



Figure 1. Aisha Seriki, *Ori Inu 5*, 60 X 80 cm, (Seriki, 2023)

Abstract

This article explores the interconnectedness of mind, body and spirit, through ways of making and artistic practice. We examine photography and its associations with time, truth and the fake through the Western Spiritualist Photography movement, which rapidly developed in conjunction to the advancement of photography in the late 19th century.

Focused on the photo series *Dwelling: in this space we breathe* (2017) by the late photographer Khadija Saye, and my own photo project 'Orí Inú' (2023 -2024), I reveal the power of photography apparatus, in providing an avenue for marginalised identities to imagine speculative narratives, and divergent ways of being that subvert the status quo. Furthermore, special attention is paid to the implications of Ẹṣẹṣẹ (Yorùbá Spiritual Tradition) on conceptions of self. Opening with the predisposition to rethink the Cartesian mind and body dualism, I propose embodiment and the acknowledgement of the intangible aspects of self as a strategy to facilitate healing, and reclaim cultural knowledge for artists and their audiences.

Keywords: Spiritualist Photography, Embodiment, Yorùbá Spirituality, Orí.

Embodied Creative Practice as a Method for Cultural Recovery

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We exist in the marriage of physical and spiritual remembrance. It is in these spaces that we identify with our physical and imagined bodies. (Khadija Saye, 2017, p. 42).

Introduction

This paper weaves through my artistic journey, and my adoption of an embodied practice, as a methodology of recovering my voice and self, as a creative practitioner. I examine the photographic image as an immortal trace that transcends time and space, and highlight its capabilities in producing non-linear narratives, challenging fixed notions of time which underpins the western colonial project. Through my analysis of works

by the late British Gambian Photographer Khadija Saye (1992-2017), and my photo project 'Orí Inú', I showcase the ritualistic process of photography, as a liberatory force for sustaining life, as well as its capabilities in carving a space of solidarity for the photographer and viewer. By focusing on *Ìṣẹ̀ṣe* (Yorùbá Spirituality) and Spiritualist Photography, I demonstrate the power of photography as a tool in imagining speculative possibilities, that go beyond the normative understandings of marginalised bodies. The spiritual tradition of *Ìṣẹ̀ṣe* does not adhere to Western conceptions of religion, as a separation does not occur between the secular and the spiritual, instead the spiritual guides everyday existence as depicted through the craftsmanship of Yorùbá Art.

In what follows, I discuss photography's relationship with time and its entanglement with spirit photography which gives way to an introduction to Yorùbá cosmology. I then unravel my journey with photography, before presenting the photography work of Khadija Saye. Poetic prose is enlisted as a way of communication to Saye's photography, which is inspired by Tina Campt's (2017) practice of close looking. Following this, I use captioning as a tool to write back to my own photography work, whilst I explain how embodied methodology shapes my artistic practice with the example of my photo project Orí Inú.

The photographic Image as an Immortal trace

Photography at its core is a time-based medium, entangled with the Western linear timeline project which continues to shape how we perceive past and present. A traditionalist perspective on photography sees the image as a snapshot of time on the photographic negative or the memory card. Berger explains that the basic message of a photograph is that the image maker has "decided that seeing this is worth recording" (Berger, 2013, p. 2). As a recording device, photography was used for surveillance by the colonial settler governments across the globe. European explorers used the medium to document their presence and 'discoveries' on Indigenous land and for cataloguing the colonised (Thomas, 1910; Schebesta, 1936).

A nuanced analysis of the photograph goes beyond a static understanding and acknowledges photography's manifold relationship with time. Whilst photographs document past events, they are not frozen in history because our interpretations of images change depending on circumstances and time. Tina Campt, in an interview (Hannabach, 2018) describes photographs as haptic objects because our experience with images goes beyond sight to multisensory awareness that helps create a physical embodied encounter. Our encounters with images are shaped by what we bring to them, what we feel from them, and what they solicit from us. Based on this frame of reference, the power of photography is its temporal and unfixed nature that challenge fixed linear notions of time.

Roland Barthes (1993) highlighted the uncanny power of the photograph, as ultimately separated from the unreachable past moment; and so the "terrible thing which is there in every photograph is the return of the

dead” (p. 9). In this view, photography is an act of immortality, and an attempt to bring the dead alive through the photographic plate. It is an object that traverses through time until the present day but ultimately serves as a window to the past.

