

Research Field Station #10

# Omo Sapiens

by Lara Rose



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## Omo Sapiens

***Thus, from a Mixture of all Kinds  
began,  
That Het'rogeneous Thing, An  
Englishman:  
In eager Rapes, and furious Lust  
begot,  
Betwixt a Painted Britain and a  
Scot.  
Whose, gend'ring Off-spring  
quickly learn'd to Bow,  
And yoke their Heifers to the  
Roman Plough:  
From whence a Mongrel Half-Bred  
Race there came,  
With neither Name, nor Nation,  
Speech or Fame.  
In whose hot Veins new Mixtures  
quickly ran,  
Infus'd betwixt a Saxon and a  
Dane.  
While their Rank Daughters, to  
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



## My Afropolitan Dadaist Manifesto:

I Omolara, Omoluwabi, Omo Sapien, as an Afropolitan Dadaist (dada meaning dreadlocks in Yoruba), do solemnly declare:

I am influenced by Yoruba art aesthetics and culture. I have a plethora of artifacts, concepts and orishas to choose from. I have been influenced by Gelede, Egungun, and Eyo masquerades. I have worked with the following symbols: Ase (power); Ade (crown); and Iwa (good character). I am guided by Ifa (the Yoruba spiritual practice), Ewe (Yoruba proverbs) and Ori (spirit head). I am also enriched by Oriki (praise songs for elders), Olodumare (the almighty God) and the Orishas (the Yoruba saints): Olokun, Osun, Obatala, Ogun, Yemoja, Sango. And, I musn't 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 vision is threefold:

1. Explore Yoruba culture, philosophy, and spirituality, including Yoruba art aesthetics and allow its essence and characteristics' (ewa) to influence my art practice. In other words, allowing the Yoruba voice to speak.
2. Update Yoruba culture narratives, dispel untruthful damaging negative narratives, and resurrect lost Yoruba art traditions to in turn inform my art practice e.g. the tradition of creating terracotta or bronze sculptures of notable community members (My first sculpture is of Dr Geraldine Roxanne Connor RIP)
3. Utilise Afropolitanism to frame current discussions about race, identity, mental health, and equality post BLM reviews and #Bameover.

As I sit at Terminal 2, Manchester Airport on my way to Florida for my aunt Barbara's funeral, I start to reflect on my *Omo Sapiens* (Child Wise/Modern) exhibition and my PhD project. I connect with my stream of consciousness as I sip my mocha at 2.25am in the Starbucks lounge. Why have I chosen the title *Omo Sapiens*? The title of this exhibition is a play on the human categorization at this evolutionary phase of *Homo Sapiens* (Human Wise/Modern). My full Yoruba name is *Omolara*, and I have been told that this means, 'This child (*Omo*) is our kin, is part of us, receives grace, etc.' I particularly identify with the receiving grace part having been given the incredible opportunity of completing a doctorate and staging this exhibition. Sadly, I do not always feel like I belong anywhere, so much that I am daring to travel to the United States of America to attend 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!*

## Afropolitanism and decolonisation

As an Afropolitan, I appreciate the political and economic climates that produced our current position on the earth, but I feel more and more disillusioned by some of the more extreme behaviour that happens in the process of decolonisation (not to undermine the sentiment or necessity of it). I feel de-colonisers sometimes in resisting colonisation create a somewhat paradoxical situation of pseudo self-attack. Thus, it would be foolish to pluck up the entire foundation on which we currently exist destroying everything in its wake but there is definitely a need for a recontextualization of the past. (Note the recent toppling of the Coulson sculpture by BLM protestors followed by a guerrilla installation of the BLM protester Jen Reid sculpture by Marc Quinn in Bristol). Nevertheless, the mammoth task that de-colonisers (e.g. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986) want to achieve include re-writing and correcting any 'creative' or false narratives about Africa including linguistic decolonization. I hope in exploring the Yoruba language and culture and its influence in Leeds, this will contribute to the current decolonisation discourse and debates.

I thus propose a 'coming to terms' with the status quo and support the de-colonisation task with re-orientation, re-positioning and reframing within an afropolitanisation framework. I believe positioning as an Afropolitan, shifts perspectives, and helps in understanding what colonisation did to the Yoruba language and culture. Inspired by the title of Thiong'o's (1986) book, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* it occurred to me that my first step is to decolonise my mind. Look at Yoruba culture from a fresh Afropolitan lens to overcome my anxiety of imbibing in it; sifting through the data like a farmer at harvest time, separating the wheat from the chaff, within a Bhabha hybrid 3rd space or Afropolitan space. This inevitably could result in a 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 (1952-2011)  
2022  
Installation view in foyer of  
Leeds School of Arts, Leeds  
Beckett University.



