

**THE EMERGENCE OF YAKUBU: A PROCESS WORK RESPONSE TO
INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION**

**A Contextual Essay to Accompany the
Creative Acting Project
*ATTRACTIVE CHILDREN: ONE MAN'S UNMASKING OF
INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION***

Submitted by

Okokon Obot Udo

To

THE PROCESS WORK INSTITUTE

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the

MASTER OF ARTS

In

CONFLICT FACILITATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am not a self made man. It has taken the collective effort of literally thousands of people to get me to where I am and to make me the person that I am. The people that have contributed directly to this journey in Process Work have been there to coach, push, cheer and support for the last three years of my academic experience.

Special thanks to my study committee of Stephen Schuitevoerder, Jan Dworkin and Emetchi. They were my dream team. They were relentless in their pushing me to be my best and amazing in their love and support of me at every step of the process especially in my examination preparation and project development phases.

I owe my wife Umo and kids Utibe-Abasi, Idara and Emem immense thanks for making sacrifices even during basketball seasons, important holidays and weekends, so I could pursue my dream and complete my degree program. You provided a comfortable space at home for reflection and integration and gave me the courage to keep dreaming.

I would like to thank my peer group members (Global High Dreamers) for providing a context of learning that provided all the qualities we needed to learn and deepen our knowledge of process work and grow our mastery of metaskills. Thanks Art, Sonia, Genevieve, Mohammad, Ben, Yura, Nami and Elizabeth. You made me look forward to returning for each of our seven long residencies. You made me laugh and cry, you pushed me over my edges and you celebrated the emergence of my secondary identity.

Christine McHugh, my coach and director in the development and staging of my one-man-show, I salute you for your dedication to my process. You are a master at what you do. Without you, this endeavor would not have evolved to the level that it is. I know our paths will cross again.

To my close friends and conversation partners, I say thank you. You encouraged me, you loved to talk process work, you were curious about what I was studying and inquired about my process. Some of you were so interested in my final project that you made it to Portland for my performance. Helen House, Souzan Bachir, Anthony Parry, Jack Bandy, Noni Threinen, Ian McKelvie, Joe & Nancy Sertich, Anna Schumacher, Gary & Linnea Dietrich, Greg & Kiki Webb, Liberto Pereda & Rosario Dominguez, Linda Langley, Ronnie Clifford, Marte Jannecken Birkemo Aarsland, Caroline Kay, Nate Bogopolsky and Linda Eickman, I cannot thank you enough.

Finally, my thanks goes to the great spirit and energy of the universe, variously called God and the Higher Power, who made it possible for me to this embark on this phase of my journey at this time in history and gave me the energy and wisdom to be able to complete the journey. How great thou art!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title.....	Page 1
Acknowledgements.....	Page 2
Table of Contents.....	Page 4
Introduction.....	Page 5
Process.....	Page 7
Internalized oppression.....	Page 9
The performance.....	Page 13
Use of masks.....	Page 14
Identification of and experiences with masks.....	Page 16
Embodying the characters.....	Page 20
Product.....	Page 22
Audience.....	Page 21
Quality.....	Page 23
Contribution to field.....	Page 36
Limitations and limits of project.....	Page 37
Future possibilities.....	Page 38
References.....	Page 39

INTRODUCTION

This contextual essay accompanies a creative acting piece that I chose to do for my final project in Process Work. The play about which this essay is written, is my story. It is the story of my evolution into the person I am. The story takes place in time but transcends time in its recollection of my identity and way of life of my people. It is located at a time in history marked by imposed and abusive tendencies of colonization and evangelization. It is a story about the pain, the struggle and the triumph. In that context, it mirrors the story of everyone who has ever lost their voice, been spoken for or been marginalized by another person or group.

Twelve years ago, I was invited to fill a major role in a play called, *Not in My Season of Songs*, written and directed by Awam Amkpa, a Nigerian playwright and New York-based University professor. It was the story of an Irish woman and a Nigerian man who grew up in different cultural contexts thousands of miles apart but were dealing with similar imposed realities of colonialism and oppression. I was introduced to the character of Yakubu when I played him as the lead role.

Yakubu grew up at a time when his home country of Nigeria and people were colonized. He watched his people get taken advantage of, lose their freedom and begin to let go of their cultural norms and values in favor of the western European values of the colonizers. He was disheartened and outraged but soon learned in Mandela's words that "you have to learn the ways of your enemy to beat him". (Mandela, *Invictus*) He took advantage of the education that

was available, including some time in the United Kingdom. He studied and became a successful cartographer who eventually used his knowledge and expertise to rally against what he called the irrational drawing and redrawing of the Nigerian map.

Yukubu was a successful Nigerian elder statesman who grew up with hopes and dreams for himself and his people only to be confronted by a paradox between his new-found "modern" life and the destruction of his cultural structures and constructs. Initially, he chose to ignore the tension and found himself face to face with deep questions arising from his professional life. For Yakubu, it was not enough to be the obedient intellectual and professional he had become. In fact, those labels were what got in the way of his finding his voice and addressing his issues of internalized oppression and marginalization.

By the time I met Yakubu he was unapologetically African in his thinking and ways. His anger and rage were now turned not only to his target of displeasure - everything "white" but Africans that he believed had sold out by adopting any reflection of "whiteness". For two weeks in the fall of 2000, I was Yakubu. I embodied who he was and I became his voice. I ceased to be Okokon. I found myself angry, outraged, frustrated and impatient. I was right and the rest of the world who subscribed to the western colonialist and Christian missionary mindset were wrong and evil. That play was the avenue for lessening the pain, protecting me and reclaiming the identity of my people.