Spirit Photography

Photography has been entangled with the spiritualist agenda since its inception in 1839 as it became associated with the supernatural, as evidence of the immortality of the soul. Spirit photography reflects humanity’s enthrallment with the unseen, the question of the origins of our existence, the supernatural, and the afterlife. Early technological advancements such as the discovery of radio waves and X Rays, as well as the fundamental belief in the camera as an instrument of objective truth because of its ability to generate doubles of the sitter and scenes, led many to contemplate the camera’s possibilities to document things invisible to the human eye. It was understood that divine beings, the supernatural, ghosts and psychic energies could be shot through the photographic plate, which materialised often through streaks of light and optical illusions (Roos, 2023; The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, n.d.).

Communication with the unseen was facilitated through automatic writing, seances, and spiritual mediums connecting the living with spiritual beings. Several Spiritualists rose to fame, for their abilities to communicate with the living dead, at a time when people needed evidence of an afterlife (Wojcik, 2009). Spiritualist photography could provide emotional relief and reassurance to its commissioners; but the process of photography could also provide the grieving with a more materialised vision of the afterlife, filling in the gaps created by Christian denominations which rejected communion with the dead, thereby creating an alternative vision of Western eschatology (Glendinning, 1894).

It is this convergence where the image sits in between time, immortality, death and memory that interests me as a photographer– complementary to Yorùbá beliefs in the afterlife as a transition from one existence to the next. This central spiritualist position is that the psyche can persist beyond bodily departure, a view that is akin to the Yorùbá view of the afterlife.

The Yorùbá Cosmology

Primarily located in Southwest Nigeria, in what is commonly known as Yorùbáland, the Yorùbá people are one of the most documented groups in Africa. The Yorùbá people are the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria making up 15.5 % of the population (Nigeria Population 2024 (Live), 2024). Their inhabitants can also be found across localities in West Africa, accounting for a small number of populations in countries such as Benin and Togo. The impact of the Yorùbá people has surpassed the confines of Africa, and its cultural

relevance has been maintained across the diaspora, visible in the traditions of its descendants of enslaved people in the Caribbean and across North and South America.



Figure 2. *Calabash Bowl Balanced on a Sphere*. 20 x 20 cm (Seriki, 2023)

The Yorùbá Cosmos is often represented as a Calabash with two halves that fit compactly, each side representing two distinct but inextricable arenas, Orun and Aye (Rice, 2017). Orun signifies the invisible spiritual land of the sacred containing Olódùmarè, Òrìṣà's, Ancestors and Spirits, while Aye represents the physical world. This conception brings forth temporal implications in the comprehension of time, as the Yorùbá formulate the past 'as an accessible and essential model for the present' (Drewal & Pemberton, 1989,

p. 14). Death, for example, is not acknowledged as the final destination, but rather a transition from one existence to another. Ancestors therefore exist in a liminal space and can be reached out to for assistance from their descendants, or travel to the physical world temporarily through the Egungun masquerade (Drewal & Pemberton, 1989, p. 15).

Olódùmarè is recognised as the architect of existence, a non-gendered spiritual force withdrawn from the matters of the divine and physical beings. Òrìṣà's are conceived as emissaries of Olódùmarè, some are personalised natural forces or celebrated ancestors. The number of Òrìṣà's is not exactly recorded and is calculated as the sacred number of 401+ to represent the infinite number of their existence. While all Òrìṣà's can frequent the physical world, two divine beings Èṣù and Ọrunmila / Ifá sit on the gateway between Orun and Aye, aiding in communication between physical and spiritual beings (Drewal & Pemberton, 1989, p. 15). The Yorùbá practice of divination, Ifá, is the codified knowledge of Ọrunmila. It is through Ifá that humans can communicate with the spiritual world.

My Early Beginnings in Photography

My work using photography and its tools, long exposures, double exposures, and photomanipulation, aims to embody and connect to the wisdom of my ancestors to navigate my present reality as a means of my exploration of non-linear spiritual histories. My journey into photography and art began through my dad's documentation of our migration from Nigeria to South Asia. Like many parents, my father used the camera excessively to capture the daily milestones of my sisters and I, along with plenty of images featuring our gummy smiles, sequin princess dresses, boxed or relaxed hair, and family celebrations. Eventually, my family landed in rainy London in September 2006. Their decision to migrate to the UK was to provide me and my sisters access to a quality education which neither of my parents had the privilege of receiving.