## Adopting the Yoruba creative process as an Afropolitan

I would say that there is a physiological need, in living matter, to create  
Bronowski, 1977

Bronowski believes that it is a mistake to think of creative activity as something unusual and asserts that this is normal to all living things. He proposes that the laws of nature are such that nature consistently runs down, becoming disorderly but living matter is constantly opposing this and creating order.

The word "creation" means "the creation of order," the finding in nature of links, of likeness, of hidden patterns which the living thing—the plant, the animal, the human mind—picks out and arranges.  
Bronowski, 1977

Every civilization and culture seem to have their own creation story, from the biblical Adam and Eve to the Egyptian story of Seth and Horus. There are a few Yoruba creation stories including the one about Olodumare, the supreme being, of Obatala king of the white cloth and of Osun the goddess of sweet waters. However, what seems to be a common thread of these creation stories is a state of disorder to which became subjected or tamed to create order. The Holy Bible (Gen 1, KJV) opens in Genesis with, 'And the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the spirit of the lord moved on the surface of the deep and God said let there be light.' Dr Kemi Atanda Ilori (1986) in his book, *The Yorubas: Myth of Origin* cites Harold Courlander and writes:

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 *iwà* (identity and essence) of their subject, and *se lóge* (embellish them) through artistic activity using *ojú-onà* (design consciousness).

*Ballerina*  
2020  
Masking tape and twig



## My Yoruba Research Rourney

This Research Station showcases research from my PhD entitled; *The Dr Geraldine Connor (1952-2011) civic Aworan statue: Yoruba culture and its influence on artistic practices in Leeds*. It tracks simultaneously both my Yoruba exploratory journey superimposed with the overall Yoruba story from creation to modern contemporary Afropolitan diaspora. I needed to find a research methodology that would help me analyse my research project as it developed. I discovered that Practice as Research was a suitable methodology to support my investigation.

### 1. Practice as Research (PaR)

Practice as Research (PaR) as a research methodology is a non-hierarchical multi modal design, imbricating and layering multiple qualitative research methods. These methods include autoethnography case studies, reflective journaling alongside my art practice. This PaR study aims to investigate how Yoruba culture has migrated, despite prohibitions and anxieties surrounding it, and how it influences art practices in the diaspora, focusing on Leeds.

One of my case studies explores my engagement with Dr Geraldine Connor and her phantasmagorical *Carnival Messiah*; through rigorous practice combined with reflection, my PhD journey has grown, evolving from loosely placed shrine-like assemblages to creating dynamic new civic sculptures.

### 2. Why Create a Geraldine sculpture?

Recent discourse around identity, the BLM movement, and #BAMEover has given rise to an urgency to look again at African indigenous cultures. 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 lfe 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 logo' 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*)

### 4. Letting the Yoruba voice speak: Blue–Olokun, Yemoja, Mama God, Obatala Creation story

Yoruba scholars and writers such as Sophie Oluwole, Rowland Abiodun and Wole Soyinka advocate when studying Yoruba art aesthetics, one needs to let the Yoruba voice speak. (Geraldine, Iyanla, Mama G said to me, 'child you need to tell your story, your African Yoruba story!')

### 5. My proposition:

Indeed, my intention is to experience the culture through the spectrum of Yoruba philosophy, in its multi-faceted whole as movement, sound, sculpture, and word, etc. It is clear, that an effective way to observe Yoruba culture in situ is only by doing (vis-à-vis knowing in action) art practice, e.g creating the mini ori head masking tape maquettes during lockdown became the springboard to the Geraldine sculpture. Thereby practicing ideas or PaR, informed, and influenced by Yoruba culture, as a process of conceptual enquiry (to create new artworks).

*'Odò kì í sà̀n kó gbàgbé isun'*

'A river does not flow and forgets its source'

- Yoruba Proverb

There are more than 30 million Yoruba people living in the African continent and many millions in the diaspora. The Yoruba inhabit a world of myths, allegories, poetry, and the love and wisdom of the lfa divination system. Yoruba culture, art and spirituality have suffered dehumanising narratives from colonisers, explorers, and religious authorities. What if we can let the Yoruba voice speak? When Leo Frobenius (1910) discovered the Ori Olokun Oni Head he couldn't believe the sculpture was created by Africans thinking he had discovered the 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 Orúnmilá: 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 lfa 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.

