



OUTRIDERS AFRICA

In early 2020 five pairs of writers embarked on life-changing journeys through Africa meeting other writers and communities along the way and engaging in wide-ranging discussions around migration, colonial legacies, inequalities, globalisation and environmental change.

This was the result of the Edinburgh International Book Festival's 2020 African edition of *Outriders*, a unique literary development project initiated in 2017 (in the Americas) that aims to contribute to our understanding of the world, giving voice to untold stories.

Featuring emerging and established Scottish and international writers, *Outriders Africa* represented a range of practice, nationalities, ethnicities, backgrounds and genders. The five pairs journeyed across Africa between January and March 2020 and each writer was tasked with creating a new work in response to their journey to present at the Edinburgh International Book Festival (EIBF) 2020. None of them would know when they set out how significantly the world would change in the months to come.

The *Outriders* project itself was born back in 2017 when the EIBF devised a unique initiative to explore the idea that, in shifting and turbulent global times, writers could, and should, provide new insights on the world and contemporary geopolitics. In its first outing *Outriders* enabled ten writers to travel across the Americas, in pairs, offering them not only priceless experiences and material for their own work but also helping them nurture long-term creative partnerships, creating opportunities to present their work to new audiences. During the 2017 EIBF the *Outriders Americas* writers came together to talk about their travels, the people they met along the way and the work that the experience invoked.

“Momentum has given the Book Festival extraordinary opportunities to try out new ways of working with writers, and to forge new partnerships.”

NICK BARLEY,
EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL
BOOK FESTIVAL



Photo: Nadine Aisha Jassat and Amanda Thomson celebrate connecting at Cape Point. Photo credit: Nadine Aisha Jassat.

for the *Outriders Africa* project in 2020. After a summer of relationship building, EIBF Director, Nick Barley, attended the African Writers' Conference in Nairobi in December 2019 and made a deep connection with Jalada Africa, a pan-African writers' collective with extensive connections across the African continent and by the end of the year the *Outriders Africa* programme had come together.

The Momentum programme allowed the Book Festival to turbo charge their existing plans and enabled fresh creative encounters on the African continent. Rather than simply being tourists, the participants were truly connecting to cultural seams through writing groups and networks in Africa. At the time of planning the *Outriders* participants would never have imagined the different world in which they would be recollecting and recounting their adventures, but here's how they got on.

Glaswegian poet and writer Kei Miller was paired with Edinburgh-based musician Kayus Bankole for **Outriders #1**. Kei & Kayus embarked on a deeply personal journey through Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana exploring 'home' through the

Rastafari culture in Ethiopia and the idea of ancestral heritage in Ghana, contrasting spiritual, musical and storytelling along the way.

Kei travelled to Shashamene in Ethiopia which had special significance to him because it was donated to the people of the African diaspora in America and the Caribbean, by Emperor Haile Salassie in the 1950s, a figure who is revered as the messiah of Rastafarianism. Kei's focus was on the contrast between his experience of, and personal relationship with Ethiopia as a spiritual homeland, and Ghana, as an ancestral home.

Kayus's focus was routed in local musical traditions and while in Ghana he collaborated with a group of musicians in Accra. One of the resulting songs will be included in a collection of new work by the *Outriders*, published by Cassava Republic.



Both Kei and Kayus appreciated that many people from Jamaica hailed originally from these areas of West Africa because of the slave journey and realised just how connected both their stories were, even though they'd originated from very different parts of the world themselves

Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga and Edinburgh-based poet and writer Nadine Aisha Jassat were paired up for the most ambitious of all the Outriders' journeys. Their plan for **Outriders #2** was to follow the route that David Livingstone's body took when it was carried by his attendants after his death in Chitambo, a village in modern day Zambia. It gave them both the opportunity to return to places close to them from childhood, to investigate ancestry and respond to new places, all the while discovering wonderful partnerships with other writers, individuals, and organisations along the way.

On 11 March the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. At this point Nadine and Tsitsi were in Kasanka National Park, Zambia, and over the next few days as the global situation escalated massively the pair made the decision that Nadine should return to the UK as soon as possible. To catch a connecting flight, they drove overnight to get to a town called Tabora and only just made it, even grappling with a broken-down truck on the way. Nadine then had an epic three-day journey back

home to Edinburgh. Tsitsi who lives in Zimbabwe completed the journey on her own, arriving in Bagamoyo, the port town where Livingstone's body was shipped back to Britain, and consequently travelled home safely, with a story to tell!