Contextually, not long after our move, during the early 2010s was the appointment of the Conservative Government in a hung parliament alongside the LibDem party in the UK. Their measures of austerity led many families to rely on food banks, including my own family. The widening gaps of inequality and its effects radicalised me and I remember spending many mornings watching the news and reading the free metro paper on the way to secondary school.

My love for photography was reignited in this period, as I was now completing my Art General Certificate of Secondary Education. I was absorbed by the medium, this time not for its snapshot purposes, but to examine and give a conduit to my anger; I was looking for an escape from my then-current realities of existence. My politics could not be separated from my Art. I was inspired by several activists and artists like the Guerrilla Girls, Banksy, Frida Kahlo, and Basquiat. Thus, the subsequent work I produced reflected my existence as a Black African migrant in the UK. My final piece for my Art exam was a mixed media collage which pulled

words from 'We Should All be Feminists' (Adichie, 2012). Additionally, my other school projects documented the decline in social housing and the rise of gentrification in London which directly impacted my family for years, by continually displacing us to living in temporary accommodations far from our home borough.

10 years after arriving in London I applied to university but was unfortunately unable to access state funding for my studies. I was then admitted into the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) under a scholarship that covered tuition fees for immigrants who did not have access to student finance. It was during my time at SOAS that I became acquainted, through my African literature course, with the works of Black theorists such as Franz Fanon, Paul Gilroy and Chiekh Anta Diop, and activists like Steve Biko and Thomas Sankara. Readings that particularly inspired me included Cabral's (1974) essay *National Liberation and Culture*, as well as Ngugi Wa Thiongo's (1982) *Devil on the Cross*. Calabral (1974) stated that "the colonised will only be culturally free from 'foreign domination... if, without complexes and the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture" (p.13). This expression catalysed the start of my journey into discovering the teachings of African Spiritual Traditions, specifically the Yorùbá Spiritual Practice *Ìṣẹ̀ṣe*, to rediscover aspects of my identity that had been uprooted from me. Hoping to further the processes of decolonising my mind, I decided to use my undergraduate dissertation to uncover aspects of my culture and identity which had been socially and religiously relegated as merely fetish and witchcraft.

Khadija Saye's Artistic practice as a Method of Recovering the Self

The events of June 17th, 2017 are deeply etched in my brain. It was also the day before my final A-level Exam. X (formerly known as Twitter) broke the news to me first with several accounts about smoke in West London. I spent the rest of the day glued to the TV screen in horror at every news update. A rollercoaster of emotions ensued when the fire transformed into its final form, and I eventually realised that there would be casualties.

The revelation of Khadija Saye's death hit close to home, and I was saddened that it was her death that served as my introduction to her work. Khadija Saye (1992-2017) was a British Gambian photographer whose artistic practice was influenced by her mixed-faith upbringing and her ethnic background. Ambitious and determined, Khadija made several strides in her professional career, including her work being exhibited in the Diaspora Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017. However, her practice was abruptly interrupted by her untimely death on June 17th, 2017, when a fire broke out in the 24-story Grenfell Tower (About, 2017). Already jaded by the failures of the government, Grenfell highlighted to me the results of a system that prioritised wealth accumulation over the safety and well-being of its citizens. The Grenfell Inquiry discovered in its first report in 2019, that the hazardous ACM cladding installed on the exterior of the building was

responsible for the spread of the fire (Gaudion, 2022). Sadly, several warnings were ignored months before the blaze by the organisation that managed the tower, neglecting the safety and wellbeing of its occupants.



Your eyes are closed to the psychical world, yet they are open to the world of the unseen, which one is unable to access through our bodily selves. You cup an object towards your ear, is this your portal to soundscapes of the visible unseen? There is a stillness to your body that makes me pay attention to myself, my body, my movements, as I watch you inhabit the state of tranquillity.