## Evolution of Yoruba

In a pseudo randomised order, I initially created 24 stations equivalent to the 24 hours in a day as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of human interaction: growth, trauma, healing, re-trauma, fracture, disjunction, development, evolution, etc. but specifically, to represent both my and the overall Yoruba journey from its inception/creation through kingdoms born and civilisations formed. Included in my research is evidence of the disruption caused by the transatlantic slave trade and the consequent dispersion of Yorubas, the African holocaust worldwide, USA, Caribbean, diaspora and the Windrush scandal. I have brought these histories together in my exhibition in Leeds. Subsequently, I teased out seven key phases of human history involving the Yoruba (Edekiri) people in the world, tracking it's evolution from creation to the Geraldine Structure.

Multiple layers of meaning are included in this exhibition, such as reconstruction, empowerment, remnants, carnival and resurrection. I examine the resurrection of ancient Yoruba traditions, masquerades in carnival, playing mas and venerating elders or leaders via Aworan (sculpture). These investigations lead me to an inclusive understanding of how renowned persons became deified (Oluwole, S. 2015). Syncretism was practiced amongst displaced Africans far away from home. They appropriated Catholic saints with Yoruba deities to keep Yoruba spirituality alive. I also demonstrate the importance of colour to represent deities e.g. *Osun*, goddess of beauty and love associated with yellow, *Obatala*, king of white cloth and creation with white. *Olokun* and *Yemoja* of ocean, seas and rivers the colour blue; and *Sango* with red, etc.

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.

I discovered a proverb,

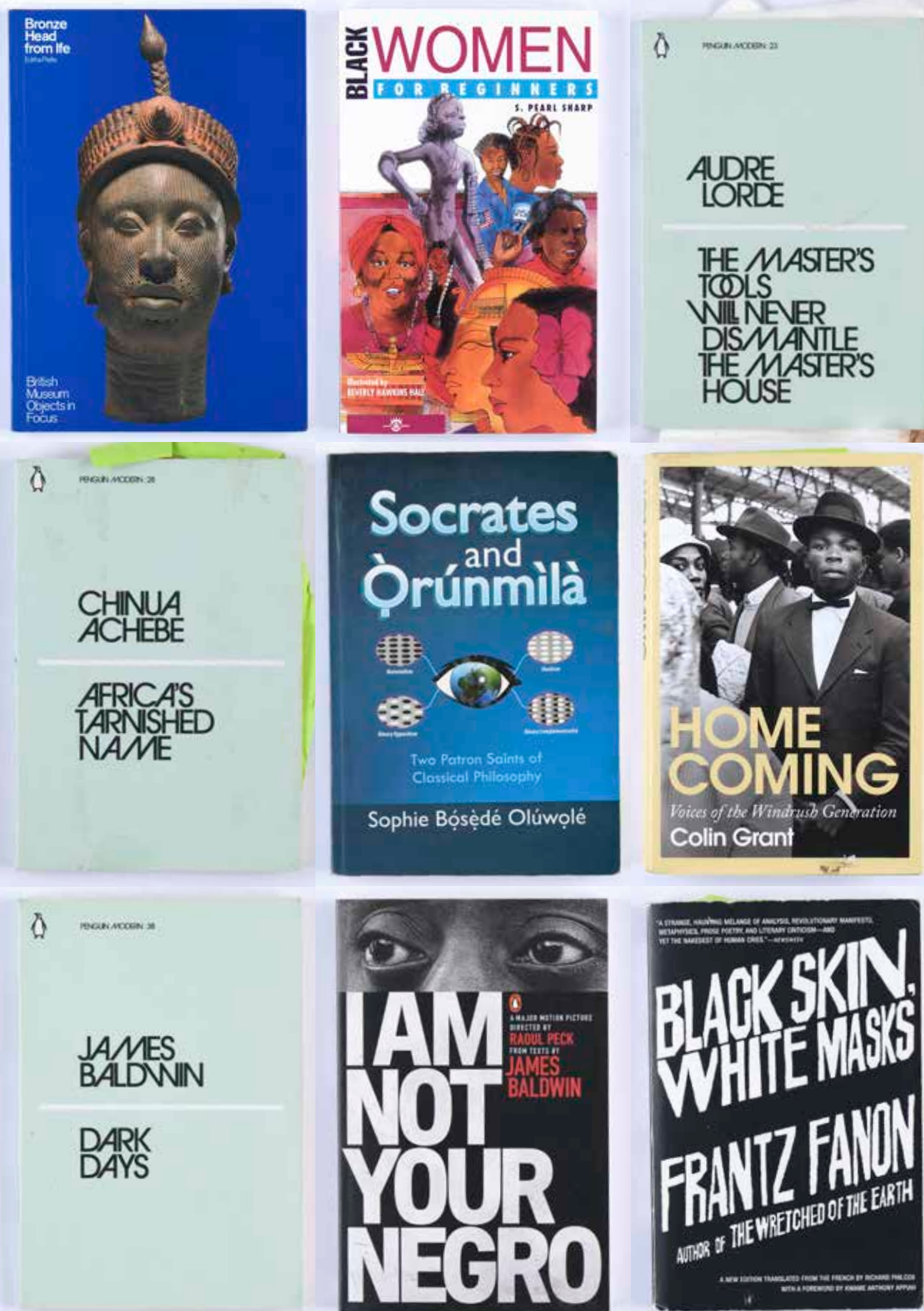
*'Eni to kan akanpo ewu ti kuro ni ile san tabi. ko san.'*

'The nobility of someone who is dressed in gorgeous garments is without qualms.'

