

Research Field Station #10

Omo Sapiens

by Lara Rose



*their Parents just,
Receiv'd all nations with
promiscuous lust.
This Nauseous Brood directly did
contain
The well extracted Blood of
Englishmen.*

From Daniel Defoe, *The True-Born
English Man*

by Lara Rose



forget our founders and ancestors: Moremi, Oduduwa and Queen Luwo. It is also important to recognise the contexts of former and present day Yoruba kingdoms or tribes: E.g. Ile Ife, Oyo, Abeokuta and Oshogbo. It is also important to remember shrine assemblages that attract good and deterrent assemblages that were created to ward off evil. The list is endless but most of all, it is important for me to discover Akanpo (status determined by clothing) and reinstate Aworan (a sculptural practice - visual representation). Finally, Ori Olokun sculpture and other Yoruba sculpture from Ife have, in turn, influenced Benin sculpture and my Akanpo, Aworan sculpture in Leeds!

my aunt's funeral and hopefully feel a sense of belonging with remnants of my *Oguntade* family!

Indeed, I birth the lyrics to my song, *Nomad Woman* to reflect this:

I was born in a land that is cold, yes it snows...
... don't know who I am boy, don't know who I am lord
Mama, please tell me there's a plan here...

Afropolitanism is simply defined as *citizens of the world (cosmopolitans) with African roots*. It is constructed from the name "Africa" and Greek word(s) "polis" (citizen) or better still the word "kosmopolitēs" ('citizen of the world'). Contrary to popular opinion, the term Afropolitanism originated in South Africa coined by Achille Mbembe and popularised by writer Taiye Salasi. Salasi penned an essay, *Bye-Bye Babar* (2005) in which she defined Afropolitans as 'Africans of the world' identifying multiple local peoples of African descent worldwide. Salasi, in her Ted Talk, also introduced the newest generation of African emigrants, saying "Were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question – 'where are you from?' – you'd get no single answer from a single smiling dancer."

We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world!

win-win decolonisation outcome for Yorubas and humanity on both the continent and diaspora alike.

For when you domesticate a member of our own species, you reduce his output, and however little you may give him, a farmyard man finishes by costing more than he brings in. For this reason the settlers are obliged to stop the breaking-in halfway; the result, neither man nor animal, is the native. Beaten, undernourished, ill, terrified—but only up to a certain point—he has, whether he's black, yellow, or white, always the same traits of character: he's a sly-boots, a lazybones, and a thief, who lives on nothing, and who understands only violence. Poor settler; here is his contradiction naked, shorn of its trappings. He ought to kill those he plunders, as they say djinns do. Now, this is not possible, because he must exploit them as well. Because he can't carry massacre on to genocide, and slavery to animal-like degradation, he loses control, the machine goes into reverse, and a relentless logic leads him on to decolonization.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963)

Dr. Geraldine Connor (1962-2011)
2022

Installation view in foyer of
Leeds School of Arts, Leeds
Beckett University.



One account collected and published by Harold Courlander in Tales of Yoruba gods and Heroes, describes the pre-historic settlement of Ife. Ife, indeed, the whole world, was a desolate marshy stretch inhabited by the goddess of the sea Olokun. Above the swamp was the sky, the domain of Olodumare, the Supreme Being.

One cannot help but note a similarity between the two stories, a heavenly supreme being, a chaotic and latent earth with a residing spirit or deity and an executor of order or creator of order to the earth, but I digress. The popular *Ori Olokun* Bronze Ife head currently at the British Museum in London, is to venerate *Olokun*, the ocean deity and he/she is said to be androgenous. It occurred to me that as an artist my creative drive is an instinctive response to opposing nature's propensity for disorder too. I am metaphorically speaking, trying to bring light or create order to the mass of chaotic building blocks I encounter on the surface of the deep so to speak. In engaging with Yoruba culture coupled with contemporary practices I am constantly trying to create order to the somewhat fractured African psyche (Frantz, Connor). I utilise the remnant Yoruba culture within me from childhood, supported with new data through rigorous research as both artistic practice (PaR, Nelson, 2013) and literature searches. Rowland Abiodun (2014) summarises:

In transforming their raw material, Yoruba artists seek to realize completely the *ìwà* (identity and essence) of their subject, and *se ògbe* (embellish them) through artistic activity using *ojú-onà* (design consciousness).

Ballerina
2020
Masking tape and twig



Yoruba culture has been researched by Western ethnographers, historians, missionaries, and explorers such as John Ogilby (*Ogilby's Africa*, 1670), Mungo Park (1796) and Drewal et al (1974,1985). Yoruba culture artistic aesthetics were often described, from an outsider ethnography western lens as primitive, uncivilized, or simply decorative. Post slave trade Yoruba Egungun masquerades evolved to carnival costumes, which in turn influenced and informed my assemblage sculpture practice working within available resources. The discovery by Leo Frobenius et al. (1938) of the Ori Olokun Ife bronze head challenged this narrative. As more bronze heads and sculptures were unearthed and displayed in both the British museum and worldwide, the global understanding of Yoruba Culture and its significance has grown exponentially.