Figure 3. Khadija Saye, *Andichurai, Dwelling: in this space we breathe*. Wet plate collodion tintype on metal, 250 x 200 mm, (Saye, 2017)

I saw myself in Khadija; we shared many similarities. She, like me, was a fellow working-class West African photographer dedicated to social justice, whilst trying to pursue her dreams in the industry. The photography studio transformed and was carved into a safe space of solidarity from the outside world. Saye and I both elicit the spiritual and West African ancestral knowledge as the conceptual framework in our works. The use of performance, speculation in our photography, becomes a method of grappling with our social economic conditions. Imagination as a method of rethinking the world extends past our individual recovery, to the

viewer. Whilst I cannot have a relationship with Saye in the physical world, her presence is immortalised in the image, facilitating a non-material connection, that occurs between humans and Òrìṣà's, where her principles become a source of inspiration in my process of creating.

Saye saw the process of photography an act of empowerment, creating imagery that challenges the colonial stereotypes placed on the Black Body, what Tina Campt (2023) calls the Black Gaze which “disrupts the equation of a gaze with structures of domination by refusing to reduce its subjects to objects and refusing to grant mastery or pleasure to a viewer at the expense of another (pp. 38-9)”. In Saye’s ground-breaking Self Portrait photographic series ‘*Dwelling: in this space we breathe*’, each photograph features sacred objects some of which are localized to Gambia itself, and others familiar to the West African context, showcasing the power of spirituality as a method of self-preservation to combat trauma occurring as a result of simply existing in a racialized body.



I see you as you see me. The untamed circular necklace of flora and fauna that fashion your shoulder and neck, the wild thorns, flesh like, reminds me about the importance of reconnection to the natural world. I see you as you see me.

Figure 4. Khadija Saye, *Toor-Toor, Dwelling: in this space we breathe*. Wet plate collodion tintype on metal , 250 x 200 mm, (Saye, 2017)

Saye explained how the work originated.

The series was created from a personal need for spiritual grounding after experiencing trauma...We exist in the marriage of physical and spiritual remembrance. It's in these spaces in which we identify with our physical and imagined bodies... Using myself as the subject, I felt it necessary to physically explore how trauma is embodied in the black experience. (Saye, 2017, p. 42).

The series is filled with visual metaphors– breath as an analogy of the cyclical cycle of body regeneration and transformation engaged throughout our existence, through breath. Breath here can also be a connotation for spiritual healing and realisation, which can be accessed through the awareness of our physical body and soul.



A gaze that resists capture, a mystery that I will never unfold, yet it is your looking that keeps me enthralled. There is familiarity within your eyes, a vulnerability, that is not often ascribed to black bodies. Our encounter is instant, you demand a close look, maybe it's your focus or the adornments which you have chosen, but I am compelled to acknowledge your presence, I want to hold space with you...I want to know you.

Figure 5. Khadija Saye, *Peitaw, Dwelling: in this space we breathe*. Wet plate collodion tintype on metal, 250 x 200 mm, (Saye, 2017)

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In the photograph *Peitaw* (2017) from the same project, there is an outpour of Cowry shells that flow from Saye's nose to chin, its shape takes the form of a stream of water, perhaps signifying the richness of the Black Experience or an expression of the spiritual world that runs parallel to our daily experience. By using herself as the subject, Saye readdresses the body in which she existed. This embodiment becomes a vehicle of spiritual healing.

A journey towards a pedagogy of embodiment

I began my masters at the Royal College of Art during the halt of production within the creative industry because of the pandemic. This, and the aftermath of Black Lives Matter, left me in a state of depression and despair about my position in the world. Two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I began to question my position as a photographer, interrogating the choices and decisions behind my approach. I discovered that my creative process was risk-averse, almost formulaic and completely focused on the final output after countless discussions and artistic crits with my tutors and peers. I was enacting a role of 'educator' in that my work focused solely on dictating answers for my audience, rather than exploring my own unanswered questions generated through the inquiry process of making. Echoing Critical Scholar Roxana Ng (2018), as a self-proclaimed feminist, I had been repeating Carol Hanisch's (2006) words 'the personal is political' ever since secondary school. However, I realised that I was only partially embodying this theoretical framework outside academia and in my photographic work. My encounter with Saye's images reminded me of the importance of stillness in the process of mending.

My journey towards a pedagogy of embodiment therefore was initiated by mending of the separations between my research in *Ìṣẹ̀ṣe* (Awolalu, 1979 ; Idowu, 1962; Abimbola, 1976), Intersectional Feminism (hooks, 1981, 2004; Ahmed 2017, 2023; Lorde, 1984), and Black Studies (Moten, 2017; Sharpe, 2016) and my creative practice situated in Spiritualism.