- Wole Soyinka

From this I conceptualised the word *Akanpo* to mean well gilded art, well done aesthetics (*ewa*) of art and well-dressed clothing. A year later, post lockdown, in conversation with a Yoruba couple, Dr and Mrs Akande, I was given the right pronunciation and further meaning to the word *Akanpo*. It literally means the status of a subject determined by the layering of their clothing. Thus, clothing shows your rank or status etc. I applied this in an Afropolitan sense when deciding how I wanted my Geraldine Sculpture thus PhD regalia as layered to show her rank of Dr of Philosophy. Furthermore, as the masking tape *Ori* crown (*ade*) sculptures wilted in the sun, the sense of them not befitting with *Akanpo* or *se logo* was felt which led to the desire to resurrect the ancient Yoruba sculpture practice and to my *Aworan* breakthrough. This development in my practice was also fuelled by the BLM protests, the Leeds sculpture survey (2020) and the Marc Quinn sculpture, *A Surge of Power* (Jen Reid), 2020 placed on the empty Coulson plinth in Bristol, which inspired me.

1





## Akeregbe – Calabash or Gourd

Calabash represents the wisdom of Orunmila.

*'Akeregbe lo ma juwe ibi ti ama fi okun si.'*

*'It is the gourd that will give a clue as to where the rope be placed.'*

*-Yoruba Proverb*

*'Looking at the structural design of a gourd, no sane mind will attempt to place the rope on the waist or anywhere else. The most suitable part of the gourd where the rope could be placed without much ado about nothing is simply the neck region, which is quite evident in mind eye, to the sense of sight and reasoning! It is very easy to figure out!'*

*Olusegun Daramola – Adulawo TV*

Yoruba Culture in its purest form.



## The slave trade

Original Taste since 1886!  
Black Coca cola  
Sweet like nectar  
Power filled, like cola nut, sugar cane  
Plantation song  
Work, ancestor sweat, heat  
Thirst, breathe, drink  
Weave cotton,  
On thine knees.  
Can I breathe?

Breathe again!  
Oh Africa ancestor  
We live, original potion reclaim  
Redeem me, oh medicine woman  
Mami water, flow into lungs,  
fill with life.  
Blueprint restore.  
Become one with mud, rebuild.  
Some, all, and still we breathe.  
Lara Rose 2020

3



## Emancipation and the question of diaspora

The question of diaspora appears in papers, books and journals, and debates persist on where or what diaspora is.

I feel a simplistic solution is not so much to go back and look at the original definition of diaspora in which for the Greeks or coloniser it was a term that favoured the coloniser population. In recent years and after the Jewish Holocaust it was used to describe displaced populations. In other words, there will never be a unifying locus for what constitutes diaspora, but it will mean different things to different people. For the purpose of this thesis, diaspora is situated in Leeds and in Lagos: In Leeds it represents the Windrush generation, Caribbean migrations and Nigerian migrations; in Lagos the emancipated African Aku people like my mother's family, migrations from Sierra Leone to Lagos post slave trade, and myself accompanying my parents at 5 years old.

I resonated with Taiye Salasi, multi local afropolitan paradigm, right away when I first saw her essay *Bye Bye Babar*. I always felt that there was nothing wrong with embracing both my British and Yoruba heritages. Naturally, growing up, I had engaged more with my British English side thus I am now attempting to balance my psyche split in this project. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes that we should not have to invent a new voice but use our own authentic hybrid voice. Chinua Achebe wrestled with the use of English and felt a betrayal to his national culture. It needn't be so: I advocate for embracing both cultures, and as Daniel Defoe demonstrates in his 1701 satirical poem *The True-Born Englishman*, everyone is a hybrid of somewhere else. There truly are, and it is very rare that there are pure breeds on earth today, as Connor said, everyone is from someplace else. Fanon goes into the psyche of the newly emancipated African who grapples with the split loyalty or 'voices' in his head. I however desire that we can start to bind up this split psyche by embracing our dual or multiple heritages as humans on earth.