This rediscovery coupled with a feeling of living up to the aesthetic of Yoruba and Afropolitan identity, a realistic sculptural heritage, and a desire to embellish ('se loḡo' in Yoruba) my work impacted my practice and influenced my decision to model a befitting civic sculpture of Geraldine akin to ancient civilised notable Yoruba elders, e.g., Obas (Kings), Babalawos, (Fathers of knowledge equivalent of Priests), Iyanla (Elder Mothers)

3. Demystifying Yoruba spirituality, honouring ancestors, elders, women

Christian apologists deemed Yoruba spirituality as pagan or heathen and Yoruba speaking was prohibited in some homes and at missionary schools. (I was astonished by Geraldine Connor's use of Yoruba language in her epic doctoral musical artefact *Carnival Messiah*)

lost city of Atlantis. In 1948, following William Bascom's discovery of more Yoruba sculptures, the illustrated London News headline asked:

How, in a comparatively obscure corner of this vast and backward continent, could an art and technique have flowered that take their stand by the best ever evolved by the elaborate civilizations of Europe and Asia?

My research has been a quest to explore Yoruba culture and ask why we were forbidden from speaking Yoruba at home and school as it was classed as a vernacular language. Prof Sophie Oluwole, lamented, in an interview, that we are committing suicide by not speaking our language. Oluwole (2014) also stressed her reason for writing *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*: "They said Africans could not think, that we were not thinkers, that we were primitive. I felt challenged and said I was going to find out if truly we could not think. I wanted to prove them wrong." I also wanted to understand what was so scary about Egungun masquerade, Yoruba spirituality and Ifa divination. Subsequently, I started to explore my Yoruba culture within an Afropolitan framework in which I embrace both my British and Yoruba heritages and concluded the obvious—as anyone would agree—that we are all one HUMAN RACE, with a shared common humanity and history. I believe history isn't black or white but a collective human history. This history (good, bad or ugly) was the product of an interaction between humans of all skin tones, cultures, beliefs, skills, etc. And thus, *Omo Sapiens* (combining the Yoruba *Omo* and Greek *Sapiens*) was born.



Overall, this exhibition will give you an insight into my research journey, including an understanding of: the interplay between chaos and order; fragmentation and reconstruction; the concept of a split psyche; and restored wellbeing. Engagement with prohibited Yoruba spiritual practices (e.g. IFA divination) or what I call synonymous with 'casting lots' or tossing a coin.

And they cast their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Acts 1:26

There are also current studies demonstrating IFA to be an 8-bit binary matrix decision making process. (Sophie Oluwole)

Lockdown (you could ironically refer to it as 'an artist's retreat') serendipitously allowed me to explore the concept of Ori or inner head, inner beauty, human spirit, Yoruba identity as *Omoluwabi*, etc.

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3



split loyalty or 'voices' in his head. I however desire that he can start to bind up this split psyche by embracing our dual or multiple heritages as humans on earth.





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interpreting reality.

In comparing my maquettes to intricately adorned Yoruba crowns, aesthetically I found my art wanting. I understood that we were in lockdown and thus had access to limited resources. I appreciated that my mental state had been compromised by the Covid pandemic and this was reminiscent for me of how, I imagine, my Yoruba ancestors may have felt, being enslaved, dispersed and their culture broken. Generations later today in Leeds still feeling the effects of the disruption, my art practice seems to remain informed from pain, brokenness, and remnants of twisted Yoruba narratives rather than from joyous 'celebration' of the original rich tapestry of Yoruba culture.

I created the calabash (*Akeregbel*) to represent, look upon (*iworan*) and induce the proverb (*ewe*) once more and receive inspiration.

The 'Aha' moment,

It is great that Yoruba Masquerades have evolved to Carnival costumes. But, what about the prolific bronze sculptures unearthed in Ile Ife by Bascom et al, etc? Where are the equivalent sculptures created by artist today in the diaspora and in this case Leeds? What is the effect on the psyche to continue to hold on to broken narratives about Yoruba culture? How does looking and seeing art (*iworan*) based in the broken past compare with art based in Afropolitanism, imagined futures and *Akanpo*?

Akeregbe, the shape of the calabash will tell you where to tie the rope.

'Aha' moment 3: utilise the same technology Marc Quinn used and emancipate myself from the confines of lockdown and get back to using the University resources and advanced technology!

