

GREY AREAS JOURNAL



For Creative and Intellectual perspectives

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Yann W. Tanoé

Author . Activist . Publisher

YANN W. TANOÉ is an Author, Activist and Publisher. He is lead editor and founder of Grey Areas Journal, an e-platform from SunBird Journal Publishing (his publishing House). With this collection of intellectual and creative perspectives, Yann hopes to add value to readers' perspective of society. He lives in Suffolk-England.

This journal reflects the wealth of perspectives that can come together and shape our view of this complex modern world. This journal is much more than a publication, it is a platform created to feature the creatives, thinkers, innovators, entrepreneurs and individuals who utilise their creativity to build platforms that impact in society and add value in an array of different forms. I believe that the purpose of life is to try to converge towards each other in some way. I believe that it is part of our journey to learn from each other, from the things that we say, from the things we do but more importantly from our perspective. Yes, I believe almost that the perspective we are coming from is even more important to understand than the words that come out of our mouths.

Talk is cheap, everyone can talk, everyone can share their beliefs, everyone can share their opinions, but to me what adds value to the things we have to say is the perspective we are coming from. Our perspective is greatly determined and influenced by our backgrounds. I believe that trying to get to know others is an investment, an investment that will always yield more that you have put in. I believe so, because regardless of the type of interaction; positive/ negative, fruitful/ fruitless there will always be a valuable lesson to learn, a lesson that will impact in our life forever. I believe that all the interactions that we have with humans are back logged in our subconscious. They are called upon from time when we are ready to learn from them. Never think that any one of your encounters was in vain or useless. They all serve and teach you in time. The idea behind Grey Areas as an intellectual concept is to explore the unexplained; it explores what we think we really believe. It demonstrates the grey areas that exist between our core beliefs and our ideas of what is right or wrong.

Where do we obtain our knowledge from? What swings our moral compass in one direction or another? What qualifies us to formulate our thoughts or opinions? I have always been fascinated by the way in which our core beliefs, morals and ideals are constructed and, furthermore, how they evolve. Over the years, I have come to understand that our beliefs are shaped by the core values that we were raised with, influenced by our culture, our social background, the people we admire and both our direct and indirect exposure of the world.

In my opinion there exists three aspects that constitute the make-up of our beliefs: firstly, there is the knowledge that we were socialised into either through our upbringing or background, secondly there is what we decide to hold onto as our core belief based on our own experiences

and interactions with the world; and thirdly, there is another part which, to me, is a grey area, an almost controversial area that exists tucked away at the back of our subconscious. A part that has the potential to challenge, to question these core beliefs and almost undo them. This is the part of reasoning which I believe is self-suppressed by many people because it is viewed as a threat to their beliefs and integrity as a rule.

It seems as though a large number of us are afraid to even consider questioning our own beliefs or venture on to the uncharted territory of 'counter arguments'. However, ask yourself the question, do you make your beliefs or do your beliefs make you? If you can make yourself believe in something, can you equally convince yourself that this very belief is untrue? I believe this to be an extremely worthwhile intellectual exercise to question and challenge our core beliefs from time to time, to explore and even embrace different points of views. This, in my opinion, can enable us to cultivate and feel more empathy towards the others that we disagree or quarrel with about different issues.

My further rhetoric through conceptualizing 'Grey Areas' are, how true are we to our beliefs? To what extent are we committed to them? Is every belief that we hold flawless? Do we really have enough integrity and conviction to stand up for and even give our lives for the 'purity' of our beliefs? Or do our core beliefs have unexplored corners, corners that we cannot quite reconcile or explain? Do we have the strength to question our belief and to perhaps realise that they may not be as flawless as we think.