## Emancipation, liberating Akanpo & Aworan

Quantum scientists are making significant claims that when scientists go looking for the smallest particle in nature through extensive research activity, the act of looking seems to create or 'bring into existence' new particles. As if it were matter responds to the enquirer.

As I lay reflecting on my project and my line of enquiry, vis-a-vis "Yoruba culture and its influence on my artistic practice", I wondered again about the process from inspiration to creation. I wondered about what role my imagination plays in creating art, how much was imagination and how much was influence. I wondered how my process of inquiry will reveal things to me or as quantum physicist claim will create for me. I thought about the word *àwòrán* (visual representation) in Yoruba in relation to the beholder (*awòran*), and the act of looking and seeing (*iwòran*).

Babatunde Lawal (2001) writes in the abstract for his paper entitled, *Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art* that

This paper draws attention to the link between art and language in Yoruba society. It then focuses on the ontological, mnemonic, and ritual significance of *àwòrán* (visual representation) and the social, religious, and artistic conventions that influence the practice, modes, and reception of portraiture. The paper also examines the complex interaction between visual representation (*àwòrán*) and the beholder (*awòran*), underscoring the fact that in Yoruba society, the act of looking and seeing (*iwòran*) is determined as much by individual responses to specific representations or spectacles as by culturally constructed modes of perceiving and 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 (*Akeregbe*) 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*?



The more I looked at my maquettes, the more I wanted something else.

As a sculptor, I had created a host of assemblage sculptures and had started to look into creating more gilded sculptures working with sugar, clay, and wood before lockdown. My use of masking tape is a metaphor to represent binding up our broken past but I was feeling increasingly dissatisfied and wanted to resurrect the ancient practice of honoring elders, notable people and departed or ancestors with sculptures akin to the *Ori Olokun* head still housed in the British Museum today.

I was astounded by the achievements of so many African and Caribbean community leaders that have gone unacknowledged. These community leaders work tirelessly and quietly in their fields some of whom have recently been awarded MBEs. However, lots of youth lament they have no role model statues that look like them, indeed we only see ancient sculptures housed in museums in the diaspora. A second 'aha' moment occurred; it became clear that I must create Ori (head) sculptures of notable people in Leeds. Faced with the realisation, my next challenge was, how I was going to create the sculptures.

A quick internet search in 2020 revealed only five sculptures of black women have been erected in all of the UK (a recent sixth of Henrietta Lace, 2021), one of which had been removed (that of Marc Quinn). Marc Quinn in response to the BLM moment created a giant, 3D printed resin sculpture of Jen Reid. He installed it without permission on the plinth where the Bristol slave trader Coulson statue had been torn down during the protest. I felt I needed to tap into my inner resolve and find a way to create new Aworan (sculpture); back to the *Akeregbe*, the shape of the calabash will tell you where to tie the rope.

