



JOHN CABOT UNIVERSITY

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The Root/The Bloom: Screening & Talk with Filmmakers Echaka Agba and Kristina Valada-Viars

by **Samantha Bane**

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On October 18, JCU welcomed filmmakers and partners in life, Echaka Agba and Kristina Valada-Viars, for a screening of two of their recent short films *The Root*, and *The Bloom*. The two films are part of the series “Where Could We Go: A Map of Finding Home.” *The Root* was an official selection for the Black X Film Festival (2021) and Afrikana Independent Film Festival (2021). The event was organized and presented by Professor Marco G. Ferrari of JCU’s Department of Communications in collaboration with JCU student clubs, the Africans in the World Cultural Club and The Queer Alliance, as well as the Virginio & Marisa Ferrari Foundation.

The first short film, (*Coordinate 1*) *The Root: Looking for Ancestors in My Father’s Garden*, is a reflection on family as the pair seeks a home that prioritizes Black and Queer Liberation. Full of references to the earth and nature, *The Root* explores home as the starting point of an expedition, a point of reference, to which a part of one’s identity is tied. In the summer of 2020, Agba and Valada-Viars traveled from their home in Chicago to Agba’s family home in rural Indiana to document a series of conversations with their elder relatives centered around the concept of home. These conversations with her family about memories made, values formed, and challenges met in their path from Nigeria to the American Midwest led Agba to wonder, “What would plant me *here*?” in her father’s garden.

Both Agba and Valada-Viars maintain that the ability to identify where you come from can be illuminating to your experience and sense of self. In carrying out interviews with family members, the couple sought an exchange of thought and experience. This approach revealed the heal

that can come from the process of understanding where our family members come from. “The more specific something is,” said Valada-Viars, “the more universal it can be.”

If *The Root* asks questions of the past, *The Bloom* asks questions of the future and works to find an answer. (*Coordinate 2*) *The Line in Bloom*, Agba and Valada-Viars’ second short film, is a poetic, forward-facing piece that

takes the conversation of home and one’s roots to the “next generation:” members of their family who grew up in the U.S., their close friends, and intimate partners. “Which lineage do we continue?” asks the film, “Which future do we labor into being?”

In a director’s statement, the duo explains that “We made this film to create opportunities for conversation around what true connection and liberation could mean. We believe our self-expression and artistic vulnerability provide an opportunity to close the distance between diverse life experiences.”

“If I saw diversity, would I feel more comfortable, would I feel more possible?” Agba and Valada-Viars ask in *The Bloom*.



From left: Echaka Agba and Kristina Valada-Viars



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