



Ahọ́n Dudu

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To the land I live, work and create on,

**The unceded Coast Salish Territories: The Ancestral lands
of
səlilwətaʔ təməxʷ (Tsleil-Waututh)
Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw (Squamish)
S'ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō)
Stz'uminus
šxʷməθkʷəy̓əmaʔ təməxʷ (Musqueam)
Nations**

Land of rich valour and resilience

*Your resilience and permanence despite efforts to render you forgotten amaze me,
give me confidence, and is often a learning place for me.*

For I am uninvited and this status humbles me and cautions me to approach with caution

I often do not have the words to give honour to you and pay my respects

but I write this body of work in this manner with the awareness of what you are now

and the misdeeds done to you by colonial masters.

For we share links in our histories with them

I greet you first and honour you

I also acknowledge that I can get it wrong and to that,

If I have overstepped my boundaries forgive me,

If I have contributed to injustices done to you,

If I have grieved you, forgive me.

**I acknowledge that I, Sola Olowo-Ake, am uninvited and on the unceded Coast Salish
Territories of the səlilwətaʔ təməxʷ (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw (Squamish),
S'ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō), Stz'uminus, šxʷməθkʷəy̓əmaʔ təməxʷ (Musqueam) nations.**

To Him who made me

To them who raised me, Adebayo and Toyin

And to us three beautiful ladies

Bi o ʃe le ka eyi

How to read this

Hello,

Your journey has already started but from this point on you will be greeted with **‘what is to come’** which will then lead you to a note addressed **‘To You’** then a bit about Yorùbá story-telling.

The end of these will take you to the gates of Oke. When you see Oke, play the audio accompanying this document- ***I highly recommend that you use earpieces to listen to the stories.***

You have the option to read and listen at the same time or to listen first and read later- I ask that you prioritize the oral over the written with respect to my Yorùbá heritage and the ways in which my work is profoundly centred on it.

The audio begins with an introductory greeting from me and then a performance of the stories.

After this, there is another note **‘For You’** to read.

I invite you to look through how I have chosen to reference, meanings, and the bibliography.

Then proceed to the second document- on processes.

****I recommend that you enable ‘two page view’ on your page display settings to read this document, ‘View-Page display- Two page view’.****

ohun ti n bọ

what is to come

To You

Àlọ́: on Yorùbá story-telling

Story One: **dnayal** (Denial)

Story Two: **fasad dafasiti** (The Facade: Diversity)

Story Three: **bọs glas** (The Glass Box)

For You

‘Reference List’

Bibliography

Meanings



The mountains from my bedroom balcony, 20 August, 2019.

Diary Entry

5th of July, 2020

“Over the past few weeks, I’ve been fighting because I’ve been trying to get people to understand- to be on the same page with me.

And recent events and conversations have shown me really how western bias shields one from seeing the world through another lens.

Like I realised the glass box is the bias. I no longer want people to understand, I just want to break it.

I want every story I tell to break the glass box.”

To You

“Hello dear friend,

*We meet here at the start line of these words,
a pool of them for narratives- black narratives.*

*We meet in this body of work, a journey through life experiences whose meanings
will soon become apparent to you.*

*That the ugly stench of racism often pokes its head out at our community
and endangers its true development.*

*It has corroded our soil, our ways of doing, ways of being,
ways of knowing and our ways of seeing.”*



The mountains from my living room balcony, circa 2019



The mountains from my living room balcony, 12 December, 2021.



To You,

I arrived at this thesis exploration the moment I stepped foot into Vancouver, Canada. I had just finished my BA in Fashion Design in the UK and I moved shortly after to start my Master of Design Program here at Emily Carr University. Somewhere in the middle of my first term, I was struggling a lot with whitespace around me and felt compelled to colour it as it had stifling effects on my creativity. It was then I wrote:

“The whitespace irks

It is like the see through box they confined our excellence into

...

The whitespace is all that it is

White. Space

Plain walls and empty atmospheres

No wonder I feel the need to colour it.

...

Black girl why should you be afraid to let loose in this space?

It is yours like it is theirs

Black girl the whitespace is limiting.”

I felt stifled, there seemed to be a lack of black communal culture here. So, I decided to start expressing my cultural identity more in order to feel at home. As time went on, I began to express my Nigerian Yorùbá-ness more and more. As I did so it became an increasingly important part of my thesis exploration. I saw the value of being true to the soil I come from because I needed that connection.

And I don't just pen these words abstractly, I do mean that what I expected as an expression of being black in the diaspora was missing from this environment- there was and is a lack of black communal culture here, in Vancouver. It was in pondering these thoughts that I began to call into question the ideals of 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' frequently expressed about Canada . Why was the multiculturalism make up of Canada that I was told existed here, not apparent- at all -to me? My lived reality seemed far from these ideal Canadian experiences that had been promised to me prior to my arrival here and also once I arrived by the new Canadian friends I had made here. Could it be that what I am truly in search of is something deeper than the state defined and promoted multiculturalism of this nation, and this place- Vancouver?

In February 2020, I was relieved when I attended the Story for Awakening workshop held at Emily Carr University. The workshop featured a performance by Charles Campbell on his research methodology for his work, 'Actor Boy'. The performance centred around visiting the past and activating marginalised and erased voices and histories. Following the performance the audience (made up of students and faculty) split up into smaller breakout groups to discuss what had been shown to us. In this setting I found Charles confirming my own personal observations. Having only just met him I was inspired to talk to someone who acknowledged my own experience and discomfort with the disparity between the Canadian diversity ideal I had been sold and the lack of evidence of this in real life.