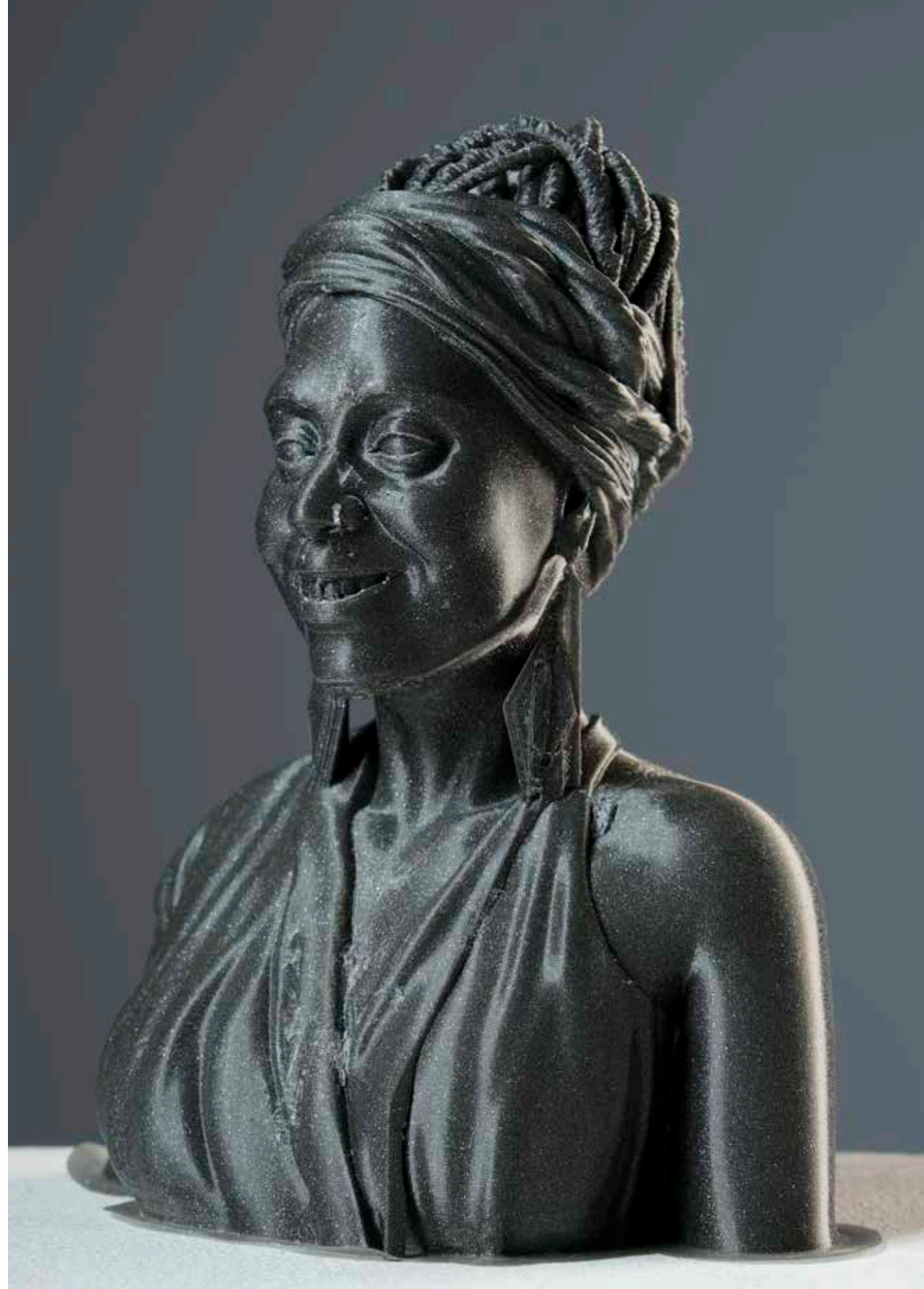
'Aha' moment 3: utilise the same technology Marc Quinn used and emancipate myself from the confines of lockdown and get back to using the University resources and advanced technology!

*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



## Psyche split, coconuts, and bounty bars – you think you white?!

Sylvia Theuri (2016) in her thesis section 4.7.1 *Personal journey: 'I felt as though I did not belong'* writes:

My predominant reasons for feeling embarrassed have been highlighted and explained very well in a study of Afro-Caribbean children by Sewell (1999) where he outlined 'the process by which Afro-Caribbean children had been reduced to two extreme choices 'the (acting white) MacDonald man and the rebellious Yard man, any children that did not remain within the collective boundaries of 'blackness' were considered to be 'white' Sewell 1999

My first experience of feeling alienated or 'othered' was at secondary school in Lagos where a Yoruba chemistry teacher was extremely hostile to me and other girls born in the UK, mocking us as '*Oyinbo England Girls*' by virtue of our command of the English language in tone and RP! We were also called '*coconut*' or '*bounty bar*', white on the inside and black on the outside. So, in contrast I did not feel I belonged in Nigeria. Indeed, having been brought up with white foster parents in Leeds from 3 months to nearly 5 years of age with two older white foster brothers, I also got on very well with my Austrian Home Economics teacher, and Mrs Jolly my English Teacher from India.

Theuri in relating to internal conflicts also sites Frantz Fanon,

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.

Fanon then states that:

All colonized people – in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave – position themselves to the civilizing language: i.e. the metropolitan culture. The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become.

I could now see one of possible explanations for why the former slave *Aku* Creole peoples of which my mother's family is – the Baileys from Sierra Leone were not received with open arms on arrival in Lagos. Mother was a *Coconut*, a *Saro*, a descendent of 'slaves', quite British and the native Yoruba were not very trusting of them. It would also explain why she too had a more English character than local Yoruba people and communicated mainly in English. However, Fanon's claim of an inferiority complex that perhaps has developed insidiously and taken root, needs further exploring in relation to our collective psyche and mental health. Sophie Oluwole, indeed, laments that we are committing suicide by not speaking our language.

Pan Africanist, The Negritude movement, Black Power movement and all such movements can be seen also as attempts to resurrect, restore, and retain original African culture by diasporic peoples. I resonate with the concept of Afropolitanism because I feel it allows my dual cultural heritage of Yoruba and British to exist side by side without the constant burden of needing to be black or white. I do agree with Fanon about the unconscious feeling of wanting to be taken seriously and treated as a normal human which sometimes leads to overcompensation in performance by some blacks. For example, in the same 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

misinterpretation is that walking barefoot and near nudity or minimalist clothing by *tribesmen* or *natives* is merely due to uncivility. But what would you expect one to wear in high temperatures of the blazing hot sun in Africa? We wear minimalist clothing like bikinis and swimsuits at the beach; imagine a scenario where some aliens arrive in Ibiza and see scantily dressed men and women, assume the same mis-interpretive stance and then forcibly round everyone up to wear woolly jumpers!