I hope that the following subjects and themes approached in this Journal not only challenge, but also add value to the way in which you view your human experience. ■ Yann W. Tanoé



***International
Women's Day***

This issue is dedicated to

**INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY**



Antoinette
Hewitt
Art Critic

Frida Kahlo was born in Mexico in the July of 1907. Her mother was half Amerindian and half Spanish; her father was of German descent who immigrated to Mexico. She had a difficult and turbulent life, suffering from Polio as a child, and then nearly losing her life in a bus accident as a teen. Both of these incidences caused many medical problems throughout her life, permanent physical, mental and emotional damage and pain. She married the famous Mexican painter Diego Rivera, who was twenty years her senior. This marriage was turbulent and fraught with multiple infidelities. They divorced in 1939 only to remarry a year later; this second marriage was just as volatile as the first.

Frida's multi-cultural heritage must have brought a conflict and a battle within her as she didn't know who and what she was: too European to be Mexican and too Mexican to be European. Along with the wars of inde-

FRIDA KAHLO: IDENTITY

■ With Art Critic ANTOINETTE HEWITT

pendence not long over, the state of her health, romance with Diego, and much pain and agony she suffered through her life, all came together to bring a raw realism to her art.

Frida, famous for her many self-portraits, would often use her artwork as a biography of her life, depicting her many traumatic experiences. I often wonder if it was also a cathartic exercise for her which helped her deal with her trials. Within her self-portraits she explores the themes of identity, race, femininity, and post colonialism.

In the painting on page 6, The Two Fridas (Las Dos Fridas), composed during her separation period with Diego Rivera, many of these themes are seen. To start with, there are two Fridas. Why is this? What is she conveying to us? We, as the viewer, need to look at the artwork to uncover what she is trying to tell us.

To begin with, let's take a look at her attire. On the left she is wearing a common, European style dress, typical of clothing worn by western women at this time. On the right she dons the traditional

Tehuana costume. Here we see the two different personalities and dual heritage of Frida; the European, Western woman on the one hand and the indigenous Mexican on the other. However, we see the relationship between the two through the holding hands and the connection of the heart and veins.

Neither Frida looks particularly happy, with her famous mono-brow creating a hard exterior. The Frida on the left appears as if she is looking down on the viewer, giving her a haughty air; a look of disdain, perhaps. The western society often looked down on the indigenous people, so is that the reason for her look? The Frida on the right feels much more inviting; her eyes meet you, bringing you into her sphere; is her look a challenge to the western culture? Is it sympathy that while the viewer seems to understand Frida, no-one will ever know her as she is having trouble evaluating herself?

People with dual nationalities, especially those who are living away from their country of origin, have trouble with their identity. In fact, often the question of identity is very prolific with many people today, no matter what their race, culture, heritage or place of abode. The questions of 'who am I?' 'What am I?' And 'where do I belong?' are all challenging concepts that people feel the need to answer for themselves. Frida shows here that,

within each of us, there can be a multitude of answers to these questions.

The Mexican Frida holds a picture of her ex-husband Diego Rivera. This is significant as, recently separated, we see that she still holds him close. The European Frida, on the other hand is holding a surgical instrument, forceps, depicting the many medical procedures

she had to endure. Suffering from many miscarriages with Diego caused her untold emotional distress. The blood dripping onto the beautiful white dress, the broken heart of the European Frida, the portrait of Diego she holds all show her deep painful memories that lie within.

This was the way Frida told the stories of her life and

discussed her grief – through her art. This was her medium for expression. And yet, do we know Frida? If we were to analyse every painting she ever did, or read every book written about her, we may get a glimpse into who she was and events in her life. However, we may never know the real Frida. But then, does she completely know herself?

■ ANTOINETTE HEWITT



The Two Fridas (Las Dos Fridas), Frida Kahlo, 1939

OSHUN AND THE DIVINE FEMININE

■ With Artist / Santeria Priestess DANIELA DE ARMAS

As I approach my anniversary of when I was crowned with the mysteries of Oshun in a ceremony called Kariocha, I find myself being asked to write about Oshun and the Divine Feminine. It took me a long time to sit down and write because it is really hard for me to encapsulate the magnitude of who Oshun is in one small article, but I guess I can start by comparisons between the stereotype of who Oshun is and who I believe Oshun to be from my own experience as one of her daughters.

