A POWERFUL DOCUMENT OF A COMMUNITY VIGIL FOR ISLAN NETTLES, A TRANSGENDER WOMYN OF COLOR WHO WAS BEATEN TO DEATH IN FRONT OF A NEW YORK POLICE DEPARTMENT PRECINCT IN HARLEM

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545 8th Avenue, Suite 550, New York, NY 10018, E: twn@twn.org, T: (212) 947-9277 x 10, W: www.twn.org
TRANS LIVES MATTER! JUSTICE FOR ISLAN NETTLES

A documentary by Seyi Adebanjo

TRANS LIVES MATTER! JUSTICE FOR ISLAN NETTLES is a powerful and moving document of a community vigil for Islan Nettles, a Transgender Womyn of Color who was beaten to death in front of a New York Police Department precinct in Harlem. When Islan was taken off life support on August 22, 2013, she was only 21.

Islan was a vibrant 21-year-old Transgender Womyn of Color growing up in Harlem, who loved hanging out with her Transgender sisters of color. Islan used her creative and positive energy along with her anti-violence values in her work as an assistant photographer and fashion instructor at the Harlem Children’s Zone. At the time of her murder, she was working as an intern assistant designer in Harlem.

A few days after her death, Islan’s family and friends held a vigil at Jackie Robinson Park in Harlem, steps away from where she was murdered. With video and still images, Seyi Adebanjo documents the vigil and captures the love and support that the Transgender and Gender-Non-Conforming community brought to sustain each other and Islan’s family during this emotional time.

Seyi Adebanjo’s short film TRANS LIVES MATTER! JUSTICE FOR ISLAN NETTLES is part of the multimedia photography piece of the same name. The exhibit took place at the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art and was created in collaboration with the Queer/Art/Mentorship program. (2013, 7 min, U.S., English)

SEYI ADEBANJO is a Queer Gender-Non-Conforming Nigerian media artist. Seyi raises awareness around social issues through digital video, multimedia photography and writings. Seyi is the recipient of the Best International Short Film Award at the Sydney Transgender International Film Festival; Best Documentary Short at the Drama Baltimore International Black Film Festival; and Pride of the Ocean LGBT Film Festival Award. Seyi’s latest piece QYA: SOMETHING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO WEST AFRICA! is screening globally.

“Adabanjo captured the anger and sadness that soon galvanized the transgender community to fight for their own causes. The film is a mashup of photography, sound and video that crescendos in emotion. Most of Adabanjo’s visual work focuses on social justice and activism, and this one was no different.”

KIRATIANA FREELON
SHADOW AND ACT BLOG
CREDITS

Rest in Power Islan Nettles
Special Thanks to:
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Janet Mock
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Mike Kamber
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Elena Martinez
Steve Zeitlin
Amanda Dargan
Pam Sporn
Community:
Ronald Caldwell
Lourdes Ashley Hunter
Sasha Alexander
Egypt
Miss Kim & Cris
Community Kinship Life (CkLife)
Chanel Lopez
Anti Violence Project
Laverne Cox
Mariiah Lopez
Ni’Ja Whitson
Kokumo Kinetic
Imani Henry
Sean E. Coleman
Destination Tomorrow
Audre Lorde Project
Harlem Pride
New York City Black Pride
Gay Men of African Descent (GMAD)

TRANS LIVES MATTER! JUSTICE FOR ISLAN NETTLES

SCREENINGS

The Stream, Al Jazeera America
Bronx Documentary Center
San Francisco Transgender Film Festival
Minneapolis Transgender Film Festival
BlacktinX Performance Series
Sydney Transgender International Film Festival
Madrid International Lesbian Gay & Transsexual Film Festival
Gender Reel Performance & Film Festival
Black Star Film Festival
BFI Flare London LGBT Film Festival
UFVA Conference in Montana
PBS Channel 13, Broadcast
Rush Arts and Corridor Gallery
Pride of the Ocean’s LGBT Film festival on the High Seas
CineSLAM, Vermont’s LGBTQ Short Film Festival
Black Trans Media
New York Live Arts
ImageNation
Bed Stuy Pop Up Cinema
YeYo Arts Collective
Gender Reel NYU: Transgender Film Festival
Brooklyn Museum
Exclusive: Watch Experimental Short, 'Trans Lives Matter! Justice for Islan Nettles'

By Kiratiana Freelon | Shadow and Act

June 10, 2015 at 4:17 PM

The murder of transgender woman, Islan Nettles, coincided with my move to New York City in August of 2013. I moved to 112nd and Amsterdam Avenue on Friday, August 16, 2013. The day after I moved to the neighborhood, Nettles was beaten into a coma just blocks from my house, at 148th and Frederick Douglass Boulevard. The close proximity of this hate crime made me reflect on the rights and vulnerability of transgender women and men. I wondered if Nettles’ beating (and subsequent death) would transpire into something bigger for transgender people.

