grandmother.

Listen [here](#) to Themba Mpetha.
Click [here](#) for audio transcript

Listen [here](#) to Oscar Mpetha.
Click [here](#) for audio transcript

Listen [here](#) to Esther Mpetha.
Click [here](#) for audio transcript

Monday 20 February 2023 Watching films in the National Film Archive

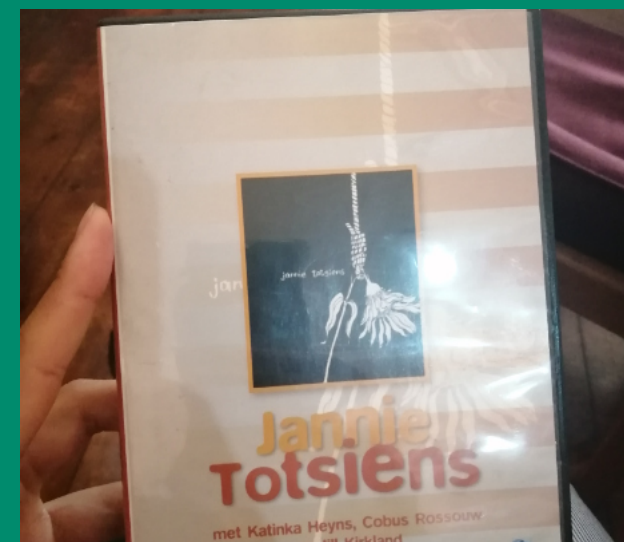
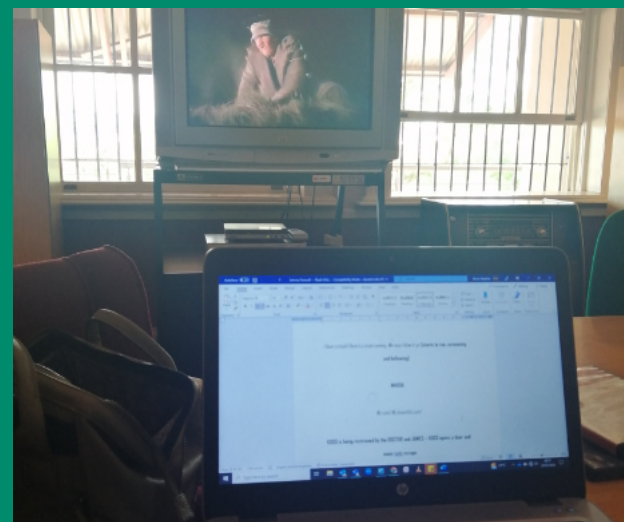
After just over two weeks in SA I have realised I absolutely do not have enough time to do all the things I want to do, but at least I have made a start! I spent this afternoon watching some archive films, back at the National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria. I ended up watching Farewell Johnny (1970) and Katrina (1969) by Jans Rautenbach and Fearless Child (1987) by Katinka Heyns. All Afrikaans filmmakers, as I was intrigued to watch Trevor's favourite films. In fact, one of the films didn't have English subs but Trevor loved the film so much he had written his own that I read along with the film.

Watching Afrikaans films with anti-apartheid messages was an interesting experience. I was challenged because often, we think in terms of black and white, good and bad in the UK, and bringing that thinking to SA was not helpful. The struggle has always been a shared effort, and I have to remind myself of that rather than thinking in binaries. Perhaps these filmmakers were using the tools at their disposal to fight the oppressors, their cameras. The films were fascinating, in particular Johnny Farewell, an abstract but direct criticism of apartheid government. All of the films I watched I couldn't believe they hadn't been banned, which tell us yet again, that the authorities doing the control do not have an artistic gaze and interpretation.

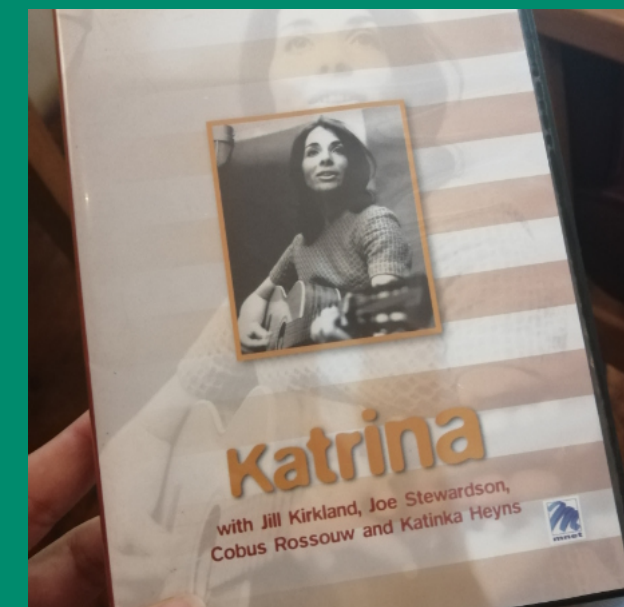
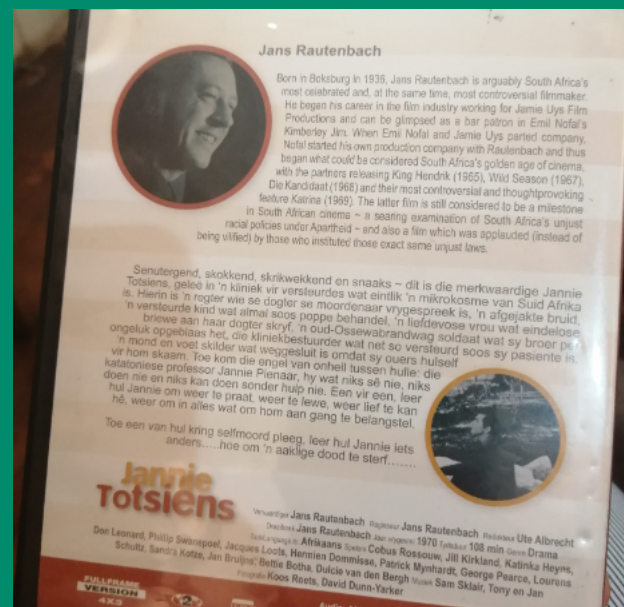




Handwritten notes in a notebook, mentioning 'John Fordell (1970)' and discussing a character's role in a film.



Handwritten notes for 'Film # 3 Fearless Child (1987)' by D. Katinka Heyns, describing the plot and the director's style.



Handwritten notes for 'Film # 2 Katrina (1968)' by Jans Rautenbach, discussing the film's themes and production.