Oshun is one of the many Yoruba deities worshipped in Yorubaland and in the Diaspora. She is one of the youngest in the Pantheon of the Yoruba deities, yet, one of the most powerful, but how she is depicted is sometimes really concerning.

There is a corruption, I feel, of

whom Oshun is and what she signifies, as she is reduced to the epitome of what beauty is deemed to be. In the diaspora, she is frequently portrayed as the sensual and physically beautiful light skinned goddess; young, sensual and that is it. Occasionally talked about as the Venus of the Orisha Pantheon, there is a lot of emphasis placed on her physical appearance and the colours and beautiful attributes that surround her. Also, it appears to me that people are seduced by these attributes, and so many individuals seem to crave this energy, and in these days of selfies and narcissism, I feel this to be rather sad.

There is so much more to Oshun than what is often portrayed. Firstly, let us understand that Oshun is an African Deity and despite this, post-Colonial times, and the colourism within cultures



Daniela De Armas

Artist / Santeria Priestess

Daniela De Armas is celebrating 13 years of being a Priest of Oshun this year. In addition to being a Diviner, and guiding godchildren and others following the Lucumi Path, she is a Musician, having directed musical projects and teaching music also over the last thirty years. Currently she is the Director of the London Lucumi Choir which is the only non-audition community choir of it's kind in the UK.



An Sacred Ide Of Oshun, marking the wearer as a Priestess.

that practise this religion in the Diaspora has affected the understanding of the aesthetic aspect of Oshun. In addition, when we talk about the "Divine Feminine", let us be careful that we do not impose what we think that to be.

Oshun is powerful. There are many stories of Oshun being forgotten about by the other Orisha, and when that happens and Oshun's Ashe (life force) is ignored, life begins to die, and the world begins to Perish.* Oshun symbolises everything that we need in order to make sense of our

lives. Love, music and the arts, the Ashe that she has in her hands to make beautiful things. She is one of the fresh water deities and without water there is no life.

I always say, in the UK, where the philosophy of austerity prevails, that this really is not what Oshun would want. The arts and music are being cut from the curriculum in schools, and where the creative arts are not valued, people's quality of life severely diminishes and we all know how healing and powerful music and dance can be. It has been scientifically proven.

Diplomacy is one of Oshun's weapons. Where war will fail, and brute force will not resolve, Oshun's Ashe can be sure to conquer with her sweetness, and a gentler way of resolving matters.

Where she is portrayed as being physically beautiful, we all know that physical beauty is a social construct and there is more to beauty than the external. Beauty is deeper than the surface. Oshun teaches us that.

Although Yemaya is the owner of the waters that surround the baby in the womb, work with Oshun can help someone conceive and she has an important role in this process.

Oshun, however, is one of the Orishas that inspires fear amongst her followers. She does not embody the pa-

tience of Yemaya and Obatala and has been known to punish swiftly and affectively. She is not all sweetness and light.

In my own life, Oshun has brought me many lessons. Oshun has made me look in her mirror and work on myself. Oshun has taught me self-love. Oshun has helped me understand that I know joy because I know pain. Oshun, has brought me joy and pain and helped me understand what it is. I really need to live a fulfilled life and also how best I can help others. Oshun has helped me release my voice and guided me to use my voice to empower the voices of others. Oshun has helped me be compassionate but use boundaries when necessary. Oshun has

confirmed to me how beautiful our planet is and how we must take care of it, especially our rivers. It is an honour to be a child of Oshun, but more than that, it is a privilege to wear her crown and to serve her by living my best life and inspiring others to do the same.

That is Oshun and the Divine Feminine.