It did, and Seyi Adebanjo, an experimental filmmaker, was there to capture this moment.

One week after Nettles was admitted to the Harlem Hospital, she died from her injuries. Her murder shocked New York’s LGBTQ community. Harlem Pride, the community’s main gay rights group, took the lead and organized a vigil for Islan Nettles. But for transgender people, this vigil was a disappointment for myriad reasons.

“You had this vigil that was organized by gay men of color,” Adebanjo said. “All the transgender folks who wanted to speak, they didn’t let them speak.”

Adebanjo, a queer gender non-conforming Nigerian, captured the anger and sadness that soon galvanized the transgender community to fight for their own causes. The filmmaker’s seven-minute film, Trans Lives matter! Justice for Islan Nettles, is a mashup of photography, sound and video that crescendos in emotion. Most of Adebanjo's...
“Isi Nettles’ murder] makes you look at whose lives are disposable and don’t matter. These lives matter and my life matters,” Adebanjo said. “Our lives matter and we need to talk about it and show it being alive, so people don’t think they are crazy and alone.”

The seven-minute short film premiered in October on New York’s PBS channel thirteen as part of a shorts film festival. It was also shown at the Gender Reel film festival in New York in February (http://genderreelfest.com/). Today, the full film is unavailable online, but you can watch the seven minute version on Shadow and Act for the next seven days.

Seyi’s next project is a 30-minute “lyrical, rich” documentary that looks at him/her as a queer non-gender confirming Nigerian who goes home to connect with the Orisha religion. It looks at the gender fluidity that happens in spirituality in Nigeria.

Trans lives matter! Justice for Isi Nettles- Excerpt
from Seyi Adebanjo
LOVE AS REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICE
those around me….to step into what brother Darnell Moore has described as “acting in deep participation with each other”. It has also helped me to shift the ways in which I view intimacy. For me, love as manifested through intimacy should be about possibility, it should seek to push open, and break free in the most pleasurable sense. We must be careful though, because love is also in many ways about power and we must also seek to deconstruct and unlearn some dangerous discourses lest we find ourselves replicating the very ideologies and systems we are seeking to dismantle.

**Why are concepts of revolutionary love important?**

Politics is emotional. Economics is emotional. Exclusion is emotional. Activism is emotional. Psychic autonomy is emotional. Liberation is emotional. In evoking, exploring and living a politics of revolutionary love we are acknowledging that our work is not just about challenging the structural architecture of injustice but in shifting how we feel.

I think we also need in our activist work to constantly feed the positive, to instigate joy and to create resources of inspiration that can nourish our work for inclusive, just and nonviolent societies. Love is that resource. I walk alongside you because I care about your happiness, I want your freedom because your freedom is also my freedom.

I agree whole-heartedly with you Amina that self-love is an important part of this. As a luminary feminist mentor-friend of mine Hope Chigudu says “do we really think we can transform the world if our own bodies and spirits are broken”?

**What moves you in the ways that people have explored revolutionary love in this Issue?**

There are so many beautiful love stories in this issue. What a pleasure it was to read all the submissions! I think what has touched me the most is being able to reflect on the many ways people are envisioning love that is transgressive, bold and imaginative. I hope folks reading this issue enjoy it as much as we have!
As a Queer Gender Non Conforming Nigerian who uses art as activism I take it one breath at a time, and one day at a time. Love is a revolutionary act during these trying times in the world, in our hearts and minds.

Who I am and what I envision for the world are built upon many pillars in this global conversation about Human rights, Queerness, Blackness, and Africanness. It is outside the prescribed category of gender and race, mainstream Queer media/ and heteronormative, transphobic xenophobic white supremacist/ privilege Queer movements

One of those pillars is:

Bridging spirituality and social justice. Honoring and reclaiming indigenous ways of healing, practicing spirituality and organizing. Ensuring these practices, which are viewed, as private and personal spiritual conversations/practices are visible and pillars in our politics is important. We need to ensure that conversations about religion aren't just about institutions, that they are political conversation about spirituality. Our ancestors and present day healers/ spiritual leaders were/ are being killed, persecuted for these technologies. When we gathered for ritual/ honoring the divine/ mother earth/ our murdered community members, we organized our communities; we liberated ourselves and strengthened our inner selves for the fight.

Sharon Bridgforth states “The Spirituals invite us to know that multiple things can be true at the same time: That we can stand fully in our brokenness and hope. That we can fully express our sorrow and fight. That even when our dreams are shattered and there is no evidence of Grace, we are never alone.”