When it was done, I went back to my life as a Nigerian who is now also an American living in the United States. That was until I enrolled at the Process

Work Institute. This work is the expression of my emergence from the rubble of internalized oppression through my process work training into the person, man and global citizen that I am today.

The Process

My entire process was a deep democratic one. I had to pay attention to, honor and mediate the discussion between the different levels of reality within me, different parts of me and the different voices within me. Diamond and Jones describe the process thus: "Deep democracy was not only a sociopolitical method of addressing conflict and other social issues, but also a spiritual and psychological awareness method that enabled people to find fluidity and wholeness in the midst of social tensions" (Page 12)

The spiritual and psychological awareness that enabled me to find fluidity and wholeness would become my internal process all through my academic process. At the height of my process, I was having two to three supervision sessions most weeks with my process work faculty and my coach/director. The beauty of it all was that I could use all the help I could get to manage the intensity of the experience and conflict that was occurring within me.

The process stretched me in different ways. My primary identity that often came with a polished appearance and social etiquette was met with spontaneity, anger and rage. Like the first play I acted in, I discovered I could shape shift into other characters who were also parts of me. I laughed, I cried, I let out very primal screams and did different forms of inner work to ground myself. My most

frequented and appreciated inner work experience was the earth spot visualization, as it calmed me down and focused my energy. I stretched as far as I needed to because of the safety net that was built around me by my study committee members, my coach/performance director and my cohort peers also know as the Global High Dreamers.

Given the established nature of my easygoing, adaptable, friendly, polite and nice primary identity, it was months before I would step into, practice and eventually embody my direct, angry, intense, frustrated secondary identity. I used the process to deal with different types and levels of conflict. I used the intense level of my engagement with Yakubu to do two party conflict work and used the experience of internalized oppression and feelings of marginalization prompted by the twin issues of colonization and evangelization to work on my own disturbing experiences. The pain of the experience soon gave way to the gift of the experience as seen in the metaskills of fluidity and eldership experienced and demonstrated in my overall learning process.

My decision to go the creative project route for my final project was the culmination of a seed that was sown when I first played Yakubu in *Not in My Season of Songs*. Although a process that is still unfolding, I am fully claiming my secondary identity as a necessary aspect that is also me and needed to expand my range of options as a Process Work facilitator. For me, the One Man Show is more than a performance. It is a courageous step to strengthen my voice, come out to the world and finally come home to myself. It is also a creative project that follows the mystery that in turn informs me about the project. The

mystery is in the encounter with Yakubu and the ensuing heated dialogue between us. My project reveals my journey with Yakubu and the marginalization and internal oppression experience it generates. This contextual essay frames the journey in process work terms.

Internalized Oppression

Things Fall Apart is futuristic in its presentation of the issues associated with colonization and evangelization. Although it appears to be exclusively concerned with the imposition of colonial rule and the traumatic encounter between Africa and Europe, Simon Gikandi writing about *Things Fall Apart* notes,

“It is also a work that seeks to address the crisis of culture generated by the collapse of colonial rule. Indeed, Achebe has constantly argued that the theme of colonial domination in Africa - its rise and influence - was made imperative in his works by his concern that the culture of colonialism had had such a strong hold on African peoples, especially on a psychological level, that its consequences could continue to haunt African society long after European colonizer had left the continent". (Page xi)

In Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe discusses both the process and complexity of oppression. On the one hand, he fears what usually happens; the reality of existing internal systems collapsing in favor of the new imposed structures. Gikandi describes the central theme of the novel as "what happens to the values that define Okonkwo's cultural community, and his own sense of moral order, when the institutions he had fought so hard to sustain collapse in the face of European colonialism". (Page x)

What *Things Fall Apart* addresses are the fundamental issues of marginalization and oppression at play in my creative expression on stage. They

point not only to the effect on culture and institutions but the emotional, spiritual and psychological impact on people and communities.

Internalized oppression is the main focus of my project and is the process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate myths and stereotypes applied to the group. I am focusing on this project primarily because I have lived its reality all my life. As a man who never went through the rights of passage of my Ikot Idaha village or Ibibio tribe, I never ever felt I fully belonged and was often left with a strong sense of shame when referred to as a foreigner or “been to” or directly asked if I knew how to do the cultural things other kids my age could do. Like climb the coconut tree with ropes or balance a clay pot full of water on my head.

It was customary for my parents to take us to the village for two to four weeks each year during my father’s annual vacation. Those visits seemed to always coincide with the masquerade season. I remember many occasions where, we the male kids would hide in our home as the masquerades visited and would hear them chant disparaging songs to the effect that we the Udo kids were not initiated and as such were not real men. I was marginalized and oppressed by the very choices my family made to follow the white man’s ways and the privileges we had in our cultural context. Try as hard as I did, I never fully measured up to the criteria for being Ibibio. I am also focusing on this project because my exploration and discovery will shed light on the issue, move forward the conversation and contribute to ongoing knowledge base of what is available in the larger community.

My current struggle began at a very early age when I noticed the economic inequalities that existed in the multinational company where my father worked and was also privileged to be on the senior leadership team. I noticed the inferior status that my friends lived with compared to where I was and was intentional in my decision to be friends with them and subversive in my efforts to bridge the gap. I recall times when I gave away my pens and lunches to more needy kids and would break established social norms and rules by bringing my friends to our exclusive and lavish home.