A part of my interrogation included asking myself open-ended questions scribbled on several notepads such as: 'How can I use photography to dispute the ideas of linearity that are commonly associated with it? As an artist, my main concern is to showcase a holistic conception of being, which challenges colonial understandings of the self. This manifesto drives my interest in spiritualist photography, as a methodology of challenging the paradoxical relationship with truth and time in the photo. I am fascinated by how analogue photography is like a magical process; it challenges our understanding of the physical and the unseen. Through my appropriation of elements of Spiritualist Photography, Mirror Trick Photography, and *Ìṣẹ̀ṣe* in my photo project *Orí Inú*, I aim to dismantle the inelastic association of the camera as a vessel of truth and expand it to showcase its power in fashioning speculative possibilities for marginalised bodies that exist outside the racialised binaries. Another question I posed was, how can I use photography to interrogate the

idea of value? Fundamentally, as an artist and a creative practitioner, I am interested in how art can help facilitate the recovery process for artists and how this dictates their creative processes and outcomes. Using Yorùbá cosmology, to create a care-centred apparatus, I am interested in sustaining life and mapping out comparative decolonial methods of recovering the self. The next question was, what does a photograph, taken by an intersectional feminist, look like?' By centring Yorùbá ways of understanding, I aim to carve out a methodology of resistance, creating visual imagery that subverts colonial imaginations of the marginalised body. However, the power of embodied creative practice is not my sole concern; photography can also be used as a tool for both healing and rehabilitation of the photographer and the viewer which I share a personal example here. So, my last question was, how can one enlist art as a method to resist violence and sustain life in this precarious world? As an artist embedded in social worlds, I must constantly redress position and approach to make socially engaged work and to give space to innovative reimaginings of the globalised world. The manifestation of spirituality and photography can facilitate a process of healing trauma for the photographer.

Orí as a method of healing



Figure 6. *Ori Inu 2*, Giclee Print, 60 X 80 cm, (Seriki, 2023)

Haddi is reaching into her reflection in the mirror. The placement of the camera and the mirror creates an optical distortion, allowing us to see doubles of her reflection. The Calabash and its spiritual half are not present, breaking the symmetrical tone of the image. Her hand is in communion with her various reflections, a unified dance of the different aspects of consciousness that make the multifaceted self.

In December 2022, I returned to Lagos, Nigeria, sixteen years after my departure as a youth. This coming back was part of the examination of my healing journey and reconnecting with myself. Following the height of the COVID pandemic and now finally being in a space where I could fully dedicate myself to my craft, I wanted to create a project that reflected the push and pull of spiritual regression and transformation. One

day, I was looking through my notebook, a messy jungle of scrawling notes, to revisit any ideas that I had long forgotten. Looking through my countless handwritten mind maps, I became fixated on one arrow titled 'Mind Over Body' and the words that followed *Living in a commodified body Feeling detached with my body*. I had mentioned the Yorùbá concept of Orí in another mind map; so I started to ponder on how I could represent the Orí. Could I use myself as the subject for such a project? My photo project Orí Inú was born.

Orí is a Yorùbá Metaphysical concept, translating to 'head', and inside the head is where the Orí Inú (inner head) is found (The Importance of Ori, n.d.). This non-physical entity is our personal divinity, guardian and navigation of the world. It is our Orí Inú that protects us and guides us to our chosen destiny, it also presides over human personality, that guides and controls the characteristics of a person. It is believed that the immaterial self, selects our spiritual destiny ('Orí'), yet this is unknown to us once we enter the world (Balogun, 2007). Scholar Oladele Abiodun Balogun posits that the concept of Orí does not fall into fatalism, or determinism and instead argues for a soft determinist view of the Orí, as humans have free will, to reshape their chosen destiny (good or bad) through *ese* (work). It is only through individual effort and working on ourselves spiritually and physically that our 'Orí becomes actualised. Due to the nature of the project, I initially imagined 'Orí Inú' as a self-portrait piece. This was monumental because, after a decade of shooting, I had never made myself the subject. I was comfortable assuming my role behind the lens. I initially started prepping the shoot during my visit to Nigeria, but later rescinded on this venture, focusing on shooting documentary photos of the familiar Lagos landscape that featured in my family photo albums.

