



## The Un-Invention of Africa

### ***What Does It Mean To Be African?***

*History has narrowly chosen to define Africa in relation to its interactions with other civilizations – not as an amorphous and ancient storehouse of our knowledge and origin. How did we become subjects, defined by race and not our own integrity? The urge to undo and re-do perceptions authentically informs our quest in the contemporary in how we portray and are being portrayed as African.*

*It's time to un-invent Africa in the global imagination - to detach it from old tropes and release it from associations of primitivism, exoticism, poverty, as a place shrouded in superstition, myth and regressive political and cultural ideas.*

*We propose an invitation to unlearn, to unlearn the tautology of colonial history. It is an ode to de-colonial movements, critique, and the re-remembering of the origin of humanity - the spiritual and philosophical essence and influence of the African continent on the world - her traditional knowledge systems, diverse cultural identities and histories from North to South, past to present.*

### **The Re-Conceptualisation of Africa - Inviting A Deeper Understanding**

It is an exciting time to situate African culture, though and contributions in the world, and seeing how in the present we live in and contribute to cultures globally, while simultaneously reconnecting with our own cultural and ideological origins, identities. The aim is to begin a new conversation looking into our history and diverse social, political, cultural and spiritual story, our practices and beliefs on the continent African continent. We envision building on the work of previous writers, philosophers, artists and activists inverting the harmful intellectual apparatus of discrimination and denouncing the ethnographic gaze.

### ***Beyond Empire, Towards Reframing & Contextualizing Africa Past & Present in History In The Historical Birthplace of Humanity – On Being, Origin & Spirit I Am Because You Are***

*While Western existential philosophy was still desperately searching theorizing in search of answers about man's essence and essential nature, the Bantu-speaking peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa had already arrived at a resolved place of great spiritual contentment in relation to the essence of their being and their relationship to God/s and supreme beings. **uBu-Ntu - 'being' – a living being complete - a rounded and integrated spiritual, physical and intellectual form.***

*What the West saw as the 'primitive', mysterious, intriguing 'harmony of African conceptions' mystified thinkers because of its consistency across spaces and time. The understanding Africans lived is that there is no separation between God and man, and that existence and life ties together spiritual and physical states of being seamlessly. Ontologically astute, and resolved, we turned our attention to capturing this essence of being in daily life and cultural output, re-creating our image and God in art and showing it as vital. We used our bodies, beliefs, spirit and cultural production to commune and communicate the divinity in our humanity, our UBUNTU.*



### **In Confluence & Created In the Image of Gods**

In Yoruba culture man in his essence IS God, in the form of ORI, a metaphysical concept that determines destiny, a force that represents the essence of one's being and individuality. And it is equally the basis of spirituality. **ORI** is symbolic, encompassing the head, the conscience, the imagination, memory and a human being's sexuality and emotional nucleus. In cultural production and thought there was a celebration of being and spirit in our bodies, a celebration of our divinity.

*Western religion and missiology arrived and we fled our true natures, placing our sacred objects and artistic output in curious glass cabinets as 'ethnographic artifacts' and fundamentally 'heathen' forms of self-ideation. We forgot. Informed by colonial tropes we sold sacred cultural symbols as collectable objects and decorative crafts - stripped of their place and spiritual import, their context.*

*After the masks came off we remained unspoken, unbidden, unseen yet believing in the wisdom of ancestors. And then Biblical tropes and colonial infatuation overcame us, bringing forgetfulness. Hope left and we embraced being reformed animists. Africans historically are the ontological 'pre-existent', how did we document our sense of being and its loss through cultural production and movement?*

*What were we before we were considered to be in the dark by colonial invaders? Contemporary African art often explores the intimate relationship between Black African bodies, faces and collective histories to space, memory, identity, and belonging.*

*We seek to reconnect a thread that reconnects and reminds the world why Africa predates Western ontological thought. Artists from across the African diaspora reflect in communion on the theme with a richness that makes room to contemplate the continent's diversity.*

*Artists reinterpret and represent the notion of being and belonging as an assertion via the physical form - our faces, ritual enactments, identities and representation, critiquing and contesting historical approaches over time. We consider the ancestral influence on contemporary work and expressions of art and performance, spirit.*