As I became an adult, moved away, invested in developing my career and starting a family, I moved away from the issue and applied myself to succeeding academically and professionally and acculturating to an outer and more global cultural context and definition of success. As I have come to understand, the issue was still living and breathing in me. I was just taking a break to maintain my sanity and build a wall of protection around me.

My experience is reflected directly in rank theory, a multi-leveled theory developed by Arnold Mindell, which incorporates non-local or dreaming dimensions to power. He identified different types of rank that went beyond the social to include psychological and spiritual. The multi-leveled understanding of power, according to Julie Diamond (Where Roles, Rank and Relationship Meet), relativizes social rank, by showing that power depends on whether one is playing the “infinite or finite game of life”. According to Diamond:

Mindell describes the “finite game” of life as the game in which winning depends on quantity: how much one has, does, owns, or earns. Social rank belongs to the finite game of life. Spiritual and psychological ranks, on the other hand, belong to the “infinite game.” In the infinite game of life,

winning does not depend on quantity but on the quality of one's life, whether one's life is full of love, compassion, joy, and meaning. The quality of one's life is an infinite and ever-replenishing wealth. Unlike wealth based on quantity, it cannot be lost or taken away by others. (Diamond, On Roles, rank and relationship)

In my experience, it is obvious that I was playing the finite game and feeling limited in many ways. In my primary identity I felt grounded in my social rank, which was mainly contextual and disconnected from my cultural roots. My experience with Yakubu was my secondary and represented my emerging power.

In the Iron John story, Robert Bly makes the important distinction between the wild man and the savage man. The savage is the type who has wrecked the environment, abused women and so on, his inner desperation having been pushed out onto the world as a disregard or hatred of others. The wild man has been prepared to examine where it is he hurts; because of this he is more like a Zen priest or a shaman than a savage. The wild man is masculinity's highest expression, the savage man its lowest.

This myth parallels my entire experience and my encounter with Yakubu. I grew up in a culture where there was a strong modeling of the savage man tendencies and a lack of incorporation of wildness into a larger self that closed a lot of men off from sources of true power and masculinity. As a result, there were and still are instances of intense rage and outbursts that have had destructive consequences.

Having been Yakubu in that play twelve years ago, when my inner world started to come unglued, it was only natural that the choice of focus and the

method for doing so would have to help with the very edges I needed to cross. Of all the options I explored, the only one that offered total freedom and depth of exploration, stretch and discovery was a play. The approach to my final project is the creative format. I will be performing a one-man show as my creative project. This contextual essay explains the experience of developing my show in process work terms.

The Performance

My process towards determining the focus of my final project evolved over time. I used supervision to identify and work through issues that were identified in my instructor feedback from my classes, internship experience and group processes that I either facilitated or participated in. The most recurrent inner work and developmental issue was in understanding and fully stepping into my secondary identity.

The form my experience took is a performance using the one-person-show format and is made up of four monologues. The monologues feature three other characters and me. The first three characters are key players in my unfolding story and wear masks while I do not wear a mask in the final monologue. The nature and focus of each of the monologues are described below.

The first monologue represents a white colonialist who lived and worked in Nigeria. He brings out the colonial perspective of control, humiliation and domination, paints a distorted picture of Nigeria and focuses on working to

advance the British Empire's cause while continuing to subjugate Nigerians. While doing that and appearing externally tough and focused, he exposes some of his humanity and frailty.

In the second monologue, Yakubu, a Nigerian cartographer muses on justice in 1973. He is unabashedly angry, frustrated, and resentful and he makes it clear whose side he is on. As a cartographer, he uses what he knows – his knowledge of mapmaking, to tinker with the reality of what the British colonial government and missionaries left behind.

In the third monologue, in 2011, an assimilated Nigerian man wonders who he is living his life for. He is brought up in “two worlds”, understands and masters both worlds and yet keeps stepping into experiences that are surprising and remind him of the unfinished nature of the colonial and missionary days of long ago.

In the final monologue, Okokon speaks about his struggles, triumphs, and the work he is continuing to do to find a way through the challenges. He gives voice to the ongoing nature of the process, how it comes down in part to inner work and the choices that are made one situation at a time, and how congruent those choices are with the metaskills that feed his life and work as a conflict and process facilitator.

Use of masks

Without consciously setting out to do so, it is no accident that I ended up using masks in my performance and finding Yakubu to be a much needed ally in

the process of discovering my secondary identity. As referenced elsewhere in this essay, acting in that play *Not in My Season of Songs* played a major role in my current unfolding process. But long before then, was a childhood dream that surfaced and provided the much needed anchor and connection in my discovery.

It was one of those supervision sessions where I was simply asked to share a childhood dream I had. I struggled, searched and then remembered that in the age range of five to seven years old, I used to be intensely afraid of the dark because of repeated dreams I would have that somebody in a wooden African mask, dressed like a typical Ibibio masquerade would hide behind doors and under the bed in our home trying to kidnap me.

As I described things in detail, it soon became obvious that the character in my dream was akin to that of Yakubu who represented my secondary identity. The invitation was to shift from intense fear and desire to escape to letting myself be kidnapped by this character, for therein lay my integration. It was as if I had just won a jack pot. I had finally found the key that had eluded me for nearly fifty years.

