

Omotola Okunlola
Doctoral Candidate
African Cultural Studies Department
Destination: Nigeria

**Fieldwork Report for IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award and BLAC
Foundation Award**

I am immensely grateful for the support I received through the IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award and the BLAC Foundation supplementary award in 2022. The awards enabled me to carry out fieldwork research in Nigeria for seven months, between June 2022 and January 2023.

Entitled “Woman in Transition: Reimagining African Feminisms in Nigerian Film and Literature,” my dissertation research explores contemporary feminist politics in African literature and film. My research seeks to answer three main questions in the field: first, what are the traditional assumptions of dominant theories of African feminism? Second, what are the new feminist sensibilities in African cultural productions by African female filmmakers and writers? Third, what are the social, cultural, and political processes that shape the representational shifts in African women’s film and literature? Some of my chapters are focused on women in the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, as well as female writers in the country. My fieldwork was broadly aimed at understanding the network of forces that has historically shaped women’s literary and cinematic representations in the country.

I arrived in Lagos, Nigeria on June 15, 2022, and quickly proceeded to Ibadan, which was to be the base of my research for the first three months. Before I left Madison, I had neatly arranged a timeline for my research, apportioning the first three months to archival research and the last

four to interviews. In the first part, I would conduct three months of research at the Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan (the largest archive in Nigeria). This archival research would allow me to gather media material (newspapers, magazines, tabloids) that can help shed light on the colonial and postcolonial historiography of representation of women in Nigerian literature and film.

The first part of my research went exactly as I planned it. The grant I received from IRIS and the BLAC Foundation contributed immensely to my ability to quickly settle down and get to work. My familiarity with the location of my fieldwork was also useful in this regard. I resumed to the archives located inside the University of Ibadan every day and was able to gather a lot of relevant materials for my research. Although it was not part of my initial plan, I was also able to access materials from two other locations in the University of Ibadan: the Kenneth Dike Library and the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA-Nigeria) library. Furthermore, because there is a thriving literary and arts community in Ibadan, I was able to attend literary events and programs at literary and culture hubs such as Tunde Odunlade Gallery and the American Corner. At these events, I spoke with people in the Nigerian literary and film community and was able to gain a lot of insights that helped with my research. The contacts that I made at these events were also helpful in facilitating some of my interviews.

Although I had neatly delineated my field research into two timeframes, I soon found out that the interviews could not be done that way because I had to work with the often-chaotic schedules of my interviewees. During the time I was doing the archival research, I started to establish connections and make contacts with Nigerian female filmmakers and writers that I wanted to interview. Following this, I started to arrange interviews during the time I was doing archival research. I used the last four months of my fieldwork to concentrate on interviews with female filmmakers and literary writers in Nigeria. These interviews allow me to get the

perspectives and opinions of these women on the resistance politics, ideologies, and strategies that simultaneously influence and constitute the representations in their work. Also, thanks to the support received, I was able to get a good recording device that I used for audio-visual recordings of interviews and to take scanned pictures of important documents retrieved from the archives.

One of the highlights of my trip was being able to meet and interview South African writer, Zukiswa Wanner. Even though I was using her work in one of my dissertation chapters, I would not have been able to meet with her if I had not been in Nigeria. She was attending the Ake Festival in Lagos, Nigeria, and on one of my trips to Lagos in November 2022, we sat down for an interview. This meeting opened other interview possibilities to me and I hope to explore some of the leads I got in the summer of 2023.

Upon returning to Madison, I have been analyzing the data collected as well as my notes during the fieldwork. The information gathered during the fieldwork will complement my literary and film analysis of the texts selected for my dissertation. Significantly, the fieldwork research will help me contextualize the findings of my textual close reading and enable me to complete my dissertation. The research will also help me to produce new understandings of feminist resistance strategies which go beyond representational politics and that are directly observable in the lived experiences of African women such as the Nigerian ones that I intend to study.