Reading Pointers and Preparation for ‘Skinned’ and ‘Spider the Artist’.

Optional contextual preparation:

Arimah:

Watch this short video interviewing Lesley Nneka Arimah (discussing her short story collection, rather than this Caine Prize winning short story—but the interview is still useful in giving insight and context):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPEq3rjkBfQ>

Read this coverage of ‘Skinned’ on its award of the Caine Prize:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48920395>

The ‘osu’ caste or class, which is featured in Arimah’s story, is a real social category in part of contemporary Nigeria. Please read Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s article for further info: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-descendants-of-slaves-in-nigeria-fight-for-equality?utm_source=onsite-share&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=onsite-share&utm_brand=the-new-yorker>

For further context on Nigeria’s legislative/political conflicts concerning clothing, see this outline of the Indecent Dress Bill:

https://www.peacewomen.org/content/nigeria-grace-ushangs-death-and-indecent-dressing-bill

Okorafor:

Here’s a short interview with Nnedi Okorafor on her writing process and contemporary literature’s function for African readers:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHRMWc0w6BA>

Watch this short TED talk by Nnedi Okorafor, on her reasons for writing science fiction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt0PiXLvYlU&t=52s>

Okorafor uses as its epigraph an extract from the title track ‘Zombie’, from the great Nigerian musician Fela Kuti’s 1976 album. This album threw a bomb at the military government of Nigeria; the fall-out was massive. Here’s a link to the title track; it carries a lot of information as well as the lyrics. Typical of Kuti, the first portion (about five minutes) is instrumental:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj5x6pbJMyU>

To think about, as you read the two stories:

--Consider the relationship Arimah’s story posits between gender inequality and socio-economic inequality. Does class privilege confer material, social freedom from patriarchy, for women? Or do class divisions operate more as a psychological boundary that obscures women’s recognition of their shared condition of patriarchal oppression? If you read the articles on Nigeria’s Indecent Dress Bill and/or on the ‘osu’ caste, how might these contexts illuminate Arimah’s story?

--What is the function of art—specifically, music—in Okorafor’s story? If you watched ‘Zombie’, what kind of intertextual relationship does her story have with Fela’s song?

-- Would you say that in these stories it is sexuality, rather than maternity, that is the dominant factor in women’s gendered experience? Or is marriage represented as the defining feature in women’s gendered experience?

--Think about the representation, and role, of public and private physical spaces in the stories—rooms, wasteland, streets, etc. Think back to the representation of domestic space in *The Convert*. Are there similarities? Is there significance in the fact that Arimah makes Ejem a trained architect?

--Think about the different literary styles and techniques deployed by the short stories. Both are speculative, rather than realist, in approach, taking elements from contemporary life and developing them as part of an imaginary future. But there are some significant differences in the style of the two texts. What are these?

--Would you describe these literary texts as examples of STIWANISM?