

# Maureen Ragoucy

# Portfolio, 2024

The work I develop is crossed by notions of history, memory, displacement and exile. Through a documentary approach, I question the plural identities related to territories, the way communities interact with their environment and the memorial, cultural, familial and linguistic legacies still present.

At the heart of the creative process, and according to a formal and rigorous working method, I invent devices around displacement and peregrination. The rules that I impose on myself are pretexts for the encounter, for which the camera or the recorder serve as a passport. By listening attentively, I establish a relationship of trust with my interlocutors. The lens isolates the other's gaze, her particularity, her singularity, her originality, while the recording of the interviews belongs to the invisible, the off-field.

What motivates me is to make the images dialogue with the stories I collect, to

give a voice, as a gesture carried by the need to understand and to say. First to strangers in the street in France. Then in Spain where, as a foreigner, I discovered the great number of Latin American immigrants, and became aware that my own foreignness could nourish my relationship with other foreigners. Perhaps recognizing themselves in part in my gaze, these foreigners confide in me. I continued my work in Mali and then in Senegal.

The result is often multiple - installations, photographs, sound recordings, books, videos and sometimes archival documents - combined in various forms, in a desire to construct narratives to which I associate the other as an actor, in order to give her a voice and to implement the means to transmit it. The personal and intimate stories that I collect are then close to the collective history, the living and oral heritage that I try to safeguard. In my installations, I interpret the

real which oscillates between dream and reality, myth and disillusion, fantasy and truth.

My quest took me from France to Mali to understand the story of family reconstruction between a young man in exile and his family back home (*Gassama Family*, 2009) and to Senegal to gather the story of a migratory adventure to Europe (*Barça mba barzakh?*, 2009). My encounters continue in Brazil to discover the Japanese cultural heritage (*Liberdade*, 2011); in Cape Verde, with the diaspora returned to its land of origin (*Sôdade*, 2014); in Benin, where an Afro-Brazilian identity persists from the memory of slavery (*The door of return* and *Bourian*, 2015, 2020). I followed my research in the Canary Islands, a link territory between Africa and Europe, to collect the words of West African exiles (*The chant of waves*, 2020). From 2011 to 2019, I worked on a long-term project about women who lived through the Second World War in France, Germany, Italy,

England, Poland, the United States, Russia and Japan, whom I called to remember (*Remember Barbara*).

As a resident artist, at Martine Franck artist residency in Peru, I question the cultural, social and linguistic diversity of Peruvian families (*Ari quepay*, 2017); and at *Des clics et des classes* photographic residency in France, the uncertainties and vulnerability of youth from the mining basin of northern France (*The black land* and *Return to the black land*, 2012, 2022).



*Awasa lake, Ethiopia, 2011*

# The Chant of Waves, 2020



*Virgen del Carmen, patroness of fisherman, Gran Canaria, Spain, 2020*

This project was born from interviews conducted in Mali and Senegal during which I asked two questions «Who are you?» and «What is your dream?», one of the most frequently cited answers is to join Europe. As a link between the African and European continents, the Canary Islands represent a complex territory, between a land of salvation and a prison island. *The song of waves* gathers photographs and epic stories of the sea and land crossings of Malian and Senegalese exiles from the African coast to Europe and reflects on the memories of exile.





« The sea journey is a real challenge.  
There are a lot of waves, the wind is blowing hard  
and all the elements were against us. »





« After experiencing Morocco,  
you can only imagine the worst.  
You get to the point where you think  
that even if it's just for a day, it's worth it. »

## Remember Barbara, 2013-2019

They were children, young or adult girls, students or working, frivolous or wise, today women tell us memories related to their daily life during the Second World war. Exile, resistance, escaping the ghetto, experience imprisonment, deportation, loss of loved ones, but also carelessness and lightness despite the horror, vulnerability, suffering, their war is above all survival. By not giving in to fear or submission, their lives will go from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Their faith in the future drives their action.

This documentary proposal is articulated between singular stories and collective history to transmit the war through the eyes of women, between illusions and realities in France, Germany, Italy, England, Poland, the United States, Russia and Japan.