Furthermore, sketches and drawings done by artists during slavery depict naked Africans chained together, some of whom were stripped of their garments beforehand and given loincloths to wear, before being loaded onto ships. With no reference points other than European clothing and what has been committed to memory through generations, freed Africans had no choice but to adorn themselves in European clothes. Insidiously too, the brain washing in Africa and the inference that Yoruba is vernacular coupled with the prohibition from speaking the language at school was part of the assimilation process of colonisers. I learnt English language, English literature, and Oral English at school in Lagos, a threefold assimilation into English language and culture. My motives as a child were not to feel equal to Europeans, but to gain acceptance with my parents by excelling at school. The clothing we wore at school were of British style, brown shoes, white socks and a v-line dress.



## Afropolitanism and cultural appropriation: So, who is wrong or right?

Ironically, Bhabha (1994) also writes about hybridity in which cultures can evolve and equilibrate to new identities but couples it with the concept of mimicry (Bhabha 1984, 1994) in which the colonised take on the culture of the colonisers. Interestingly, cultural appropriation has become topical today in the context of what I term 'reverse mimicry' in which 'colonising' cultures take on the culture of the colonised! So, who is wrong or right? Kim Kardashian (MTV Movie & TV Awards, 2018) with box braids mimicking Yoruba culture *irun didi* (cornrows) or Adele (Notting Hill Carnival, 2020) adorning a carnival costume with *bantu* knots?

As an Afropolitan artist, I have the freedom of picking from all cultures as needed on a day-to-day basis and up to the future. Likewise, Africans, and for this research, Yorubas, can imagine and once again create an Afro-cosmopolitan future like we see in historic Ile Ife or Benin. Artists play a large role in shaping culture and the future by harnessing both historical and current interdisciplinary artistic practices, creating artwork and inspiring audiences. [For example, Geraldine Connor and Yinka Shonibare]

*Bailey Head* is representative of the Bailey African Ancestry post emancipation, red to represent *Sango* the God of thunder as played in Geraldine's *Carnival Messiah* scene. It is interesting to me that both in Leeds, UK and Lagos, Nigeria you find Melanated (black) people bearing the Bailey name, a name inherited from the Slave Masters, and not using their original African names. Thinking about the dehumanising aspects of the slave trade and the stripping of identity, 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.







**Cyborg Lucy**



**Arthur France**

7

## Geraldine Connor

Recalling Geraldine's phantasmagorical *Carnival Messiah*, and her telling me to tell my Yoruba story, coupled with the Yoruba *Akanpo* concept and ancient *Aworan* tradition of honouring the departed, it became crystal clear that I had to create a memorial sculpture to honour Geraldine Connor's legacy. This must be realistic (*iyajora*) and be worthy of Civic installation in Leeds.

### Survival

Stewart & Shaw (1994) state that, "syncretic amalgamation of religions may be validated as a mode of resistance to colonial hegemony, a sign of cultural survival." Connor (2005) also writes about four coping mechanism that trafficked Africans had to adapt, the first, a phenomenon academia call 'magical realism' often under-rated or overlooked by western scholarship because of its links to the spiritual or ephemeral, in which discourse of myth effortlessly co-exists with the discourse of history. Yoruba myths and cultural survival are explored and manifest in *Carnival Messiah* right at the onset with libation poured to Esu Elegbra. Connor suggests that syncretism, is another coping mechanism stating that:

The second is directly related to the conditions of secrecy through the use of camouflage or the act of syncretism, where, often, particularly horrific historical remembrances are portrayed/ camouflaged in modern-day enactments of great aesthetic beauty or as forbidden religious practices that are submerged within, or syncretised into, the existing status quo.

Good Friday – I was thinking again about ESU and the concept of the double voice, and wondered about the parables (or metaphors/proverbs) of Jesus (also known as Jesu in the Yoruba language – it's a bit unnerving 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.

8

From the words of Rowland Abiodun – Esu is not a trickster, neither the devil. Indeed, it appears he is ranked in a similar vein to Jesus Christ who claims to be the door, the truth, the way, the life by which no one could come to the father (Olodumare, supreme being) except through him. I nervously type this revelation. Are Esu and Jesu the same entities? Both bear crosses, both are gate keepers, both speak in parables, omg! It's good Friday and suddenly I'm writing about Jesus and Esu in almost blasphemous terms!