For more please read the following links:

<https://oshunschild.com/2017/02/18/celebrity-and-orisha/>

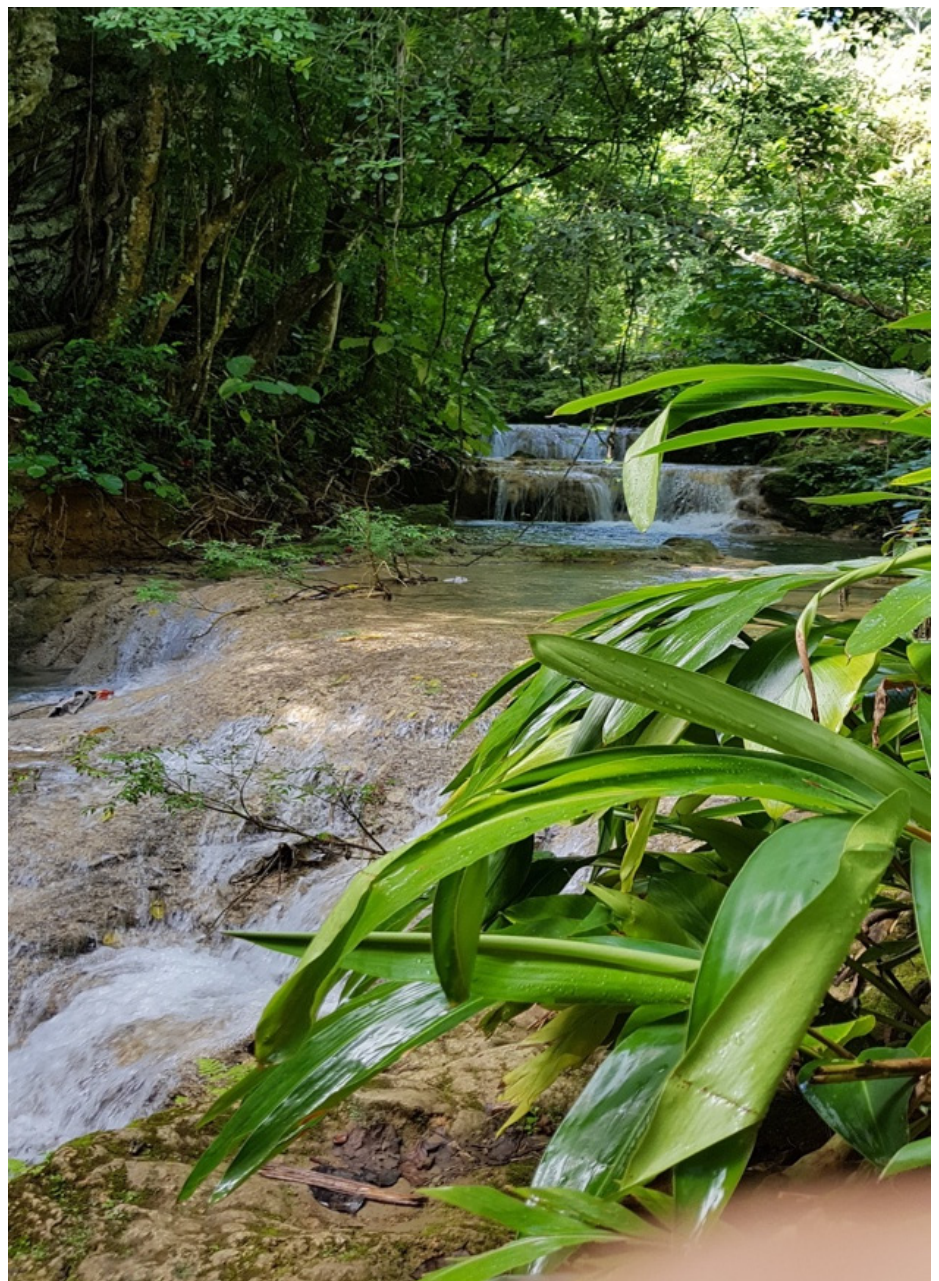
<https://oshunschild.com/2018/03/19/oshun-how-can-i-be-of-service/>

[* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU_QkhxfZjs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU_QkhxfZjs)

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[* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU_QkhxfZjs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU_QkhxfZjs)

■ DANIELA DE ARMAS





Natasha Price

Energy Therapist / Author

Natasha Joy Price is the founder of Dandelion Therapies. She is an Energy Health Practitioner, specialising in helping people to optimise the health of their energy field.