*Nina Alexeevna Kodchenkova, Moscow, Russia, 2019*





Views from the exhibition *Remember Barbara*  
 Vietnamese Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2022-2023







Views from the exhibition *Remember Barbara*  
National Archives of France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France, 2018



# Bourian, 2020

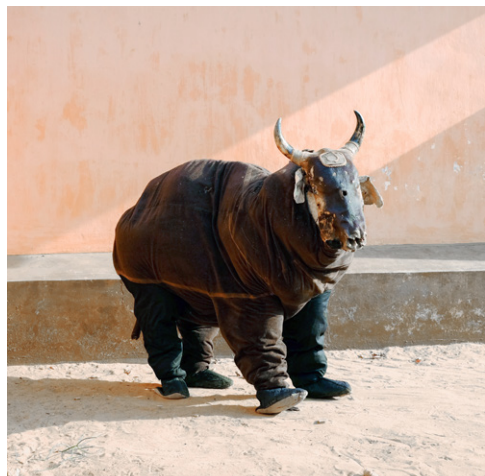
The Bourian is the most popular celebration among the Agudas - Afro-Brazilian descendants of the Gulf of Benin (Togo, Benin, Nigeria) - it is inspired by the carnival and the Brazilian Donkey celebration «Bumba meu boi». In this ballet-pantomime bewitched by percussion and traditional songs, each character, animal or celebrity, each costume and each posture embody as many symbols linked to the memory of the exile from the Gulf of Benin to Brazil («the West») and the memory of the return. We can therefore wonder: is pantomime an outlet for everyday difficulties, a celebration of the culture acquired during exile or the joyful expression of their nostalgia?

*Bourian* offers a reflection on contemporary history between the affirmation of plural identities, the need for freedom, and the claim for westernity, but also evokes memories of slavery as well as the lasting ties between the two continents - Latin America and Africa - and aims to bring together the cultures of yesterday and today.



*The ox, Espoir Bourian d'Agoué, Agoué, Togo, 2020*















## The Door of Return - Agoudas, 2015-2020

The Aguda community in Benin, and in neighbouring countries, refers to the descendants of Brazilians who (re) settled in Africa during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Strangely, the community mixes descendants of slave traders and descendants of slaves in the same identity affirmation. The photographs and sound recordings from this journey show the importance of the Brazilian cultural heritage in the country - mainly in the cities of Porto-Novo and Ouidah - and the extent to which, after centuries, it still feeds into the Beninese reality in a very visible way.



*Afro-brazilian families of Ouidah, Ouidah, Benin, 2015*

















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# Sôdade, 2014-2021

*Sôdade* is an impalpable and inexpressible emotion that does not belong to the understanding but to the heart. A complex and subtle feeling that evokes nostalgia and lack, sadness tinged with melancholic joy. This universal feeling was the starting point of my reflection in Cape Verde. Small country, located between South America, Africa and Europe, Cape Verde occupies a geographical position that facilitates migration. Migration due to the difficulty of surviving from agriculture and fishing, although very present. Music is important in Cape Verde and, like the mixed race of its population, it shows various influences. There is not an artist who does not sing about the Cape Verdean *sôdade*, the departure of a loved one, a family member or a dear friend, the uprooting or the love of the native country.

The video corpus *Sôdade* attempts to establish a link between the experiences of Cape Verdeans who have migrated and those who interpret their stories in song.



Paulo Gorge Mendes Correia, São Felipe, Fogo, Cap-Verde, 2014





*Poc li denté é tcheu*

Songwriter : Nhelas Spencer

Performance : Assol Garcia et Manuel de Candinho

*I know that life is hard here*

*But the solution is not to emigrate at the risk of your life*

*In the raging waves and under the cries of the captain*

*And if you make it to port you give thanks to the sky*

*Find me a job, I want to stay*

*I don't need a passport*

*I have what I need: my hoe, my hammer and my two arms*

*Don't force me to leave*

*You can't raise a child without a father*

[...]





*Alice*

Songwriter : Putchôta (Daniel Fernandez)

Performance : Putchôta et Nenelo Pina

*Everything you said  
I thought it was true  
But you soon broke your word  
And preferred a guy from America to me*

*O Alice, O Alice, O O Alice  
I'm dying for you*

*Oh my friends, I went to the market  
To find Alice  
When I got there  
She was with her American*

*O Alice, O Alice, O O Alice  
I'm dying for you*

[...]