Emancipation (2022) consists of:

Councillor Abigail Marshal Katung – classic stone and yellow

Khadijah Ibrahim – Black represents the universal source, the field that creates matter

Bridget – Yellow to represent Osun, goddess of beauty

Bridget – Yellow to represent Osun, goddess of beauty

4



Fanon (1972) describes the comfort zone of being around others like yourself, he writes that 'as long as the black man is among his own he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others' (Fanon 1972: 77). Fanon goes on to explore the negative and confusing emotions that a Black person goes through as they experience for the first time how others 'truly' view their race.

Again, conversely my earliest confusing emotions stemmed from being viewed differently by members of my own race albeit experiencing a comfort zone with other British born Yoruba girls at school (Oyinbo England girls). I suffered the same confusion with early encounters with some Caribbean people on my return to Leeds and I recall being on a radio show where I said I hadn't experienced racism and being told I must be living in cuckoo land. I was also asked why I was living in a 'white' area. I was back living with my foster parents in Horsforth at the time. The comment puzzled me because in my mind, UK was predominantly white so of course we were all generally living in a white area! In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1972), Frantz Fanon writes in the opening chapter, *The Black Man and Language* that:

A man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language.

I was astonished by the statement, yet it was equally enlightening, and for the first time I contextualised why I would be seen as 'coconut', 'bounty bar' or as an 'Oyinbo England girl' as opposed to being characterised as black by other blacks. I possessed the English language and the English world from birth and through childhood.

way women feel like they must work twice as hard to obtain recognition and equity in the workplace as their male counterparts. But does this stem from an inferiority complex or a conditioning of wanting to disprove and dispel the negative myths about black people as inferior to white people to justify slavery, Hellenization (civilising) and colonisation?

Fanon cites Prof Diedrich Hermann Westermann (1934) a German Africanist and ethnologist from *The African Today*, that the feeling of inferiority by Blacks is especially evident in the educated black man who is constantly trying to overcome it. Westermann claims that the method used to overcome this anxiety is often naive:

The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language; all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements.

Fanon thus lays the foundation for his research amongst French Antilleans and personal observation to show why the black man posits himself in such a characteristic way with European languages. He also notes that the same behaviour is found in any race subjected to colonization thus in this case Yoruba peoples. I contest that, yes there may be an element of naivety, however, there has also been an element of subjugating native population into conformity. For example, well-meaning missionaries offering brown sandals and khaki school uniforms to pupils when cajoled into attending missionary schools. A common



I could refer you to one of the most disturbing cases. M. NourbeSe Philip's poem *Zong!* (2008) recalls how 150 Africans were purposefully drowned, thrown overboard at sea, on the order of the Captain so the company could claim insurance for the loss of their cargo. In her text that accompanies the poem, she speaks about the pain she felt when she realises that the slaves murdered on the slave ship were stripped of all identity and referred to only as 'negroe man' and 'negroe woman' and a price recorded of £30 each for insurance purposes. Bailey is the name of my maternal birth mother who lives in Lagos. It is a sign of the survival of the displaced people (even though their names have been given to them by others). My mother's family, freed Africans (Creole, Saro and Aku people) returned to Sierra Leone migrating to Lagos and the Windrush generation of Corinne Bailey Rae's Father to Leeds. It represents the inevitable hybrid culture that equilibrated between African and European cultures respectively in music, fashion and visual arts. The hair style on the sculpture is European—a French bun—on an African face, based on a photo of my mother in her youth. The style of sculpture is based on the aesthetic of the *Ori Olokun* head and neck Aworan sculpture.

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Cyborg Lucy



Arthur France

7

Totoba language - it's a bit interesting that the name ESU and JESU, YESHUA all have ESU in common) Anyway, as I sip my cup of tea at 17:39, I keep thinking of the words, be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove as advised by Jesus to his followers:

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.
Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves
(Matthew 10:16, KJV)

This narrative of 'double voiced' is akin to the wisdom that Jesus gives to his disciples to navigate the world, in the book of Genesis, the serpent is described as the most cunning of all creatures, very sly or wise. I thus want to reframe the trickster narrative and give it a more survivalist positive spin and assign wisdom rather than trickster.

Ibrahim, Clr Abigail Marshal Katung, and so on.



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*Aye o ni ton wa dajẹ o
ifa o tun un se*

8

*It will not be spoiled in our own time
It will not be spoiled in our own time
The World will not be spoiled in our own time
ifa will mend it.*

Wándé Abimbola, the Awise of Yoruba





the seeds were sown for further inquiry into a once forbidden Yoruba culture and language. Following numerous conversations with Geraldine, and on her discovery of my Yoruba heritage, she said to me, 'Child you need to tell your story, your Yoruba story in your art.' And now, Geraldine – Mama God – is blue to celebrate joy, like an elaborate blue ocean."



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