Therapies which she offers include: Reiki, Crystal healing, Theta healing, Past Life Regression Therapy and her own healing modality Soul Continuum healing. Watch out for her new book 'Freedom of the Soul' coming out this Spring.

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Natasha Price Author

Over the last few months I have noticed an increase in the number of clients and acquaintances who are suffering from severe anxiety and low mood. There appears to be a growing number of people struggling to control the daily levels of worry and fear that arise in them. Teenagers and young people particularly seem to be suffering, as do those in their fifties and above. This

THE 5 STEPS GUIDE TO The Happiness Process

■ With Energy Therapist / Author NATASHA PRICE

feeling may of course be across all age groups and not be something new, but this issue has been highlighted for me recently in the clients that are coming to me and the queries being raised by them.

This really got me thinking about why anxiety is so high, and why so many people appear to be struggling to find contentment and happiness. I always used to think of young people as full of energy and excitement for life, yet this has changed for me lately. Likewise, people of fifty and over were often winding down and making plans for when they retire, so I wanted to understand why these problems appear to have intensified for both groups. When I sat down to think about what makes us happy I found it quite difficult to define. I realised that many factors can contribute to our feelings of security and wellbeing, but does this constitute happiness? Is it one thing or a combination of things that can make us feel happy? Is it as simple as having a roof over our heads and food on the table, or do we need more than that? Do we need to know that we have money in the bank, that we have a pension or own a property? Do these material aspects give us security and therefore happiness?

For the over fifties age

group, worrying about what is going to happen to them when they are older, where they will live and what money they will have to live on when they are too old to work, appears to be one of the major concerns. This is especially true where they have no children or family who they can rely on to help them. Their security or how they perceive their future security to be, plays a large part in how much they worry and how stressed they feel. Of course, worry changes nothing, but that is easier to say than to stop worrying. Worrying seems to be a constant state for many of us and often becomes the norm, and a way of being that we get used to and stuck in. There is always something to worry about if we are in that mode of thinking. Some of the happiest and most easy-going people I have met have very little by way of possessions. Lots of people I know don't have a pension these days or even own a property. Yet they feel contented with their life and have an easy flow to the way that they move along their path. They really appear to have less to worry about. So maybe having more possessions creates more worry.

If we equate possessions and money to finding a state of happiness, then a third of the world would be classed as unhappy and surely that

can't be the case. So many other people that I come across are full of anxiety and unhappiness and have clearly lost their way, yet have a house, car, food and plenty of money in the bank. Happiness, for me, is therefore not defined by security and possessions, as lovely as they are. Having these items creates security, which may decrease the stress levels, but this is not happiness. In some cases I have come across having more money and possessions seems to actually create more anxiety.

So, happiness must be about something else entirely. When I tried to think about why I feel happy, and therefore what happiness entails for me, I found that it was about an inner connection and awareness to my thoughts and emotions. It was about feeling balanced and centred in myself, which decreased the worry and stress on a daily basis. It was also about knowing that whatever life throws at me I can deal with it. I know that I have emotional strength and an understanding that I can change my life if I want to. I therefore have some active control over how my life pans out and I firmly believe that we all do.