As we were sat in the room, in conversation, I heard Charles say “story wants to be told, like spirit wants to live and it is in community that stories live”. His observation stuck with me. And ever since I have been asking, “What if my experience of the lack of black communal culture is as a result of untold stories?” If stories live by being told as Charles asserts then more black stories have to be enacted and embodied constantly. This is how we would keep the community alive, present and thriving.

The aim of my thesis is to embody stories through the lens of my Nigerian Yorùbá culture in order to contribute Yorùbá perspectives on social harmony to this ‘multicultural’ environment. In order to do so my work is grounded on the Yorùbá idea of ‘the spectacle’- the show that is put on to teach and entertain. This framework is borrowed from the Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ Festival and is explained by Babatunde Lawal in his book ‘The Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ Spectacle’, 1996. My work also relies heavily on dance as an embodied practice that reveals the messages your body stores, a method relayed to me by Qudus Onikeku. This method uses body and garment movement of the character as well as the listening ear, the wandering eyes and the engaging heart to bring these stories to life. The stories are also accompanied by garments that further illustrate the story visually. The garments serve as story holders and each of them have been heavily influenced by how they react when the body is in motion- dance.

The stories you are about to see in this document are expressions of my own recent experiences. They are responses to racial barriers I encountered over Summer 2020 as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests were unfolding and heightening in America and here in Vancouver, Canada. They are a recount of the continuous conversations that occurred in my life -as I discussed black lives, racism, police brutality and many other forms of injustice- within the community I was a part of. I realised that there was a disturbing unwillingness to create space for black (us). This led to barriers between myself and people I met in Vancouver. My initial friendships were severed by their lack of acknowledgement of: the black experience; of racist systems; of the complexities of the situation and what it was doing to us. Although I was having these conversations not intending them to play a role in my thesis, they led me to uncover and discover potential reasons for the lack of black communal culture I was experiencing. I have named these issues; '**dnayal**' (Denial), '**fasad dafasiti**' (The Facade: Diversity) and '**bọs glas**' (The Glass Box). Each of these names are markers of issues represented in story form.

The stories that you are about to see are intended to show you what I experienced as a Nigerian in Canada in the social climate of 2020. They are personal reflections on what occurred. While they are modelled after Yorùbá stories (Àlọ) they are written specifically for and situated in Vancouver- the issues pertaining specifically to this place. I use my Yorùbá subjectivity, Yorùbá knowledge and Yorùbá methods. I inform you here that in order for you to engage with these stories, you will have to lay aside your expectations of what constitutes a Masters thesis document- what form it should take. I invite you to become a true companion to the stories you are about to read, hear and see because where I come from, in Yorùbáland, story-telling contributes to the moulding of human life.

Companion with the story:

Although stories in Yorùbá culture shape life, the term ‘companion’ is not one that this practice is described as.

I found the term in an article I was reading titled,

‘The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-Human Agency: Making the Case for Respectful Anti-Colonial Engagement’

where the writers- Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder and Scott L. Pratt- quoted on page 11, Eva Garrouette and Kathleen Dolores Westcott who challenged the shifting of Anishinaabe stories to Western context by posing the question of companionship.

“The question they suggest researchers need to be asking themselves is not are we representing the elements of the stories accurately?—but are we good companions to the stories?”



Àlò

Àlọ

Àlọ means story and the word is used to describe a story with a song in it- also known as a folktale. There was a common practice among Yorùbá people to gather outside at night in a compound, and listen to stories. The storyteller would start off by saying “Àlọ o” and people listening will reply, “Àlọ” and then the story would begin. In the middle of the story, a song will be sung and it was a common practice for the listeners to sing along. After the story ends, the next one starts and it will go on and on until the story-teller is through. These stories often had moral lessons attached to them and the listeners were expected not to be passive- as actively listening was integral to the custom.

If there were children present, the story-teller would often ask, “What did you learn from that story?”- to which they would give a reply.

This exact form of story-telling was still being used when my dad was a little boy, now, not as much. The essence of Àlọ however has not left Yorùbá people as it is still being practiced in various ways in the day to day.

When I was a child, my parents, my grandma and other adults around me often taught me valuable lessons through the practice of story-telling. My responsibility was always to story-listen well- that I could embody what I was hearing. It is with this subjectivity and upbringing that I approach my thesis. As I mentioned earlier you will have to take on the responsibility of story-listening here, as I learned to do as a child, to read this work and immerse yourself in all that it offers you. For the onus is now on you.

An important thing for you to also know is that the stories in this document mirror ‘the chameleon’. The chameleon is the national symbol of the group of Yorùbá people I come from- Ijebu People of Ijebu-Ode. A story is told in Ifa of a chameleon who defeats his enemies by neutralising and changing strategies, doing so leads the chameleon to prosper and win its battle. My stories take this same form and strategy in the sense that as you approach the next story to be told, you will be able to retrieve more insight into the overall narrative as it shifts – for each story is the same but written quite differently from the last.

My character, Ahọ́n Dudu is me and he will lead you through my own personal experiences (embodied) while being confronted with each issue, as you follow along in the narrative that we reside in. We will lead you through it and each time the chameleon changes its colours, you will know.