Masks are featured extensively during the play. I am masked for three monologues and unmasked for the fourth and final monologue. The process of identifying the characters and casting them was slow and yet very intense. It was one that evolved in stages. First, I worked with Rhea around my primary and secondary identity using masks as the medium. As part of the process, we did visualization activities on shapeshifting and finding the energy and mask of the inner critic. We explored criticism through auditory (thinking/verbal), visual

(images) and proprioception (body or emotional) channels. In the process, I discovered the nature and characters of my identity in their three forms, namely; primary, secondary and tertiary and did some initial sketches of masks. The mask-making process transitioned into my year-long process with my acting coach and director Christine McHugh and formed a major part of the process of developing the performance. Of the use of masks Boal writes:

"The masked actor represents someone other than himself, and this anonymity produces a miraculous sensation of freedom. With the mask acting as a "permission giver", the actor can do anything, be anyone. He can plumb deep into his resources and tap his soul, imagination, and experiences. By covering it, the actor uncovers. The mask, then, becomes the perfect tool for the actor. It allows the freedom to dare to be someone else, and at the same time to be more himself. It forces the actor to organize his body to communicate a thought. It frees the imagination to permit new experiences. It becomes safe to communicate with absolute commitment and flexibility. When the body and the imagination are exercised and enriched, the actor develops a sense of confidence in his ability to create. Confidence in the process of creation is fundamental to the artistic product, and the mask characterization technique encourages such development." (Page XXX)

In my experience of working with masks, I truly found freedom "to dare to be someone else" and at the same time, to frame it in my own context and lived experience. For the character whose identity I did not particularly want to embody fully, the mask allowed me to visit and take on the full experience as well as stop the experience and walk away, at least temporarily.

Identification of and experiences with masks:

I started out developing six masks and ended up through a shape-shifting and embodying process with what would become templates for the final three

masks. Since we were not sure how the character identities would unfold, all the masks were initially done on the same color of card stock paper. During the process of developing my script, I was first charged with identifying and embodying each of the main characters that would eventually show up in my play. My entire experience with masks was done using the auditory, visual and proprioception channels. The process included a display of the six original masks on a table and choosing the ones that most resonated with the three key characters in question. For each of the masks chosen, I was invited to say why and on putting them on capture the experience I had. Below are actual reflections written in my process journal.

The “Oppressor” Mask



Reason for choice

This is my choice of the oppressive face. Words that come to mind are ugly, twisted, harsh, critical and unfriendly. There is anger, resentment and disdain on this face. It is of someone who is out to get something from me and is relentless in getting the outcomes they want. This person is not a happy camper

and seems intent on spreading that energy. The face is wrinkly and the mouth twisted. Oppressive is the right word for it.

Experience with mask

It has a very intense feeling bordering on danger and potential violence. My breathing is deep and fast. There is an air of stillness as in the calm before a storm. Both of my fists are clenched and held up over my chest. They move up and down in a synchronized fashion as if preparing and warming up. I am panting and restless and feeling intent on doing harm to someone or something. The face is all wrinkly from intense squinting that comes from the fierce look and stance. The mouth is twisted.

The “Me” Mask



Reason for choice

This is very me and what in process work terms is called my primary identity. It is also the posture of an elder that allows the different parts of me to show up and be supported, without judgment. The satisfied and fulfilled look is

representative of the experience of being both Okokon and Yakubu simultaneously. This big laughter and feel of joy is sign of happiness of being whole.

Experience with mask

I feel very calm and comfortable inside. This is the most familiar to me. My breathing is normal and I feel relaxed and grounded. This is the mask that feels most aligned with my current state. The mask has openness and a friendliness that is assuring and inviting.

The “Yakubu” Mask



Reason for choice

This is Yakubu's face. The qualities I see are those of directness, intensity, anger, rage and attack. There is something serious on his mind and you know he is going to share it. The seriousness indicates that if the atmosphere becomes hostile, he is not going to back down. He is fearless and does not take any nonsense from anyone or anything. He is direct, clear and emphatic.

Experience with mask

I am by no means neutral in this. I am feeling the intensity and seriousness. The look is focused. My heart is pounding, the pace is fast. The look is stern and triggers a sense of fear and readiness to unleash my fury from a deep well of anger and frustration. I am feeling restless and marching in one position as if ready to move towards someone or a target. There is a "make no mistake" and "no nonsense" scary feel. The pose is that of a clenched fist with a pointed finger in a repeated kind of forward motion.

Embodying the characters

The process for putting on, fully embodying and taking off the masks formed a regular part of my weekly acting Skype calls and the two face-to-face three-day segments I had with my director. The process was structured and engaged as a way of understanding and fully embodying the nature and characters of the people represented in my show. The experience of putting on and embodying the characters behind the different masks was mirrored after the process described by Eldredge below:

"When working with the character mask the student should stand in front of a mirror when they assume the mask. Participants should stand with their weight on both feet, with the body centered. They will come to know this stance as the neutral body position. They should take the mask in one hand, the elastic in the other. As they start to raise the mask into position on their faces, they should close their eyes and inhale. With her eyes shut, they put the masks on their faces, adjusting the elastic around the back of the head to make it as comfortable as possible. When the masks are firmly fixed on the students faces, they should exhale and open their eyes. As they exhale, they should imagine that they are clearing and emptying

their bodyminds. Student should see their new selves in the mirror and let the shock of that discovery affect their body minds. At this point in the process the linear sequence of assuming the mask changes into an all-at-once-ness, where many doors into the discovery of the character can open simultaneously. The next breaths they take are the masks (the characters') breaths. Each participant should each find the appropriate breath or breathing patterns for her mask. (These can be shallow or deep, relaxed or constricted, quick or slow, regular or erratic.) They should let the discovery of the breathing patterns of the masks begin their transformations into the physicalizations that they feel are appropriate for their masks, leaving no part of themselves out! Participation should try backing away from the mirror, exploring some possibilities for the physicalizations. They should also try moving toward the mirror. Once a psychophysical image of the character begins to emerge and take over the bodymind, the participant should turn away from the mirror and discover the movement of the character in space without the visual crutch of the mirror". (Page XXXI)