Of course, I get anxious and fearful at times which can really be unpleasant, but I have the tools to control this and get whatever is worrying me into perspective. For me, it is about having a good understanding of where my anxieties and fears come from and being able to put these techniques in place to keep them diminished and small. So much of today's society clouds that connection and it's so easy to become bogged down with materialism and how

we look outwardly to others. This creates a feeling of lack and sense of little self-worth. I think that is particularly relevant to social media these days. What we see is simply what the user wants us to see about their lives, and in fact a lot of it might not be true at all. How they feel is not always the perfect happy picture that they post but can sometimes be a facade hiding the real truth. In fact, they can be deeply troubled and struggling to cope, but the image they portray is of a perfect life. We then start comparing ourselves to something that doesn't exist and this can get out of proportion especially for teenagers. This dis-ease of comparison can cause our energies to become out of balance. I have heard so many friends talk about having a rest from social media recently, reconnecting to nature and to themselves. If we can reconnect to that inner essence and the part of us that is truly unique, then a sense of worth and balance descends.

If we want to change what we have in our life, then gratitude is one of the most important starting points. If we can see value in the little things in life and feel real

gratitude for that roof over our heads whether we own it or not, the food on our table, our health, our families' health and the friends that support and encircle us, then a sense of contentment begins to pervade. If we can concentrate and focus on the positives in our lives, rather than what we perceive as the negatives, then I believe this is the start of the happiness process. Often by focusing on the positives, the negatives seem far less important as our brains begin to see a different perspective.

I believe that joy is that feeling of warmth that bubbles up and often explodes into laughter and giggles. Whereas happiness is a calmer more self-contained state of just being; a knowing and a trust that comes from within. We appear to have lost that connection to ourselves and this seems to be causing the increasing anxiety that is becoming so apparent. When I asked my partner what he felt happiness was about, he said to him it was finding someone to love unconditionally, and a life without conflict. I found both comments to be interesting points. We are very social beings. We love



being with others, having friends, family and even our pets around us. We are not designed to be alone, although a lot of people find themselves in that position. I don't believe that being alone makes you unhappy, but I do agree that finding someone you can love unconditionally is an element of happiness. Being alone can mean that we are forced to face what we are feeling and who we are and having to address this truth can sometimes be very difficult for a lot of people, although very cleansing.

In order to receive love from others, we must first love ourselves and that requires that connection and understanding about our emotions and beliefs. If we have that connection to ourselves, then we can love unconditionally and in a very conscious open way. Of course, nobody wants conflict either and unfortunately there is so much of it in today's world. Not only in personal relationships but in the world as a whole. Some horrific images and situations are broadcast around the world to the point that I know a lot of people choose not to buy the papers and watch the news as they do not want to see that imagery, or for the negativity of that situation to affect them and their lives. This dis-ease can cause us to experience an overloading and overstimulation of emotions. Many people find it draining and can often get the negative feelings

that arise out of proportion, eventually believing that only negative things happen in the world.

And yet, if you break it down, people fight as they are not prepared to take on board other's beliefs, ideas and viewpoints. They are in the mindset to score points against each other and put each other down. They believe that their only option is to fight and crush their opposition. Yet if they looked within and concentrated on that inner connection, things might be different. That is far too simplified I hear you say, but I believe that if we all started by concentrating on our own feeling of well-being, which in turn affects those around us, we would be in a better place and this positivity would spread out into our communities and beyond.

be available shortly. They set out ideas and techniques that we can try to start to get a balance in our energy fields. I have set out below a sequence of energy practises for you to test out every day, or help a teenager or youngster to carry out to start this process of connection. It may seem silly at first, but eventually you will begin to feel the benefit of this energetically. It need only take a few minutes out of your time but if you can incorporate some of these tasks into your daily routine your personal energy health will improve. Maybe when you are having a shower or walking to school or work you can go through these practises, setting up your day for the most positive outcome;

Be in the now.

So how do we find that inner connection and become energy happy? The path is different for all of us, but one important element is working on ourselves. What do I mean by that? Well, by being aware of our energy field and connecting to our emotions on a daily basis. How do I really feel today? Am I feeling anxious and if so why? Where is that anxiety coming from? Questioning our emotions, finding their source and clearing them from our energy field is paramount to taking those first steps towards contentment. If we are able to improve our relationship with ourselves in this way, then our relationships with friends and family is also going to improve considerably.