“Àlọ o”

You then respond: “Àlọ”



‘Play the audio’

OKE

All of Oke was beaming. As the sun stretched itself over the town, nature responded in agreement- the leaves green, the sand as brown as perfectly baked bread and the market as noisy as it should be- business was great.

It was a friendly place that was quite hospitable to anyone that visited it and at any slight chance of a holiday, it was usually flooded by people- tourists, family members, dignitaries, etc. Neighbouring towns often looked to Oke for inspiration on how to conduct their own legal affairs. People often referred to it as ‘the land for everyone’ because it housed so many people from different places. It was a mountain that was graced with a cone- shaped crown on its top- a signifier that it was ruled by royalty. The crown had raindrops etched into its middle to pay homage to the rain spirit that guarded it.

This mountain was divided into three parts. At the foot of the mountain was ‘**Okan**’, the home of Ahon Dudu, the main character of this story; the second level, ‘**Eji**’ housed everyone that worked in the palace and was subdivided into three smaller parts- ‘**Ile keji akokọ**’, ‘**Ile keji arin**’ and, ‘**Ile keji keta**’ which housed the chiefs, lawmakers and dignified guests- everyone from Oke called these people ‘the sheltered’. And the last but topmost level of the mountain, ‘**Ẹta**’, it housed the King and his entire household. It is on this level that the King often held meetings, the laws of the land were discussed and visitors were hosted.

Let’s just say that if Oke were a person, ‘**Ẹta**’ was it’s heart.

.....

‘Play the audio’





dnayal- Denial
/di-n-ah-yi-ah-li/

It was a normal day in Oke, the sun was up and so was everyone else. Ahon Dudu was on his way back home from the end of his morning shift at the market when he noticed smoke in a forest patch on his usual travel route- he had assumed that it was smoke from the factory not too far from him but the smoke seemed to be without source. He however continued home although he thought it was odd. And so it was and continued for days- every time Ahon Dudu went to work and came back, he noticed it.

One day, as he was coming back from the market he noticed that the smoke had grown bigger and so he went into the forest to check hoping to find its source. He walked in and saw that the smoke was suspended in the air, it was not coming from a ground fire, neither was it coming from a factory or being fed by fumes from it. Perplexed, he moved closer to investigate and was caught up in the smoke. He coughed and coughed and attempted to lie down on the ground to avoid it when Ojo appeared to him, making him stand upright. He didn't need an introduction, the people of Oke knew who he was but never actually believed that he would ever appear to anyone- talk less of Ahon Dudu. Ojo graciously covered Ahon Dudu with a pillar of mist which kept the smoke away from his body. As he did so he told Ahon Dudu:

Juba omo ile aye

Emini emi ojo

Èéfín yika oke nla

Èéfín yóò gba órí òkè

Èéfín yoo run oke naa

Ahon Dudu was so shocked that all he could say was “why” and Ojo responded “because it will choke your great Oke”. After Ojo said this, Ahon Dudu found himself back on his route and Ojo had disappeared.

Ahon Dudu went back to his home and did not speak of his encounter with Ojo out of fear. One day Ahon Dudu woke up to find that the smoke had not only circled the mountain, it had filled the atmosphere of his home. He grabbed what he could and left his house in haste to warn people. His fellow neighbours in Okan had all noticed the smoke and were unsure about what to do- they discussed among themselves and Ahon Dudu overhearing their conversation, interrupted it and said, “I am going to warn people on all other levels”. They all looked at him like he was crazy, did he not know the laws of the land? What if he got arrested?

Some begged him to stay and mind his business, others applauded him and insisted that he'd go but were not willing to join him. They were torn until he yelled above the noise “Ojo told me to go and warn them!”- at this they fell silent and wished him the best.

The next day, Ahon Dudu stood at a very pivotal point in the market square where people could hear and he began to shout:

Egba Mi
Egba Mi O
Èéfín yika oke nla
Egba Mi
Èéfín yika oke nla
Egba Mi
Èéfín ti da gbo gbo ile mi ru

As he shouted, he waved his hands back and forth to catch people's attention. Those that saw him looked at him and laughed, some said he was crazy and others ignored him.

"This won't do", he said to himself.

So Ahon Dudu went back to his people, **Okan** and requested a meeting asking for advice. The households represented each gave him garments that he could put on to make his presence louder- they did this so he could warn the people faster.

So the next day, Ahon Dudu went up the mountain to warn others with the garments he had been given. He ran swiftly up the bumpy road from **Okan** as he was not allowed to take King's road because it was only assigned to dignitaries, the King and his Chiefs. He bounced as he journeyed through the unsteady road, tripping a few times but he made it to **Eji**. He barged into **Ile keji keta** and screamed at the women who were sitting in a circle showing each other their latest fabrics. The women were shocked and receded a bit because he was too close to them.

Egba Mi
Egba Mi O
Èéfín yika oke nla
Egba Mi
Èéfín yika oke nla
Egba Mi
Èéfín ti da gbo gbo ile mi ru

They all looked back at him and laughed. They had heard him shouting some days ago and concluded that he was just making noise.

“This one? He is crazy”, one woman said through her wide gapped teeth. “Is he not the one that was shouting in the market square?”, another woman with long straight hair said in his presence as though he were not right there.