*Carnival Messiah* opens with the pouring of a libation, in particular to appease Eshu. A chant is sung by Mother Earth in Eshu's and Oshun's honour. She is accompanied by four West African Djembe drums and supported by an unseen vocal chorus, the people of the world.

Overall, it is clear to me that the Afropolitan framework serves as a vehicle in which a balance between the two cultures can be reached and a tool to eliminate anxieties of inferiority. So, in conclusion, I feel experiencing various aspects of Yoruba culture enables me to interact with it, and demystify it. Memory of my involvement and experience in *Carnival Messiah* has lingered, I can still feel the elation when I sang, *Sango Aye, Halleluyah* finale, indeed relived it recently when watching the movie. This was Geraldine's wish and gift – the artistic 3rd space of empowerment and nourishment. I in turn give my product of Connor's 3rd space, my Afropolitan artistic space. I was initially going to honour Geraldine at the Leeds carnival by creating the *Geraldine Connor Carnival Queen* costume (pre lockdown), synonymous with the *Carnival Messiah Carnival Queen* costume she adorned me in at the Royal Albert Hall. Also equivalent to Arthur France, *Winnie Mandela Carnival Queen* costume. But my grandest ambition of all was to successfully honour in the Yoruba way (*Akanpo* and *Aworan*) the *Ori* head sculptures and full body sculpture akin to the *Ori Olokun* sculpture. These include representational *Ori* heads of current notable elders in the city – Khadijah Ibrahim, Cnr Abigail Marshal Katung, and so on.



Tunji Olaopa (2013) writes in his article, *Wande Abimbola, the Ifa corpus and Yoruba culture*:

Yoruba culture is diasporic in terms of substance and influence. Cuba, Brazil, Puerto Rico, the United States of America, Benin Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mexico, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, and even unusual places like Italy, Germany, and Japan host not only people of Yoruba descent, but also Yoruba music, religious practices, dance and arts, etc.

I add Leeds to that list and take the common shared humanity stance and hope this exhibition will serve as an Afropolitan tool to showcase that Yoruba culture which can be of great benefit to our world! As M.NourbeSe Philip says in her celebrated book of poetry *Zong!* (2008):

There is no telling this story but it must be told.

***Ko mo mo ni tori wa baje o  
Ko nii tori wa baje o  
Aye o ni tori wa baje o  
Ifa o tun un se***

***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 Abimbòla, the Awise of Yoruba

8





## Dr Geraldine Connor (1952-2011), 2022 Lara Rose

“There are no statues of black people in Leeds.” – Lara Rose

This sculpture is part of the research project *The Dr Geraldine Connor (1952-2011) civic Aworan statue: Yoruba culture and its influence on artistic practices in Leeds* by current Leeds Beckett University PhD candidate Lara Rose.

Lara’s most recent work, a life-size sculpture of Geraldine Connor, is being installed in the foyer of the Leeds School of Arts building until 18 November 2022 as part of Black History Month. Lara’s PhD is exploring the significance of Geraldine and the fact that, until now, as Lara notes, Leeds had no statues of black people.

Geraldine Connor created the landmark theatre piece *Carnival Messiah* (1999) and Lara herself performed in it when it was presented in Leeds. Lara’s PhD considers the influence that Yoruba culture has had on artistic practice in Leeds, particularly around the Carnival and key figures such as Geraldine and Arthur France.

Lara says: “In my first experience of Dr Geraldine Connor’s *Carnival Messiah* in 2002, 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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***The Yoruba gods of western Nigeria once existed as humans and had their way of communicating. Prior to their disappearance, they left with the people a means to communicate with them in the outer realm (the ifa divination). Over 12,000 years ago, Africans developed Ifa Oracle divination based on the square of  $16=16 \times 16=26 = 2^8$  corresponding to the vertices of an 8-dimensional hypercube and to the binary 2-choice Clifford algebra  $C1(8)$  and so to related ones such as  $C1(8) \times C1(8) = C1(16)$  [7]. Since the number of sub-hypercubes in an 8-dimensional hypercube is  $6,561 = 81 \times 81=3^8$ , the Ifa Oracle has  $N=8$  ternary 3-structure as well as binary 2-structure.***

Alamu, F.O., Aworinde, H.O., Isharufe, W.I.  
A COmparative Study of IFA Divination and  
Computer Science

Research Field Station #10

March 2023

Design: Tom Rodgers  
Photography: Ricky Adam  
Typeset in: Univers and Cochin  
Printed by: Platinum  
First edition: 250 copies

This exhibition and publication by Lara Rose are presented at  
Leeds Beckett University for educational purposes only.



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