I returned to the UK and began my new feat in self-portraiture using the calabash I bought in Balogun Market in Lagos, the mirror, and my body. Using the Calabash as a metaphor for the arenas that make up my existence- mind, body and spirit, the project showcases my attempts to mend the disconnect within the three aspects of my nature, in my quest to realign with my Orí.



Figure 7. *Ori Inu 1*, Giclee Print, 60 X 80 cm, (Seriki, 2023)

A side profile image of Haddi's head adorned with cowrie shells is reflected in a mirror, allowing us to see elements of her reflection, which represents her spiritual half. She is looking directly forward representing the hope that the future brings. The Calabash is full showing the conjoining of the body and the spirit.

Being in front of the camera however confirmed my aversion to self-portraiture. I felt vulnerable in the eyes of the camera, so the shoot became less about my conceptualization and more about my perception of myself and my insecurities. In all, the shooting process was not enjoyable, meditative, or a mode of escapism, which photography typically is for me; it was laborious and draining. I believe this discomfort occurred because of

facing myself, as the path towards embodiment is not a swift process without challenges and hiccups. Nevertheless, the discomfort led me to my next creative decision where I decided to photograph my friend, Haddi Jallow, to represent myself. Perhaps, my decision could be perceived as a contradiction to my hypothesis, but I will argue that, instead, it is a symbol that the path towards healing is not linear, as there are many victories and losses and twists and turns throughout this journey. Transformation doesn't happen overnight, it requires care, time and patience. Whilst I was not comfortable in front of the lens at that period, I do hope that I will eventually feel comfortable documenting myself in the future. By shooting my friend Haddi, I uncovered the ritualistic and collaborative power of photography I had taken for granted in the past. From my perspective, photography is not just about the final product but is more about the communal bonds created on set, the discussions with my sisters and loved ones about the project, the mind-mapping and mood-boarding; they all serve as a vehicle of the ritual. In this way, the final image reflects the process and becomes the product of this ritual. I have witnessed the impact of my embodied approach, in producing rich conversations that extend past my imagination, in the viewer's responses to *Orí Inú*.

One instance sticks out clearly to me from a group exhibition I was part of in October of 2023. Initiated through her viewing of *Orí Inú*, I had a conversation with a young Angolan woman who connected to my work. She described to me the impact of Portuguese colonialism on indigenous Angolan culture, causing restraints in her journey to reconnect with her spirituality. As a result, she turned to *Isese* to guide her. Our conversation, reaffirmed in my advocacy of *Isese* through my creative practice and informed me more about the extent of Portuguese colonialism.



Figure 8. *Ori Inu 4*, Giclee Print, 60 X 80 cm, (Seriki, 2023)

A silhouette image of Haddi emerges from darkness. Haddi's head is adorned with a Cowrie Headpiece, a motif of wealth in the Yorùbá World view, which signifies her spiritual self. Haddi's face does not meet our gaze and is faced towards the darkness, stuck in the ghosts of the past. She is not static, and her spirit and her body are in flux, represented in the juggling of the Calabash.

In my attempts to create an embodied creative practice, and by recommendation of my MA photography tutor Abbas Zahidi, I read 'Philosophy of Photography' by Villem Flusser (2000). Flusser points out the power of black and white photographs because "they more clearly reveal the actual significance of the photograph, i.e. the world of concepts (p.43). What stood out to me was Flusser's debate on the volatile battle between the photographer and the camera apparatus. According to Flusser, the more automated and complex a camera is, the less opportunity for the photographer to challenge the camera program and create new understandings.

I reflected on my years of photographing using my digital camera, which initially began as a means of convenience, but was now restricting me from a physical experience with photography past the computer screen. My solution to creating a closer relation to my imagery was to start the process of shooting on film but this did not come without its challenges. Countless accidents have ensued since, wasted film rolls, light leaks, and scratched negatives. Nevertheless, the process of shooting on film contributed to my envisioning of photography as a ritualistic and healing process, because by shooting on a mechanical camera, I was forced to slow down and become self-aware and vigilant – a state of being also essential in the process of healing. The meditative state which occurs from shooting in medium format, is a vital ingredient of recovery because it allows the individual to be introspective and reflective. I see this act of photography as liberatory in a value-driven society, which advances physical labour, over self-sustenance. By shooting on film, I relinquished my elements of control and surrender to the medium. The darkroom then becomes a space where the image emerges from darkness through the process of alchemy and transformation. Comparably, Khadija Saye also described the process of developing her Tintype photographic series *Dwelling: in this space we breathe* as ritualistic, saying that, "the process of submerging the collodion-covered plate into a tank of silver nitrate ignites memories of baptisms, the idea of purity and how we cleanse to be spiritually sound" (Saye, 2017, p. 42).