They ignored him and continued their gist. Their laughter annoyed Ahon Dudu because it belittled the urgency of this matter so he moved closer, grabbing one of the women whose hand was positioned on her lap.

He took her to the edge of the dome wall to show her the smoke. “Look at it! It’s been growing for days”, said Ahon Dudu.

The woman forcefully escaped his tight grip and then proceeded to slap him- he must have lost his senses to grab a noble woman’s hand like that.

The women hurled insults at him and one of them said, “even if smoke comes here it will not affect us because we are sheltered, so enough of that now! Get out!”

“Please you have to hear me out,” Ahon Dudu begged. But they pushed him out of **Ile keji keta**.

Ahon Dudu paused for a while to think about what to do, he was out of options.

“Ah I know”, he said. “I’ll tell the King so he can order everyone to leave Oke. Yes! They would listen to him, of course! He is the King.” So he began his journey to the top of the mountain. He ran up King’s road from **Ile keji keta**, it was smoother to get to **Eta** from there and only a short distance in case the chiefs ever had an emergency meeting.

Ahon Dudu then hastened his steps so that he could get to the King faster.

When he got to the Palace, he was stopped by the guards as there were rules about the way in which commoners entered the Palace. He struggled with them ferociously but they didn’t let him through - he then started singing on the top of his voice:

Egba Mi

Egba Mi O

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín ti da gbo gbo ile mi ru

The King came out furious and screamed at Ahon Dudu. A commoner like him was not supposed to be here like this.

“Look at you, all dirty and messy, do you expect me to listen to you like this?”

“Where are the chiefs? Couldn’t you have at least accompanied one to lay your complaint?”

“I will not listen to this nonsense, you dare defy the laws of the land?”

“Get rid of him”, the King said as he went back into the palace.

The mountain began to shake and the thick black smoke began to hover over the King’s level. Ojo appeared, whisked Ahon Dudu up and took him away.

When they were far, Ojo said to Ahon Dudu, “Look” and as Ahon Dudu turned back, all he saw was smoke- Oke, ‘the land for everyone’ had fallen.





fasad dafasiti- The Facade: Diversity
/f-ah-s-ah-di: di-ah-f-ah-si-ti-i/

Song: run and leave us o, run and leave

Poem starts:

It was noisy

Like the marketplace

Ahọ Dudu pants heavily as he runs up the mountain

He is tired but cannot give up, the smoke has eaten his home

So once again with all his might he sings

As he motions with his body, warning them like he said he would

Egba Mi

Egba Mi O

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín ti da gbo gbo ile mi ru

When his song ends, he crouches down a little bit, hands on knees, pants some more

He steps into **Ile keji akọkọ**

They warn him to leave, he is their own kin

Song starts: If they see you here, you'll be in trouble

Sade tell him

You know you are like us but not quite like us

This space is not meant for people from **Okan**

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

Ahọ Dudu: No no, there's smoke and Ojo told me to warn you

{he says in haste but they overshadow him}

Song continues: Oh you're hearing from Spirit's now?

{a woman shouts from above them, she's the cook from **Ile keji arin**}

What do you know and why would a Spirit talk to a commoner like you?

{another woman says, she's the H.O.H for the King}

Ahọ Dudu rushes past the people of **Ile keji akọkọ** who are now all shielding him.

"No ma, forgive me but there's smoke coming up this way of the mountain and it has covered **Okan**"

Come on, shut up you fool! Gbenu d'ake jare, I will hit you

{a man says}

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

"Oh what is all this noise! Why are you shouting?

Ahọ Dudu is that you?

Why are you here?"

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

"That's enough!

Come up son."

Ahọ Dudu vigorously breaks free from the grip of Ade who was in position to hit him and runs swiftly up the stairs, and through the barriers to **Ile keji kẹta**.

"What happened?"

Egba Mi

Egba Mi O

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egb...

Again with this song? {man interrupts}

"We heard you already but we don't see anything"

Ahọn Dudu says as he runs to the edge of the barriers and points at the smoke
“Ah ahn come on! **Ah ahn shebi Iya Kike lo so wi pe o ma lo da ino sun ile Ioni?**
That’s why there is smoke”, the chief says

“Not true sir! Rara o”

Song starts: you dare say I’m lying?
See this thing! {he says with disgust}
That is treason you know?
Don’t mind him, how can someone of your status challenge a chief?
Look here!! Know your place

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

We too, we have eyes, abi?
And the so called smoke you speak of we cannot see
Abi are you saying we are blind?
Is there smoke?

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

Yes ma {Ahọn Dudu replies}
So we are blind? {she responds}
No ma...the smoke
Look at my body, look at my hands
It should be proof... my home is gone
And what is my business? My home is still here {she responds}
But the smoke is coming up to swallow you all
Heh heh {she laughs in disbelief as she claps her hands together}
Look at this dome...there is a reason why the King put it here

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

Throw him out!

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave

Chant: run and leave us o, run and leave





bọs glas- The Glass Box
/bi- oh- s gi-li-ah-si/

Song: Oya (Worry)

Ahọn Dudu and the King's Testimonies differ

Ahọn Dudu at Eṭa where the King's Palace is.

The King was furious on hearing the noise and came out screaming at Ahọn Dudu. A commoner like him was not supposed to be here like this. When Ahọn Dudu saw him, he screamed "My King, please you have to send everyone out- smoke is coming up the mountain."