Outriders #3 saw writer Wanjiru Koinange and travelling partner Donna Obaseki-Ogunnaike embark on a journey from The Gambia, through Senegal to Rwanda, exploring the way that technology has influenced how we love in Africa, and saw the pair collecting stories from women balancing their sensuality, grief and the patriarchy.

Their journey explored themes of love, romance and womanhood in modern Africa and Wanjiru and Donna collected stories and interviewed locals in the places they visited posing questions such as: Where does love live in your city?

What cities, towns or places would you describe as romantic? What's inspiring companionship in your city? How are people hooking up?

Wanjiru and Donna struck up an amazingly strong bond whilst travelling together which will undoubtedly persist throughout their careers. This kind of relationship shows the real value of the Outriders project: long lasting, intercontinental, creative relationship building. And friendship!

Glasgow-based visual artist Amanda Thomson teamed up with poet, playwright and performer Sabrina Mahfouz for **Outriders #4**. They planned to travel to South Africa and Botswana, challenging both Amanda and Sabrina's propensity to travel north on the continent. They explored the differences in light, landscape, flora and fauna at the southern tip of Africa.

“Outriders Africa was a wonderful experience... it gave me the opportunity to investigate ancestry, while also exploring and responding to new places, all the while discovering a wonderful partnership with other writers, individuals, and organisations. I am so grateful that I was able to be a part of this opportunity.”

NADINE AISHA JASSAT



Amanda and Sabrina were supposed to meet in Cape Town and travel to Pretoria in the north of South Africa by train, a journey symbolic of Amanda's connection with the Scottish Highlands and the way she feels pulled to the north. Sadly Sabrina arrived in Cape Town as the threat of Coronavirus was recognised globally and their trip was cut short, however Amanda was able to cross paths with Outriders #2 and explored Cape Point National Park, Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens and Table Mountain with Nadine before she departed to Zambia for Outriders #2.

Writer, journalist and digital publisher Eliza Anyangwe teamed up with travel writer Emmanuel Iduma for **Outriders #5**. Emmanuel and Eliza chose to examine identity as an African traveller and explored what travel writing is through the lens of female and queer voices.

Emmanuel and Eliza's trip took them from one side of the continent to the other. After much deliberation, planning and visa endeavours, Emmanuel and Eliza settled on this itinerary: Madagascar, Comoros and Uganda together, then Cape Verde and Algeria individually. Sadly the Covid-19 pandemic meant that Eliza was not able to travel to Algeria as the borders had closed and Emmanuel was unable to travel to Cape Verde for the same reasons. However, Eliza confided to Emmanuel that, on the back of their shared experience, she had taken the decision to write her first novel and the two have developed a strong bond through the trip.

Despite Covid-19's best efforts to derail *Outriders Africa* the project has been a success and we look forward to hearing more about the participants' experiences in the near-future in a new collection

Photo: Wanjiru Koinange and Donna Obaseki-Ogunnaike during Outriders #3. Photo credit: Donna Obaseki-Ogunnaike.

of works published by Cassava Republic. *Outriders Africa* has provided the impetus and inspiration for longer term legacy projects like AfroLitMap, a digital mapping literature project and a collaboration between Jalada Collective and the University of Edinburgh. The project is responsible for creating numerous, deep connections between Scottish and African creative partners. It's hoped that these connections will develop and mature into the future, benefiting both Scottish and African writers for years to come.

THE OUTRIDERS

Outriders #1



KEI MILLER

Born in Jamaica in 1978 Kei now lives in the UK and writes across a range of genres: novels, books of short stories, essays and poetry. He has won the Forward Prize for Best Collection (2014) and has been shortlisted for the Costa Book Award for Poetry, the Dylan Thomas Prize, and the Jonathan Llewelyn Rhys Prize.



KAYUS BANKOLE

Kayus is a founding member and key creative force within the musical group, Young Fathers. The band have attracted critical praise the world over winning the Mercury Prize and the Scottish Album of the Year prize twice. Orbiting around the band, Kayus has deftly turned his hand to spoken word, exhibition curation, cultural conversations, contemporary dance and realms beyond.