*Stranger é um ilusão*  
Songwriter : Manuel de Novas  
Performance : Nilza Chalino et Chico Serra

*They think that emigrating leads to paradise  
That one earns one's life without effort  
Without torment, without fatigue*

*O sea, singular witness  
You know how homesick I am  
And you know how difficult my life is*

*For my beloved  
Do me a favor  
Send her a fiery kiss*

*Tell her that I live in cold and regret  
Far from my loved ones and their tender embrace*

[...]

# Liberdade, 2011

«Liberdade» («freedom» in Portuguese) is the name of the Japanese neighborhood in São Paulo, Brazil. 22 million people live in São Paulo, including 1.4 million Brazilians of Japanese origin. The megalopolis is home to the largest Japanese community in the world, outside of Japan. Between the culture of origin and the culture of adoption, *Liberdade* documents the stories of different generations of Brazilians of Japanese origin - the *isseis*, the first arrivals, born in Japan, the *nisseis*, their children, the *sanseis*, their grandchildren, the *yonseis*, their great-grandchildren - in an attempt to understand what remains of the Japanese culture through the generations and if it is still present today.



São Paulo, Brazil, 2011





*Maria Lucia Nikaedo Katakura, São Paulo, Brazil, 2011*

«In Japan, at that time, in 1933, it was said that if you worked in Brazil for three or four years, you would come back home rich. My father and mother stayed in Japan and my brother came to Brazil alone. They finally made the decision to join him. My father said that at that time he had bought a piece of land in the city of Tieté, but when he arrived, they looked for the land and realized that they had been swindled, the land did not exist.»



*Daniel Augusto Utsumi, São Paulo, Brazil, 2011*

«My paternal grandfather came at the end of the 1920's. He said that he bought a boat and spent forty-five days on the high seas to come here. He came for work, he was an agricultural engineer. My grandmother was a teacher. When she arrived, she didn't work anymore. It was one of those marriages of convenience, they knew each other from photos and so my grandmother made the decision to come and get married seven years after my grandfather had settled.»



# Barça mba Barzakh?, 2009



Booklets *Barça mba barzakh?*

«Going on an adventure» in Senegal means traveling by land or sea in the hope of reaching European borders. The journey then becomes a risky adventure where migrants come to question their destiny. «Barça mba barzakh?» «Barcelona or death?» is the rallying cry of Senegalese trying to reach Spain.



View from the exhibition *Rêver d'un autre monde*  
Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Lyon, France, 2016



Sénégal

C'était fin 2006. Le 28 décembre. Oui, c'était le 28 décembre qu'on est parti moi et un ami avec une fille aussi qui était enceinte et du coup on est parti en Casamance pour voir un marabout, pour préparer et après on est venu. On est retourné à Dakar jusqu'à N'Gor, c'est là qu'on a pris le bateau, c'était une pirogue. Oui parce que l'ami qui m'a raconté tout ça c'était un ami que son oncle, il faisait partie des gars, pour la pirogue, il travaille là-bas. C'est lui qui m'a dit: «Sans problèmes viens». Les gars ils ont payé 400 000, moi j'ai payé 350 000. Et du coup avant de partir il y a des gens qui disent: «non moi je reste ici». Après comme ça on a dit: «ceux qui veulent ils montent, ceux qui veulent pas ils restent, après on leur rend l'argent». Depuis Dakar, le gars tu le payes avant, il y a certains qui le payent avant. On lui dit là où il départ et à quelle heure.



Excerpt from the booklet *Barzakh*



## Gassama Family, 2009

In Mali, the culture of emigration has always been integrated, particularly in the region of Kayes from where thousands of migrants leave to reach the hypothetical El Dorado. Djamba, a young man of Sarakolé origin, left for France to support his family. Our meeting in Paris allowed us to create a special bond. I undertook to (re)create a visual communication between his family and him and to bring a testimony of Djamba's survival through this personal contact. The uprooting caused by the departure of the migrant, forces him to (re)build an identity between his country of origin and the country he discovers. He becomes a foreigner in search of «something» (in Soninke, «money») where he has a role to play.



*Boubou Gassama, Tambacara, Mali, 2009*



View from the exhibition *Gassama Family*  
Les Champs Libres - Musée de Bretagne, Rennes, France, 2009

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