Trans Lives Matter! Justice for Islan Nettles is a powerful and intensely moving document of a community vig il/ spiritual for Islan Nettles a transgender Womyn of Color, concerning her spirit and life. Islan was a vibrant 21-year-old womyn of Color growing up in Harlem, who loved hanging out with her transgender sisters of color. Islan used her creative and positive energy along with her anti-violence values in her previous work at the Harlem Children's Zone as an assistant photographer and fashion instructor. She was working as an intern assistant designer at Ay’ Medici in Harlem. Islan's murder was a shocking hate crime because she was beat to death in front of a Harlem police precinct on W. 148th St & Frederick Douglass Boulevard.

I was inspired to create the exhibition at the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art with Queer/ Art/ Mentorship because we can mourn & celebrate life, we can love, liberate each other and not oppress ourselves. Because the personal is political! Because the brutal and increasing attacks on Trans Womyn of Color are outrageous, and their victimization causes outrage. Because the murders of Queer Trans/Gender Non Conforming People of Color is the second wave of lynching’s. Because healing and action tighten our fists and boom our voices.
Actively showcasing Queer Trans/Gender Non-Forming People Of Color is imperative and urgent because if people continue to think the divine doesn’t love them, how will people get strength to fight, love, live and worship?

For any of us to do this work on an individual/community/institutional level, we need to know we matter and see ourselves reflected. One of the ways we are visible is within our gender expression. Gender is a dangerous conversation because it makes people uncomfortable and moves them to violence. Supporting others in being visible, overcoming personal and institutional trauma’s are rooted in my politics of using love to liberate. Which means taking risk, speaking up when I see injustice and am afraid. Being courageous to live and supporting community to live everyday and creating as much love, fulfillment, success and joy we feel we are worthy. Trans Lives, Queer Lives, African Lives and My Life Matter! Courage and love are necessities to live our lives fully and liberate our communities.

More on Seyi’s work

1. The exhibition page at Leslie Lohman

2. Current project about being Queer & Gnc in Nigeria
https://www.facebook.com/OyaWestAfrica?ref=hl

Ọya: Something Happened On The Way To West Africa!

Follow my journey as a Queer Gender Non Conforming Nigerian as I return home to speak directly with ancestors, connect with Òrísá (African Goddess) tradition, and follow a trail back to the powerful legacy of my great grandmother,Chief Moloran Iyá Oloya. This personal and political story vibrantly investigates the heritage of command, mythology, gender fluidity and womyn’s power in indigenous Yorùbá spirituality. As I encounter obstacles of a national strike and anti-gay marriage legislation to find the roots of the practice, will I be able to take on this inheritance?

The documentary illuminates the lives of Òrísá Oya (Warrior Goddess), Chief Moloran Iyá Oloya and Seyi Adebanjo while interweaving Yorùbá mythology, poetry, performance, and interviews.

3. Upcoming screening, Q & A in New York City
http://cinema.tisch.nyu.edu/object/GRNYU.html

Gender Reel NYU: Transgender Film Festival showing Trans Lives Matter! Justice for Islan Nettles
Event Date: February 7-8, 2015

4. Screening and exhibiting photos from the film
Trans Lives Matter! Justice for Islan Nettles
At the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference June 4-6th, 2015
Queer/Art Mentorship presents, Seyi Adebanjo: Trans Lives Matter! at Leslie-Lohman Museum’s Wooster St Window Gallery. For the exhibition, artist, activist and QAM 2013-14 fellow in film making, Seyi Adebanjo has produced eight large scale photos. Selected from Adebanjo’s series of photographic and video works that document black trans community rallies, their empathic eye bears witness to people as they collectively grieve, give each other strength, and voice outrage at “Cops, court, racism, jail, transphobia, prison, neighborhood violence, policing, classism and profiling. The level of criminalization and violence we deal with at the intersection of our black trans lives reveals the need for healing and justice in our communities.” (Quote from Sasha Alexander, founder of Black Trans Media.)

Artist Statement: Seyi Adebanjo:
I am a visual artist who raises awareness around social issues through multi-media photography, performance art and documentary video. My work is the intersection of art, media, imagination, ritual and politics. My work is lyrical, engaging people in trans-formative, political and spiritual dialogues. My art communicates with a distinct voice on many themes: gender fluidity, Queerness, spirituality, “Womyn” of Color, transgender People of Color, and white supremacy. Motivated by my passion to make the invisible visible, my art claims space and reclaims lives.

My art practice is built upon the foundation of my cultural heritage, ritual, political histories and hybrid identities. As a Queer gender non-conforming Yorùbá Nigerian living in the South Bronx I situate the work in the techniques & aesthetic of African Cinema, Third cinema, lyrical documentaries, AfroSurrealism, Theatrical Jazz, utilizing Julie Dash, Marlon T. Riggs, Ousmane Sembène, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Sharon Bridgforth & The Black Audio Film Collective for inspiration. My multi-media projects rewrite visual style and evoke a dialogue between technology, class, gender, spirituality and language.