This outlined process was followed whenever I was working with the masks. Each segment of shape-shifting into each of the three masks was always accompanied by a moment of reflection and journaling. There were times during the process when the session had to proceed slowly and with care because of body symptoms that surfaced during those sessions. I often reported that the "Yakubu" and "Oppressor" masks were causing intense headaches during the sessions. The intensity of the headaches slowly decreased over time as I put to use my inner work strategies like finding my U energy and doing my earth spot visualization. Overall, the very process of working with masks proved to be cathartic and empowering.

Given the nature of the life challenge of marginalization and internalized oppression I had discovered, and its implications for us as a society, I did not just want to write about it but to engage it in a way that would draw people in, create three dimensional experiences for them, invite them into conversations and

thereby bring about the level of personal and systemic change needed. My chosen form of expression was acting. Boal writes: "Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theater can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it". (Boal, Page XXXI)

Boal's point is a clear indication of the power of theatre to transform society. The experience I intend to create through my play is one in which I and the audience are engaged in an intimate experience that stirs up different levels of emotions and provokes deep self-reflection and action. Boal elaborates on this further when he says; "Theater is the art of looking at ourselves. The Theatre of the Oppressed is theater in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors". (Page XXXI). I want members of my audience to become Spect-Actors.

PRODUCT

In over a year leading up to this stage of my process, I have written four blog entries on my regular word press site (www.theonlydro.wordpress.com). The topics have been a direct result of my inner work experiences in process work and supervision sessions with faculty, and titled as follows: *Crock Pot Moments 1: Let the journey begin*, where I framed my entire process work journey that had begun and the depth of inner work exploration I was in for; *Crock Pot Moments 2, Part 1: If I scream, I may never stop*, where I addressed the intensity of oppression, the lack of containers for dealing openly with the challenge as well

as the dangers of acting “out of character” with society’s expectations of “well adjusted” humans; *Crock Pot Moments 2, Part 2: Finding Yakubu*, where I gave voice to the reality that the Yakubu that tormented me and I deeply resented for his extreme views and unpolished behavior also lived in me; and *Crock Pot Moments 3: Wrestling with Yakubu* in which I got tired of Yakubu’s mental and emotional abuses, counter accused and eventually addressed our two-party conflict. Below are two of the four blog posts on the topic of marginalization, oppression and Process Work:

Blog: "Crock Pot Moments 1 - Let the Journey Begin"

(Published May 12, 2011)

I have been off line for ten months now. I have written many poems, done many assignments and completed three residencies and one amazing WorldWork experience in that timeframe. I have also continued to hold the container for transforming human consciousness and inspiring purposeful action for the world. Out of all that has come what will now be a series of posts reflective of what is cooking in my crock pot from time to time. This is the first in that series.

When I started my process work journey, thanks to my buddy Art Shirk for his gentle prodding, I did not fully know the scope of what I was signing up for. As it turned out, I was committing to an experience at the Process Work Institute in Portland, Oregon that includes a seven residency, two and a half year journey with a lot of "inner work" spread throughout the experience. I knew if I worked

hard and wrote a major project at the end, I would also get a Master of Arts degree in conflict facilitation and organization change. But that was the least of my concerns or interest, since I already possess the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

If anything offered insights into what was awaiting me, it was the interview process. It was different from any interview I had experienced for an academic experience. I had to talk about myself in a unique way and answer questions about childhood dreams and altered states. I talked about my purpose and vision but what they seemed to be looking for at the time was just one or more inches out of reach. When I was told days later that I had been accepted into the program, I said yes more out of curiosity and intrigue than plain excitement.

Joining me on my journey were nine other people, two of whom I already knew (Art and Sonia) and seven of whom I soon got to know and love. They were Ms. G from Johannesburg, South Africa, Mr. M from Palestine, Ms. Z from Colombia & US, Mr. B from Namibia via Germany, Mr. Y from Russia, Ms. N from Egypt & Japan, Ms. E from the US, Ms. S from Colombia and Mr. A from the US. We were called MCF Cohort 4. That on its own was a rich and dynamic space to play in. We soon connected well and named ourselves the Global High Dreamers. The journey had begun in earnest.

We learned new concepts and framework and got to play in the sandbox with amazing faculty who have each studied with Arnold and Amy Mindell (God father and God mother of Process Work - Process Oriented Psychology respectively) for an average of 25 years.

I have learned about rank and roles, primary and secondary identity, I have learned about the troll or edge figure that stands on the way to that which is wanting to emerge, I have learned about individual, small group and large group conflicts and strategies of what Joe Goodbread calls "befriending conflict". I have learned about vectors, eldership and a whole list of meta-skills that are a life saver for any process worker, facilitator or leader.

I have learned about burning wood and also taking the time to plant trees. I have learned that the world has been telling us lies about who the bad guys are. For implied in our many strategies for marginalizing others are the very seeds of what later shows up as resistance or fight for freedom or to use a loaded terminology - terrorism. I have learned about Deep Democracy and the need to include and listen to all voices and all perspectives on any given issue.