Outriders #2



WANJIRU KOINANGE

Born and raised on a farm on the outskirts of Nairobi, Wanjiru's articles and essays have been published in print and online platforms. In 2019 she undertook a Masters in Creative Writing the product of which is her debut novel, *The Havoc of Choice*. When she isn't writing, Wanjiru is restoring Nairobi's iconic public libraries through Book Bunk—a social impact firm working to convert neglected libraries into inclusive spaces of art, learning and community.



DONNA OBASEKI-OGUNNAIKE

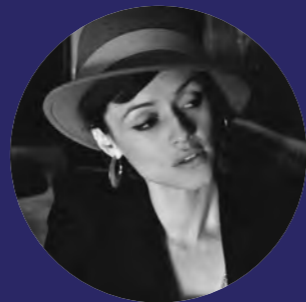
Donna is an Energy Law expert, poet, writer and theatre practitioner. Her theatrical productions *Love Like Slave and Strelitzia...An Experiential Journey To Self* were hosted by the British Council and Lagos Theatre Festival in 2016, 2017 and 2018. She has two audio albums, *Water For Roses* and *Cessy's Daughter* and her poetry shows have been hosted by the EIBF and BBC Art Talk on the Hour.

Outriders #3



DR AMANDA THOMSON

Amanda is a visual artist and writer from Scotland who teaches at the Glasgow School of Art. Her interdisciplinary work is often about notions of home, movements, migrations, landscapes and the natural world and how places come to be made. She lives and works in Glasgow and in Strathspey and feels an inexorable pull to the north. Her first book, *A Scots Dictionary of Nature* is published by Saraband Books.



SABRINA MAHFOUZ

Raised in London and Cairo Sabrina is an award-winning writer and performer. She has won a Sky Arts Academy Award for Poetry, the Westminster Prize for New Playwrights and a Fringe First Award for her play *Chef*. Her play *With a Little Bit of Luck* won the 2019 Best Drama Production at the BBC Radio & Music Awards. She also writes for children and her play *Zeraffa Giraffa* won a 2018 Off West End Award. Sabrina has recently been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Outriders #4



TSITSI DANGAREMBGA

Tsitsi was born in Mutoko, Zimbabwe. Her first novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) was hailed by Doris Lessing as one of the most important novels of the twentieth century and was included in the BBC's 2018 list of the 100 books that shaped the world. Tsitsi founded the Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa in 2009, and its publishing division in 2014. She is writing *Sai-Sai and the Great Ancestor Of Fire*, a dystopian speculative young adult fiction and runs capacity building programmes for female African filmmakers.



NADINE AISHA JASSAT

Nadine is a writer and creative practitioner. Her poetry, narrative non-fiction and short stories have been published widely, including in *It's Not About the Burqa* (Picador) and 404 Ink's highly-praised *Nasty Women*. She received a Scottish Book Trust New Writers' Award for Fiction in 2018, won the British Council's UK Open Call for the Discover project, and the prestigious Edwin Morgan Poetry Award. In 2017, she was named one of 30 Inspiring Young Women Under 30 in Scotland by YWCA Scotland. Her 2019 debut poetry collection, *Let Me Tell You This* (404 Ink, 2019) was described by Scotland's Makar Jackie Kay as a 'punchy, powerful debut'.

Outriders #5



ELIZA ANYANGWE

Eliza has spent the past decade in media working for the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, narrative change organisation the Rules, the Guardian and CNN Africa. She is now a writer, managing editor of new digital publisher The Correspondent, and the founder of The Nzinga Effect, a media project focused on telling the stories of African and Afro-descendant women.



EMMANUEL IDUMA

Emmanuel Iduma is a Nigerian writer, editor, publisher, and art critic. He is the co-founder of Saraba Magazine and the author of *The Sound of Things to Come*. He teaches in the MFA Art Writing Program at School of Visual Arts, New York City and divides his time between Lagos and NYC. Emmanuel is the author of *A Stranger's Pose*, a book of travel stories, which was longlisted for the 2019 Ondaatje Prize, and *The Sound of Things to Come*, a novel.

“The Outriders Africa Project was a journey that sat with my vulnerabilities and, for me, cured them: to be naked before an other, expecting chaos, and finding, with each turn that you are safe. It was a lovely experience. I would do it all over again!”

DONNA OGUNNAIKE



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