To which the King replied, "Look at you, all dirty and messy, do you expect me to listen to you like this?"

"Where are the chiefs? Couldn't you have at least accompanied one to lay your complaint?"

"I will not listen to this nonsense, you dare defy the laws of the land?"

His anger had drawn everyone in the palace compound to the scene.

As the King turned his back to leave, Ahọn Dudu begged him

"Sir wait!"

[Voices sing: Oya, oya o] x2

"Please, my King"

Ojo came and warned me about the smoke surrounding the mountain

He told me to come and warn you

My home has been destroyed, I'm tired and I just need you to listen.

I warned **Eji** but no one will listen to me and time is running out as I am sure that smoke will soon cover them.

The smoke is going to destroy the mountain

My King, please ask people to leave otherwise they will all die.

"Are you now telling me how to run my land?"

I know your kind, yes people like you

You only come to disrupt the peace of others and don't care about this land

Even if there was smoke, why didn't you report it the right way, as the law states?

Why do you barge in and out of the levels?

Why do you disobey laws in order for your voice to be heard?

"Sir, it's because this land isn't right and no one is listening"

“After all we have done for you, given you a place to stay, welcomed you, treated you as our own although we are clearly different. You dare spit in our face and insult us like this?”, the King said.

“I have no home! That is what I’ve been trying to tell you! The smoke covered it, it covered **Okan** and you all sat here pretty and did nothing about it. And is that what you expect me to be grateful for?”

Grateful for the fact that your complacency caused my people ruin?
I told the chiefs and they threw me out.” Ahon Dudu said.

“Then, I need to throw you out too”

“Of what use is it to listen to someone who has been disregarded by my chiefs, the noble minds of this great land?” said the King

“Great land?” Questioned Ahon Dudu

“Well, this great land will soon be nothing if you don’t order people to leave
You will lose everyone and everything in it.”

Then the King shouted, “How dare you say such nonsense, eh?!
On whose authority do you speak in such manner about Oke?
The great Oke, the land for everyone.”

“Ojo told me”, Ahon Dudu said

“Ha!” The King laughed

“The rain Spirit, Ojo?” He continued

“And he appeared to you first and not anyone of my prestigious chiefs or their noble wives or me, the King?”

The King then walked to the edge of his palace and looked down
He could see the smoke slightly as it had not yet quite reached him or his chiefs
“I don’t see any smoke rising to claw at my lungs as you have said”, the King said

“I never said that”, protested Ahon Dudu as he tried to struggle out of the guards hold.
The King then motioned for one of the Palace Guards and asked “do you see any smoke?”
The guard replied sharply “No my King!”
He motioned for another and the guard responded similarly
And so did the third one.

“You hear that?” said the King
“3 of them said they don’t see it and that’s the truth”
“No it is not my King and you know it”, said Ahon Dudu in defense.
“He defies me!”, the King said as he motioned for everyone around to see.
They all laughed
“I have said my final word and it is the truth”, said the King
“Throw this nuisance of my mountain”, he ordered

And the guards took Ahon Dudu and threw him off the great Oke. As Ahon Dudu descended, the mountain began to shake and thick smoke ascended up Oke covering all of it, including the King’s level- **Eta** .
Ojo came and whisked Ahon Dudu up and took him away.

When they were far, Ojo said to Ahon Dudu, “Look” and as Ahon Dudu turned back, all he saw was smoke- the great Oke, had fallen.

For You,

How was your experience?

By now, hopefully, you have seen that Ahon Dudu is closer to you than you think and if you have not yet come to this realisation, it's ok, this is a story that you can keep coming back to- sometimes depth of meaning lies in repetition of the story.

I write this to share with you a few reflections I have been pondering. As you saw Ahon Dudu wrestle with push back from the people he came in contact with, so it was for me as I went through my 2020 summer. One thing that I realised was that direct conversations with people who think differently from you often don't work so well- I say this from my experience. I recall that during conversations I had I would mention specific words that relate to racism: systemic racism, social justice, white supremacy, white fragility. These would immediately put the white people I was speaking to on the defense. These words did not allow for storylistening. Realising this, I went back to what I had learned through embodied practice-storytelling (Àlọ́). Building my own mode of storytelling, enabled me to address and share the issues that concern me effectively. I did so because I found that this was a more humane approach.

I encountered a few dilemmas when I embarked on my story writing. For one, I did not want to let go of or give up my Yorùbá subjectivity in order to make the stories relatable to my Vancouver audience. I was conscious that what these stories- my stories above- lend to this context is the Yorùbá way of storytelling and its contribution to shaping life- which I was shaped by. Secondly, I come at this topic as a black woman whose black experience is different from the black Vancouverite but also a black woman whose experience has been influenced by the ways of being in Vancouver- I am not quite Canadian 'black' but I am Nigerian Yorùbá black and in Vancouver. As such my black Yorùbá understandings are as valid as the black Vancouverite experience. Thirdly, the story has come out of many acts of telling, retelling. I reworked the story often. So that you the readers/hearers might be true companions of this narrative. So that rather than view it as archaic or something so far away from your reality.