The paradox in the experience posed a challenge right away. The faculty was amazing with the clinical part and took us to depths never before reached while inviting me to shift from my academic/intellectual framework that had brought me this far and accounted for my success the way I had known and framed it. It was my first painful experience. My world was crumbling before my eyes and I had a choice to hang on to what I knew or trust and let go. As I write this, I find myself going back and forth between these seeming polarities, but increasingly letting go more than holding on.

My experience with process work reminds me of my innate nature to want to know everything, be aware of the inner workings, never be surprised and be proven right often, maybe always. That is an exact mirror of what my relationship

with God sometimes looks like. There are times on my journey as both a spiritual leader and seeker that I have been content to totally surrender and let God and the Higher Power lead the way. At other times, I have claimed my half of the co-creator with God status, felt like things were not going right and taken over the steering of the car that is my life.

I have to keep reminding myself that I am work in progress. My ultimate goal is not to ever fully surrender, for where would my creative ability and internal sense of power and direction be. The goal is to surrender enough to cross the big edges that have kept me from ever fully knowing myself or claiming my freedom. It is to lean into something new that wants to be born. Not to surrender to that extent is to not know what could have been and miss possible opportunities to discover all of who I was created to be and the me that would be the best for the world.

The timing of this journey couldn't be better. It comes at a time when what is happening in the world weighs on my soul as much as the quest for outer success, personal security and comfort. It also comes at a time when all three of my kids are increasingly becoming their own persons and waiting to be launched forth into the world, one at a time.

I want to be ready for my next work when the world comes knocking and the human systems as we know them no longer support our lies and our greed. I want to be ready for THAT. Wait a minute! That world is calling now because those systems no longer seem to work. That's what this phase of my journey is

about. The context and framework and grounds for integration just happens to be called Process Work.

I have some questions for you:

- Where has your need to hold on kept you from discovering an empowered and fully unleashed you?
- Where in your life do you struggle in that space between letting go and holding on to life the way you have always known it?
- What will it take for you to fully feel the fear and yet finally take the leap and cross your edges to greater freedom and a deeper sense of who you are and what your purpose is?

I hope that reading this will give you the push you need to jump into that next journey of life, wherever it wants to take you. As scary as it often feels and as hard as I struggle to hang on, I want to constantly turn over my life and purpose and fully trust the process.

With love and appreciation,

Okokon Udo

Blog: "Crock Pot Moments 3 - Wrestling With Yakubu"

(Published December 2, 2011)

"Change occurs when the pain of remaining the same is greater than the pain of changing." - Alcoholics Anonymous

My daughter's basketball game was two hours away. It was time to shave, brush and get ready. I had the brush in my mouth when suddenly 85% of what you are about to read came pouring out. So strong was the energy and flow that 30 minutes later, I realized I still had the brush and paste in my mouth, and was typing with one thumb on my iPhone keyboard as if my life depended on it. In some direct ways, it DID. The other 15% came at 3:00am the following day.

If you are unfamiliar with "Yakubu", it might be worth reading my earlier blogs on the Crockpot Series. In them, I introduce the character and set the context for our cordial, stormy, friendly and what is now becoming a very intimate relationship journey.

As I was stepping into this unknown struggle, I recalled a bible story I had learned about one Jacob in what was called Sunday School. The story had it that he wanted something so badly and went to all extent to get it. The moral of the story was that if you wanted something from God badly you needed to STAY and not let go. Also that there is a price for the life of abundance and fulfillment we see people experiencing.

The Bible tells a story of the encounter Jacob had with an angel and how Jacob held on and wrestled with the angel until dawn and got his hip dislocated in the process for he would not let go until he was blessed by the angel. What has stuck with me the most is the wrestling part. His was with an angel, mine was with Yakubu.

After the romantic phase of my meeting Yakubu, adoring him, respecting him and caring about what he had to say, things soon got mean and nasty. It was

as if the first part of meeting Yakubu, adoring Yakubu and becoming Yakubu in Awam Amkpa's play "*Not In My Season of Songs*" hadn't happened. It got to a point where I was spiritually, emotionally and psychologically in pain. In process work jargon, I had reached an edge - a big boulder I could no longer ignore or avoid. One I had to deal with or confront.

As is common with two party and group conflicts, now was not the time to take the other side. It was escalation time. There were assumptions flying around on both sides. There was blame and meanness and judgments. I was accused by Yakubu of not being African or black enough, of not raising my kids right. He was merely re-echoing what a Minnesota-based Nigerian friend has been saying for years.

Just like me, he said my kids had African names but were in fact not African; that their worldviews were white and they did not even speak the African language. He accused me of selling out and in fact becoming a white man. He reminded me that I wasn't even there when the white man came to "our land" and plundered and stole from it and occupied it until all was destroyed.

Yakubu went directly into the areas of religion and education. He told me just like the renowned African theologian, John S. Mbiti had articulated years ago, that prior to the coming of Christianity to Africa, "Africans were already incurably religious". He said I had taken to the way of the white man and his religion and education. He reminded me that he had been educated in the white man's ways as a cartographer and is resentful at the constant drawing and redrawing of the African map to meet the white man's insatiable greed. He

chastised me for getting a PhD as according to him, it was the ultimate mark of conscription.

Some conflicts last for days even months. Others last for years and what is called generations. Mine with Yakubu had gone on for over 50 years. I only realized it ten years ago, became aware of its impact and picked up the accusation months ago, midway through my process work journey.

The accusations, blaming and shaming were relentless, I cried, was sad and even became mildly depressed but it wouldn't stop. It felt like the more I stepped into my victimhood, the more the abuse continued. To protect myself and maintain my sanity, I went into defense mode for a while and then I fought back and justified who I was, what I had done and the lifestyle I had achieved. I took pride in my global citizenship.