A lot of anxiety that people of all ages experience is because they are thinking about the 'what ifs'. What will happen to me in the future? They then go through all the worst scenarios that may happen, playing them out in their minds and allowing their anxiety levels to raise. When you get into this habit you are worrying about something that has not happened and may never happen, and yet you are feeling anxious and unsettled due to this non-existent event. If anxiety is becoming overwhelming for you for this reason, practise being in the now.

Practise clearing your mind

of any possible future events and just concentrate on what you are doing in this particular moment, on this particular day. Really bring your mind into the present and keep bringing it back if it wanders. Another way to do this is to try the following visualisation - imagine a version of you in front of you – your future you, and a version of you directly standing behind you – your past you. There should now be three of you standing one in front of the other. Now bring your focus into you, at this specific time. See yourself in the middle version, in the version of you NOW. Really concentrate on how your physical body feels, and how your feet are touching the ground. Set the intention to draw all your energy to you now. Once you are sure you are fully in the present version, send roots of energy down into the earth, anchoring yourself in the here and now. Repeat this visualisation every day, and if you find yourself worrying about 'what if's', repeat it again as many times as you need to.

Be happy.

If we wait until every aspect of our lives are perfect before we allow ourselves to find happiness, then it will never happen. Find happiness in the journey itself. Enjoy the process of that journey and everything it entails by being very present at every moment. Be happy now. Make a mental choice each day to be happy even if you feel tired and worn out. Smile at people, make eye contact with them, and above all be kind to them no matter how you are feeling. Eventually, you will begin to feel happier.

Be positive.

Control is also a point of anxiety for many people. Not feeling that you have any control on your world and what is going to happen to you. When in fact being positive and staying in the present creates a more positive energetic environment and attracts more positive scenarios into your life. I totally believe that we do have some control over the life that we create with the energy and positivity that we give off around us.

If you are struggling with staying positive, stop reading the papers and watching the news for a while on TV, and practise the energy routines in this article. We need to be aware that the news is often weighted to a certain perspective, and that the positive acts of kindness and love that happen continually throughout the world every day, are not being reported on. What we see are the negatives and bad news, and this can become out of proportion making us believe that the world is a negative place. So let go of this for a while, as well as Social Media if you can, and concentrate on your energy connection. You will feel a benefit and an improvement in your mood, and then perhaps you can bring in small portions of time when you read a paper or look at Facebook. However, if it affects your mood again, ignore it.

Be grateful for what you have in your life now.

The roof over your head, the family and friends around you, the job, money in the bank, whatever it is actively send gratitude to the Universe for allowing these

things to come into your life. I often repeat my gratitude mantra throughout the day – really connecting to the emotion of it. It is the emotional connection that is the key element, connecting to that feeling of gratitude in the heart when you think about something or someone that you are truly thankful to have around.

Create a bubble.

One of positivity and protection around you. Imagine a bubble so big that you can step into it and it will completely envelope you. Fill that bubble with joy, happiness, gratitude, love, whatever emotion you want to fill it with. Give a colour or texture to the emotion or emotions that you fill the bubble with, and perhaps customise it with whatever you want around the outside. For example, you could see liquid crystal dripping all over it, or streaks of fire flashing over it. Allow the positive emotion and feeling of being protected to be enthused into every cell of your body. Step into your bubble whenever you need a top up of positivity or protection. If you find yourself in a situation which particularly makes you anxious, then just imagine stepping into your bubble. Nobody need know what you are doing, but eventually that feeling of protection and positivity will be anchored into your being.

Of course, being aware of our emotions and energy field is just one of our tools, which I specialise in throughout my healing sessions, but there are also other processes that will assist the happiness levels and which you many find of benefit:

I would always encourage clients to initially talk to a medical professional if struggling in any way with low mood, severe anxiety or depression.