It is in story-telling that my mother often illustrated the ugliness of greed and it was in story-telling that I was first presented with the options 'to be greedy or not', to learn the repercussions of both choices before experiencing more complicated levels of greed. It is with this embodied understanding of storytelling that I tell the stories above. Stories can teach us about the black experience and through them we can empathize with the black community in Vancouver and adjust that we may not be perpetrators of the pain they [we] face in the diaspora- in Vancouver. This is the pain that comes with the feeling of lack- the one that comes with no sense of belonging because in your experience, your environment is not making space for you to belong. Although in this case, my experience of the lack is ongoing, it is through story that listeners of this story can experience Oke falling in advance before we, as an environment, take more steps along a dangerous trajectory- in our own reality.

I too have learned a lot from this process. I have learned that not all 'difficult' conversations should be had. I have learned that there is only so much the black body- my black body- can take in chaos. I have also learned what it means to be rationalised and neglected but what it means to triumph in the midst of hurt and pain. I have learned that there's a lot to my Yorùbá heritage that I still don't know and, that learning self is a life-long journey. And most importantly I have learned that I do not have the answers I wish I did. I have learned that I am not a superhuman, neither am I an expert- I can only say as much as I know and have come to know. And I have learned that story learning is slow and so this work will take years of revisiting for meaning to be unfolded to us.

It is through continuous wrestling within myself, joyous moments with family, tears on my bathroom floor, heavy moments of exhaustion I experienced and disappointments from broken friendships that this thesis was made. It is through embracing these moments that I learned about the importance of this document- my thesis. I have written and composed this story in this way because it is reflective of my identity, and how I see the world. I see my diasporic environment differently from the next Vancouverite and they see it differently too. And so I come in all honesty to myself and the soil I am a product of. I come with what my Yorùbá eyes have seen and what my Yorùbá body has witnessed.

Too many times the black soul has been told to stretch out their hand. And this is what I mean, for a long time the onus has been on us only to show: that we are not as the stereotypes claim; that we are not inferior. And so we have conformed, switched, sacrificed our mother tongues and customs to appear more 'educated', to fit into systems that frankly were never built for us to thrive in. Black souls in the diaspora especially live with double consciousness. We are forced to look at ourselves constantly through the white lens because it is through this lens that we are evaluated. The conventional thesis structure is an example of this lens, that mould that we are asked to conform to.

At the start of my thesis writing as I looked at outlines that addressed typical ways thesis documents are written, I found it increasingly difficult to document my research experience through it. It was not so much the outline of what makes up the document but the way in which language would have had to be framed in order to present a thesis.

The route I was taking was relying heavily on Yorùbá oral practice and experience which would not have thrived in the conventional thesis structure for many reasons.

For one, the conventional thesis would have required me to write about my experiences as though I were a case study. My words are heavily intertwined with my black experience in Vancouver and in many ways, to prove further that what I experienced is actually worth talking about, it would have asked for research methodologies that substantiate my story. The thesis structure in my opinion would have asked me to forfeit my Yorùbá subjectivity by doing this- implying that my experience would only have been credited as good research for a good thesis document because I was able to validate them by basing them foundationally on what established academics had written.

The second issue with this structure is regarding my Yorùbá culture. Our culture is built heavily around oral practice and so my research was conducted by word of mouth and conversations. The conventional thesis asks me to cite and reference academic materials in certain ways; however because of the place I am from, the way that would have been more befitting of my culture from my perspective is to recognise who I spoke to and what their words added to my project. This oral practice is not bound to books, brackets, commas, issue numbers or page numbers. This oral practice is bound to people, knowledge they carry as a result of experiences and practices that have been spoken of and lived by for decades.

If I kept conforming and code switching my work to fit expectations of a thesis document that would have bypassed the very issues surrounding my chosen topic area- my experience of the lack of black communal culture- while simultaneously asking me to forfeit my Yorùbá subjectivity, a black culture that I am made of and one that exists in Vancouver, then it would not be an integral body of work. It would not be my masters thesis. For what I experienced over the summer, I experienced as a Yoruba woman in Vancouver and, it was more urgent to recount it in a way that was befitting of my own identity as that is the only safe space the story can reside in without being altered.

So this body of work, this story is presented to you dear reader as an invitation to stretch out your own hand to my out-stretched hand, that we may meet halfway. For if we desire change and speak so passionately of our desire for it, it ought to reflect in our actions and, if our actions still stay committed to 'the ideal', I'm afraid that we become victims of our own deceit. We risk remaining in denial, we risk carrying on believing that we truly have mastered the 'art of diversity' and this thinking will keep black students and students of colour within the glass box still because we have not allowed for ourselves to honestly navigate the world around us. My work strives to counter this in the academy, and in the field of everyday life experience.

It is with this that I ponder the effectiveness of debate and wonder how helpful it is in issues of racial injustices. Do we continue to debate and reduce the black bodies we've lost to police brutality to facts, statistics and court cases or do we see them as people that actually walked this earth? Can Vancouver see Ahon Dudu as me, a Nigerian in Canada who has experienced racism here in this place, instigated by people who call this place home? Can Vancouver see that Ahon Dudu may not just be me but also the black souls that make up the 1.2 % in Vancouver- people in neighbourhoods, workplaces, institutions? Or would it debate that he is but a fictional character who from time to time becomes statistics on news screens?

Are black souls seen as human?

Are black souls seen as human?