It seemed for a while that we were even but the conflict soon moved into my sleep and dream world. I would wake up several times during the night questioning my identity and entertaining the thought that I might truly be a fraud. All was calm on the outside but tumultuous on the inside. I had to keep life going. I had a family to raise and work to do in the world. I had horrible dreams and nightmares, some of which I processed in supervision with my process work mentors and teachers. For a time, I would work and do life during the day and fight mainly at night. Soon the boundaries were blurred as I would work and fight during the day and work and fight during the night.

This was indeed a fight. It was a fight for my healing, integration and identity. If there was ever a fight worth fighting, this was it. It was a fight for my

life. He was eloquent. I was subdued. For how could I possibly talk or raise my voice at him when I was raised to respect my elders and value what they had to say. With hours and hours of inner work, a point came in the process when my voice not only came through but grew stronger. I was able to stand up to Yakubu. His words still hurt but I could no longer stonewall or avoid, as my tendency in conflict was. I spoke back. I defended, I justified and I challenged his views and opinions. It had infact become a two party conflict.

My conflict with Yakubu was one of those where there would be intense fighting for a while and then there was a ceasefire. Beneath all that was vibrant readiness for when it would break out again. At some point in my ceasefire phase, I had the fortune of reconnecting with a college friend on Facebook. As I snooped through his friends' list of over 700 people, something caught my attention. Going by the names about 90% were Africans or Nigerians.

Because of the sensitivity to cultural/ethnic issues Yakubu had reawakened in me, I went back and browsed through my own friends' list. The contrast was striking from the same perspective. My friends' list was less than 10% Nigerian or African. Yakubu was right after all. Now I was fully living the role. It had an assigned name; it was smelling and feeling like internalized oppression. It really had to be.

Something sobering I realized in this process, was that Yakubu was not an elder out there to engage but a powerful voice and presence that had taken up residence inside me. It was the voice of my internalized oppression and marginalized self. It was not the enemy outside of me. It was the enemy within.

All of that knowing didn't turn things around immediately. It further escalated the conflict. Whereas, with Yakubu as an external presence and voice, I could take occasional breaks for brief moments of sleep, with my discovery it was an all out war. Someone could in fact die. I felt vulnerable and yet hopeful. Vulnerable because I was in what felt like a never-ending free fall. Hopeful because I was acknowledged in my process by my support team and assured that if I didn't quit, I would come through stronger, wiser and more aware of how to construct my life and reality going forward, and thus become more internally aligned and effective in my life and work.

During this ensuing conflict, I was seeking a LOT of help in supervision from my PW teachers and mentors (Stephen, Jan, Emetchi and Lesli) and peers (Genevieve, Art, Zea, Nami, Yura, Ben, Elizabeth, Sonia and Mohammad). I needed every help I could find. I had come too far forward at this point in my encounter with Yakubu to consider going back. The risk of going back was greater than the pain of enduring, totally surrendering and hoping as in Campbell's Hero's journey, that there was a breakthrough in sight - that somehow I (the hero) would return, bruised or with a dislocated and soon to heal hip, and be blessed and transformed.

During one of my last supervision sessions, something shifted in my relationship with Yakubu. We went from standing face to face and tearing each other apart to standing side by side, being curious and compassionate and inviting each other's stories. I discovered that mutual learning and integration was now possible. I may not have been there when the British colonialists and religious

zealots came to Nigeria and Africa; when foreign religions attempted to destroy the incurable religiosity of Africans but I could appreciate and fully enter into the experience. I listened to Yakubu's pain and anger and isolation and witnessed his resolve to let go of the pain and old story. I finally felt for him.

I witnessed myself become an elder, hold complexity, empathize with Yakubu. I experienced Yakubu be the elder I dreamed about. I had known he was a worrier, fierce, stern, and angry. Now I saw his ability to hold complexity, his fluidity, his wisdom, his vulnerability. I saw him integrate his polarized parts. I saw deep democracy occurring inside Yakubu. I got in touch with my deep democracy too. I listened to all sides and all voices. It was as if we were engaged in a delicate and intricate dance. It was intimate. There was a good doze of tears involved. In that moment I knew I had come home. I had now fully come home to myself.

I am fully convinced that all of me needs to be integrated for healing and wholeness to occur. My journey in life and experiences do not make me less black. They rather expand the range and depth of who I am as a human being. I am a full human being and African and American that lives in the United States, is a global citizen, a clergy, well educated and experienced/ skilled in many fields of human endeavor. I am a man who is all these things and many more. All parts of me counts and I owe no one an apology for that.

Where do I go from here you may ask? My first and primary commitment is to myself. On my honor I promise that:

- I will continue the dialogue with Yakubu. I will embrace the polarity of the experience and lean into the both/and of what Yakubu and I can create. This is part of a lifelong process of discovering and mastering myself and living a life of purpose and impact.
- I will bring Yakubu forward. Meeting and befriending Yakubu and experiencing him as teacher and ally are things that were meant to be. He will forever inform who I am and how I live and always be part of my vocabulary. I introduce you to Yakubu as a metaphor for parts of you that you have disowned or marginalized.
- I will hold myself as 100% Nigerian/African, 100% American and 100% global citizen. All of who I am count and all of who I am and have are needed for Africa's ultimate liberation and global restoration and healing. No part of me will be left out.
- I will not domesticate Yakubu. I will own his edginess and maintain the wildness, which are my secondary parts. I will integrate them into the elder, caring, holding, championing sides which are my primary identity.