Figure 9. *Ori Inu 3*, Giclee Print, 60 X 80 cm, (Seriki, 2023)

In an image of doubles, representing Haddi's Soul and Body, each of the figures clasps the conjoined Calabash, which they hold together. This unity and symmetry emphasise the contribution of both spirit and body in establishing a strong sense of self. Haddi's spirit (right) is not concerned with us, instead, her focus is directed to Haddi (Left), whilst we are confronted by the gaze of Haddi's body (Left).

The use of Mirroring and Black and White film are aesthetic decisions, to encourage what Tina Campt (2017) calls listening to images. She explains that a close looking at photography is "constituted as a practice of looking beyond what we see and attuning our senses to the other affective frequencies through which photographs register" (Campt, 2017, p. 9). By shooting in black and white I aim to focus the viewer's attention on the performance of the sitter, the negative space in the images becomes a representation of my inner consciousness and of the emptiness caused by the thought patterns of existential dread that had emerged

during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Mirror became a constant recurrence in the images, as mirrors are a popular artistic trope and have been used as a method of truth-telling, or as an illusion and a device of trickery, vanity, and reflecting emotional realities throughout history (such as in the work of Cuhan, 1927; Caravaggio, 1597 – 1599; Cocteau, 1950; Manet, 1832 – 1883; Muholi, 2015). I use the mirror to trap curiosity and enchant the gaze of the viewer, as well as to honour the invisible element of the soul that makes up the human body.

Conclusion: The Embodiment of Mind, Spirit and Body

My photo project 'Orí Inú ' is an accumulation of my attempts to reconnect to my love of photography and an examination of the process of spiritual regression and transformation through the Yorùbá conception of the Orí. Nigerian scholar, Temitope Adefarakan (2018) states that the Orí

subverts conventional Cartesian frameworks by encouraging the reconceptualization of the self as the fusion of body, mind, and spirit, an empowering shift of embodied consciousness that can help to counteract the dislocation and oppression prevalent in mainstream teachings and learnings. (p. 230)

Referring also to the work of Audre Lorde, Adefarakan brings awareness to the importance of Orí, as providing a feminist, decolonial method to arrive at an embodied consciousness which allows for the integration of all aspects of self, body, mind, spirit and soul. Citing Lorde,

My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without restrictions of externally imposed definition. (Lorde as cited in Adefarakan, 2018, p.120-121)

Black feminist critical scholar, bell hooks (1995) also points attention to the contradictions of healing the split between mind and body in the black body, in a culture that sees black people as body rather than mind. She argued that

for black bodies, the fear has not been losing touch with our carnality and physicality but how to be in touch with our bodies in a way that is liberatory, that does not confine us to racist/sexist paradigms of subjugated embodiment (p. 204)

Akin to hooks's and Adefarakan's theoretical stance, in my adoption of the Yorùbá concept of the Orí, I create and showcase a counterhegemonic image of the black body that, not only takes account of the physical body but also pays attention to all aspects of self, which is often denied to black bodies.

By bringing my experiences to light in this article, I hope to strip down the aura of romanticism that surrounds artistic practice, which I believe feeds into the power dynamic between the artist and the viewer. This idealisation also feeds academia and posits the academic as the repository of knowledge against the student. Further, through sharing my journey towards embodiment and recovering my ancestral past and its

impact on my creative practice, I hope to cancel out this hierarchy by stepping outside the role of the educator. I am not a fountain of knowledge, and I become the service user of my art, as a student who is learning, uncovering, and healing alongside my audience. By centering an embodied approach in my creative practice, I create intimacy for the viewer, from a collective space which acknowledges the process of healing, mourning and self-actualization. It is an embodiment of the mind, spirit and body that allows us to be in tune with ourselves in a liberatory manner, providing us with an alternative mode of existence outside colonial understandings of being. By placing the spirit in the centre of my recovery and rediscovery of my artistic practice, I detach myself from the mind and body dualism and embrace all elements of my being, allowing for a more holistic and tender understanding of self.

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