If there's anything I learned from COVID, it is how interconnected the human is to other humans, it is why we need each other to comply with health rules to care for ourselves and others. I hold that we need this same application on issues of ethnic identity and the application of interculturality. Dear Reader, we need to review our actions, review our ways of doing, review our ways of being and even ways of knowing. Doing so honestly with the humility and willingness to face discomfort is essential, for us to thrive together and not not fall like Oke.

I say this well aware that review of our current circumstance is an inward facing task that must be taken on in order for an us to be able to then turn outward and work towards substantial revisions of our ways of doing/ being together. Without this collective work, the black soul will continue to suffer. I know from personal experience that there's only so much the black body can take when faced with difficulties that arise from issues I have explained above. It is why this is an urgent matter.



*Ahọn Dudu means '**Black Tongue**'*

Now that you know the meaning of his name, how do you see the story?

If you were Ahọn Dudu , what would you have done?



‘Reference List’

Place

To the place that I was made in- **Nigeria**. My first contact point for diversity and celebration of culture, of the black body, of the black self.

To **Eko**, the land of hustlers, evergreen. One of the reasons I am what I am today, the place that has shaped me as a designer and the way in which I design. This project is because of this place and all it possesses.

“You are from where your Father is from” is an identity marker for us **Yorùbá** people. I am from Ogun State of the Ijebu People [Ijebu-Ode] and we are **Yorùbás**. It is from this heritage of mine that I imagine, make and write from. It is through these lenses that I choose to see the world around me and speak to societal issues on race in the diasporic environment as it pertains to the black body.

People

To the story-tellers who shaped me and taught me family legacies, moral lessons and cultural values through stories. They taught me what it means to embody stories to keep them alive and the integrity that comes along with that.

Catherine Olowo-Ake [Grandma]
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Texts of Protest

Posthumous tribute to **Martin Luther King Jr.** for your defiant response to your fellow Clergymen in your 'Letter from the Birmingham Jail', in 1963. Your bravery made a mark in history that will never be forgotten- even if they try. Your letter gave me courage when I wanted to give up on this thesis.

Posthumous tribute to **W.E.B. Du Bois** for 'The Souls of Black Folk'. Your writing was both poetic and inviting and your explanation of the hardships the black soul was often plagued with still occurs today in the 2021. Your text helped me further understand and illustrate the second barrier I found here- the Glass Box.

Posthumous tribute to **Gil-Scott Heron** for your 1971 poem, 'The revolution will not be televised'. A great reference point still today for my brown and black brothers and sisters as we carry on in hope.

Indigenous Texts that helped shape my thesis

To **Waziyatawin** for 'Unsettling ourselves: Understanding Colonizer Status'

To **Leanne Simpson** for 'Land as Pedagogy'

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Meanings

Oke- The Mountain

Ahọn Dudu- Black Tongue

Ojo- Rain Spirit

Okan- one

Eji- two

Ile keji akọkọ- the first of the second floor

Ile keji arin- the middle of the second floor

Ile keji kẹta- the third of the second floor

Ẹta- three

Èéfín- Smoke

Egba Mi- Help me

Iya Kike: means the mother of Kike

In Story 2, as the chief in **Ile keji kẹta** converses with Ahọn Dudu:

“Ah ahn shebi Iya Kike lo so wi pe o ma lo da ino sun ile Ioni?”

Translation: ***“Didn’t Iya Kike say she was going to burn something today?”***

When the rain spirit appears to Ahon Dudu in the 'Denial' story, he sings:

Juba omo ile aye

Emini emi ojo

Èéfín yika oke nla

Èéfín yóò gba órí òkè

Èéfín yoo run oke naa

English Translation:

Greetings Son of the earth

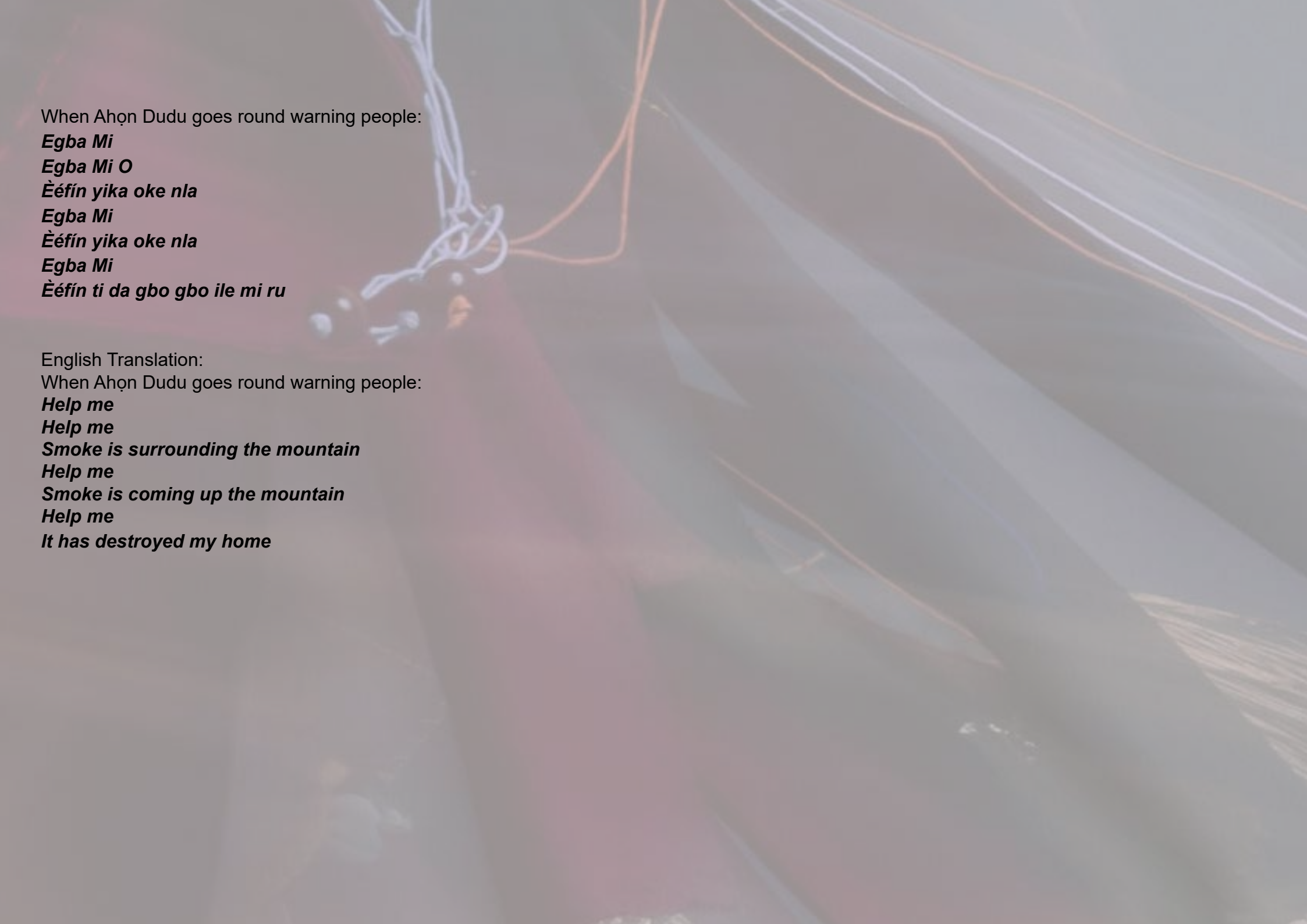
I am Ojo the rain Spirit

Smoke is surrounding the mountain

Smoke will engulf the mountain

Smoke will destroy the mountain

Go and warn everyone in the land



When Ahon Dudu goes round warning people:

Egba Mi

Egba Mi O

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín ti da gbo gbo ile mi ru

English Translation:

When Ahon Dudu goes round warning people:

Help me

Help me

Smoke is surrounding the mountain

Help me

Smoke is coming up the mountain

Help me

It has destroyed my home

As he progresses up the mountain the song develops into:

Egba Mi

Egba Mi O

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín yika oke nla

Egba Mi

Èéfín ti da gbo gbo ile mi ru

Èéfín n bọ lati fun yin pa

English Translation:

Help me

Help me

Smoke is surrounding the mountain

Help me

Smoke is coming up the mountain

Help me

It has destroyed my home

Help me

It is coming to choke you

Story Names

Each story name is spelled in Yorùbá and not translated to Yorùbá hence, the positioning of the letters.

dnayal- Denial

/di-n-ah-yi-ah-li/

The story is named ‘dnayal’ because it illustrates the encounters I had with Denial in Vancouver. This often reflected when some people would respond to my experiences of racism or micro-aggressions with disbelief that they could happen here in Vancouver. In most cases, it led to them placing their disbelief over my accounts and saying to me that they were not true. As a result, there was little space to express pain because these emotions were assumed to be simply as a result of lies.

fasad dafasiti- The Facade: Diversity

/f-ah-s-ah-di: di-ah-f-ah-si-ti-i/

The story is named ‘fasad dafasiti’ because it illustrates a common perspective on diversity that people I was in conversation with, have. That perspective holds that Vancouver is diverse because it houses so many different ethnic identities- this is solely the definitive factor of diversity. This bred a certain level of complacent belief that there was no more work to be done on Vancouver’s part on building community for people of colour generally and the onus was placed on foreigners to adjust.

bos glas- The Glass Box

/bi- oh- s gi-li-ah-si/

This story illustrates how our different experiences shape the way we see life. While I mourned the black souls we lost to police brutality over the summer and watched other black people (as well as non-black people) mourn online, I realised in some of the conversations I had, empathy was lacking because of believed stereotypes about black people and the lack of white experience with racism.

W.E.B Du Bois speaks of the double consciousness the black soul is born with, through which the black soul knows what the white gaze defines as black and what black is to the black soul. I noticed in my conversations that the experience of the white gaze, in this case, the dominant perspective, simply would not accept that racism against the black body exists because of its lack of experience with racism. This often led to them rendering the black experience with racism in Vancouver as 'unreal' because they hadn't witnessed it. And this label stood as truth because it was a predominant opinion.

The Glass Box in the Museum is a visual depiction of this way of thinking. The museum shows you the "object" in the glass box in the way it wants you to see it and what you receive as the viewer is knowledge of the "object" within the confines of a box. What happens if you saw that "object" or "artefact" in its usual environment, serving its usual function? Your understanding of it changes. One cannot come to understand the true meaning of the "object" or "artefact" based on only what the museum reveals- one would understand its true meaning if it was in its home, serving the purpose of why it was created.