I invite you to pause and grab your journal and pen or recorder. Take a few deep breaths. You can even close your eyes for a moment. Now take yourself to your favorite place on earth or awe-inspiring moment in nature (also called your earth spot). Take in the energy and presence of this place. Make yourself comfortable. Take a moment and go inside. From this place, respond to the following questions on your journal:

- What parts of your life and core identity have you disowned or marginalized?
- What is holding you back from visiting those uncomfortable places and going over your edges?
- When will you begin your inner work?

I hope my process has contributed to your desire to begin or continuation of your inner work journey/ process. Please do me a favor by posting your questions, responses or comments triggered by this post on my blog site. It will help me a lot in my ongoing journey and inner work process. Because of the nature of this particular post and potential desire for inner work process it might trigger in you, please consider requesting for a conversation with me if you so desire.

Thank you for journeying with me.

With love, respect and gratitude,

Okokon Udo

In anticipation of the performance, I have created a Facebook page called *LearningCircle for Change*, that is furthering the conversation around issues of marginalization and internalized oppression, providing updates on my own ongoing exploration and discovery, pointing people to resources should they need inner work exploration opportunities for themselves and presenting people with options for local and global action.

The tangible outcomes of my project are a fully scripted one-man play and this supporting contextual essay. I have developed a one-man show featuring me playing my role in my current state, my acculturated self, as Yakubu and as a colonial master in an experience that unfolds in four monologues. The contextual essay component was developed as the play unfolded since it was the play that created the process of my emergence.

Some secondary products will be an ongoing blog designated for inner work exploration as well as updates on my unfolding journey as the emergent Okokon. Other products will be a recording of the full play to be posted on YouTube and ongoing performance of the show in designated cities and conferences around the world. One distinctive feature of the show is that it will always be accompanied by a post-show discussion to facilitate integration of the experience and engage audience questions generated by the performance.

CONTRIBUTION TO FIELD

Growing up male in Nigeria and now living in the United States, there have been hundreds of examples of what Robert Bly calls “savage men” who abused their wives and women, neglected their family and community responsibilities, and harbored hidden anger and rage that are never openly talked about or given healthy channels of expression. There are also many like me who for cultural or family reasons have not had the courage to access or engage the struggle that goes on internally. My work will focus on what Bly refers to as “wild man” energy geared more towards discovering the “dark side” that holds the key to

humans' sources of true power.

Another contribution is that my project will reignite the much needed discussion in many circles across the globe and invite oppressed people to revisit their own senses of marginalization and internalized oppression with a view to producing more grounded expressions of those extreme feelings. My contribution is also that my creative project will introduce process work's deep democracy framework as an integrated model for not just uncovering the issues and challenges but working through, integrating them internally and applying them externally in meaningful and productive ways.

LIMITATIONS AND LIMITS OF PROJECT

There are many causes and contributors to experiences of marginalization and internalized oppression. My goal is to unfold my internal struggles prompted by my relationship and journey with Yakubu, while my focus is to follow my process and see where it leads. In doing so, my project is limited to my personal experiences with oppressive structures of colonization and evangelization as they are drawn from my encounters with a Nigerian elder named Yakubu. Although my work may have applications for minority groups and people of other races and ethnicities, those are not my primary motive for this creative expression.

I am aware of the systems nature of the issues that are reflected in my expression. According to Michelin Mason "Internalized oppression is not the cause of our mistreatment, it is the result of our mistreatment. It would not exist

without the real external oppression that forms the social climate in which we exist.” (Page 1) While the systems piece is true and needed, fully unmasking its role was not within the scope of this work.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Based on my personal experience in the course of writing this essay and producing the one-man-show, I see a possibility for doing a qualitative research or video project that interviews and accesses stories of marginalization and oppression with a view to producing further impact and helping society understand the effects of internalized oppression. Other possibilities include writing proposals to present the show as an educational and dialogue inducing experience at major multiculturalism and intercultural effective conferences worldwide and establishing a social media site for educating, facilitating ongoing dialogue and responses by people impacted by or interested in issues related to marginalization and internalized oppression. At a further professional level, my play and contextual essay will form the core design piece for a planned inner work oriented facilitator training process for consultants, coaches and trainers.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1996) *Things Fall Apart*. Berkshire: Cox & Wyman Ltd.
- Anderberg, K. Internalized Oppression (May 9, 2007)
www.kirstenanderberg.com)
- Appel, Libby. (1982). *Mask Characterization: An Acting Process*. Carbondale, IL. Southern Illinois University Press
- Bly, R. *Iron John: A book about men*, (1990) New York: Vintage Books
- Boal, Augusto. Translator: Jackson, Adrian. (1992) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. London: Routledge
- Diamond, J. Where roles, rank and relationship meet: A framework for working with multiple role relationships in Process Work learning communities
- Diamond, J. & Jones, L. S. (2004). *A path made by walking: Process Work in practice*. Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press
- Eldredge, Sear A. (1996). *Mask Improvisation for Actor Training and Performance: The Compelling Image*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press
- Mason, M. Internalized Oppression, (first published in Reiser, R. and Mason, M. (eds) (1990) *Disability Equality in Education*, London: ILEA)
- Mindell, A. (2010), *PROCESSMIND: A User's Guide to Connecting with the Mind of God*.
- Amkpa, A. (1994), *A Play - Not in my season of songs*, Southampton
- Conversations and supervision sessions with members of my study committee
- Conversations with my acting coach and director Christine McHugh