### **Africa, Supermarket Of Dreams**

**FOR SALE - FOR HIRE – FOR HEALING...**

*Who owns what, and whom in a contemporary Africa coming to terms with struggles for political and economic autonomy - and what does the reality beyond our television screens and mass media poverty porn really involve? Why are we, despite our vast mineral wealth and resources still the economic looting ground, the global investor's supermarket of dreams? Bodies, borders and resources to plunder and trade, minerals, land, industry, agriculture, cheap labor, and weapons – our struggles for liberation have left us impoverished and with leadership crises around succession and dis-unity.*



Marta Moriarty

*WE need a conversation through art lively engagement. A map re-drawing borders and tracing historic connections and encounters that define post-colonial Africa and our intra-continental relationships between countries pre and post independence. It poses questions, celebrates identity and freedom struggles and moves back and forward in time between countries and their former colonial masters documenting narratives around democracy as a notion and a neo-colonial project in Africa. Regime change, warfare and uprisings, independence and belonging towards the impact of mass immigration and the violence of unceasing poverty.*

### **What is Our Relationship with the West & What Informs It?**

***The scramble for Africa is one of the most active periods in colonial history.***

*My research explores themes around Africa's negotiation of space and identity through trade, governance and political resistance, urbanization, migration, global, economic, rights-based political and social struggles defining our contemporary dialogues in Africa. From slave ports to liberation posts and parliament – trade is always robust, in bodies, dreams, and weapons or political compromise.*

#### **A Reflection On Economic Terror In Prose...**

*I'm preparing an exhibition where we invite artists of African descent globally to create a powerfully evocative and engaging body of work reflecting on the various phases of political and economic transition on the continent, region-to-region, post-colonially. They interrogate notions of national identity and our development, economic struggle and the cultural renaissance spearheaded by various movements from North to South – the gaze noir and its impact. Real signs of political autonomy evade us. Curiosity compelled us, Ubuntu birthed and then tamed us. Commerce seduces. Africa for hire, for sale, manufacture your industrialist fantasies, bring your desire for the exotic, non-consensual land grabs and appetites for illicit minerals. Have your pick - buy bodies at a discount or corrupt officials, maybe you like guns for regime change, come sell and help usher in change. Borders grew porous, and lots and lots of rules about where to move, new clothes, religious dogma and so-called civilization's missiology made us grow puerile, mute. Confined by the markers of race, of discrimination we fight back.*

***We memorized imperialist ideology letter and verse, toiled and prayed for first class passes to heaven. Our bodies weary seek release, only God knows our suffering - or so we hoped.***

*Commerce is booming no less, and foreign financial aid descended on us quickly, like flies. The stench reeks as we seek to reconnect with our spirit. Borders we did not choose creep in, we clutch Bibles we never refused. What lay beyond our fresh, post-independence dreams and hopes of economic parlance? Not freedom, but its antithesis. Rules us.*



*Marta Moriarty*

*Maybe it's a curse because we forgot the creed of ancestors when colonizers came juju-bearing - and in time we erased it, but not them.*

*We failed to remember who we are - a continent who birthed universal man in its cradle and humanity. Instead we found financial indexes, World Bank loans and famine – even when we had land we couldn't farm it or grow food. The struggle is real - **Mayibuye** save us, feelings of **Uhuru** fade inside, ancestors release us!*

*Mandela, Nkrumah and Fanon our mantra - grow more conscious we promise, ask and they promise freedom but feed us instead, sending in more aid.*

*We buy guns, trade fear and wear regressive colonial mentalities like fake hair weaves smothering out intellect, repressed we crave contentment to escape poverty.*

*Our search for connection increases, so we shop and grow deeper material desires urgently as our bodies writhe but dreams are in designer gear and debt. Fame calls and so do corrupt politicians – release on social media platforms where platitudes are our truth. We need hope but do not find it, youth folly, so we shop online, opinions and promises and then we vote for the candidate who feeds us.*

*Dreams of wealth proliferate - but where to go?*

*Go West, go to Spain, France or Italy. We escape poverty, migrate - but Libya is where we end up, stuck or enslaved finally then rescued live on television. Finally we are on international news - but not the way we intended! At home we sing and dance for another contested election victory but for now we're economically deficit, 'zero-rated', un-creditworthy beings. So our dreams churn and grow dark, we seek the ocean and sink on makeshift boats like stones tied around bodies and thrown into the deep, ocean blue – all are immigrants we, at market as history repeats itself on a digital loop, protest calling on the mother ship ... **AFRICA, On Sale Now!***