There is a direct link between our sense of smell and our emotions, so using essential oils can boost your mood considerably whether that be by using a diffuser or using the oils directly on your skin. Again, if in any doubt please consult an expert.

Nutrition is also very important as there is also a direct relationship between the health of our gut and our brains. It is therefore useful to do a detox which will reduce the toxic load on the body, as well as causing

an emotional detox. Once this has been accomplished try to eat clean foods if at all possible. I have recently been for Vega testing which was incredibly interesting and helpful as to what was the most beneficial way to move forward nutritionally, and it is always useful to get some expert advice in this field as well. It really provided me with clarity as to the areas that needed my attention going forward.

Exercise is also helpful to boost mood and aid sleep which is an important factor for supporting mood.

It is up to you which of these elements that you include in your daily routine, but if you are struggling with finding the Happiness Process

then begin to adopt some of these practises into your daily life and see how you feel.

Natasha Joy Price is an Energy Health Therapist who specialises in looking at the health of your Energy Field for general wellbeing, due to an illness or following a major life event.

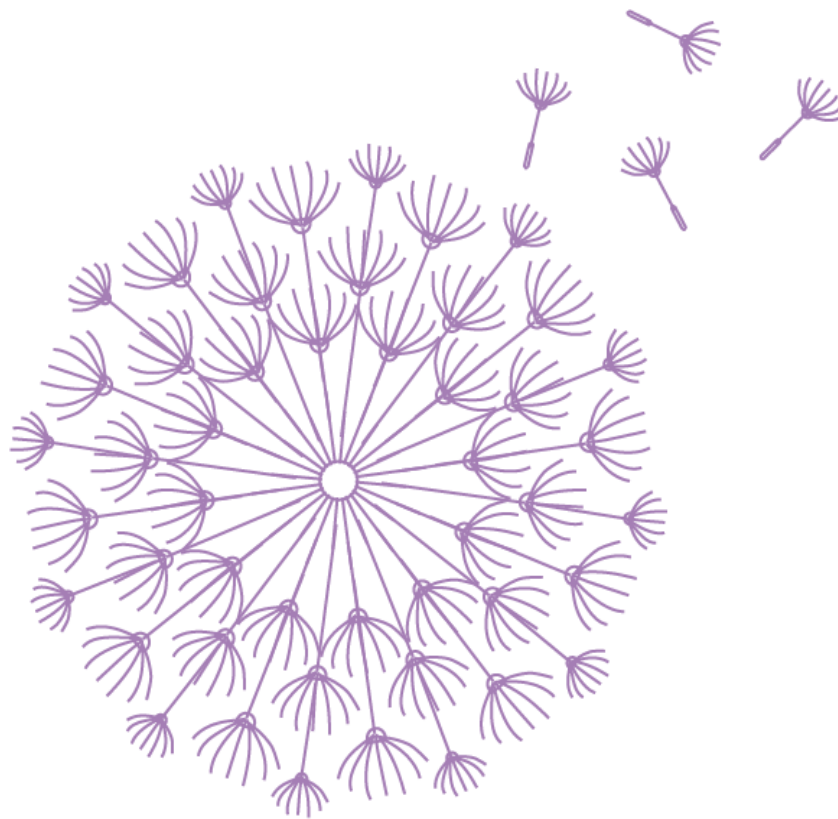
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■ NATASHA PRICE



IDENTITY: The Process of Becoming

■ With Corporate Lawyer / Freelance Writer DONYA FREDJ

Who am I? It is a question that perplexes many of us at one stage or another in our lives. Ironically, the more we ask ourselves this question, the more perplexing it becomes. So why is it that three seemingly simple words, when linked together in a specific order, can cause the human mind to spiral into a state of confusion?

When faced with any question, we exhibit a tendency towards wanting to provide a concrete answer. We are predisposed to categorising things and packing them neatly into tidy boxes. We are uncomfortable living in the grey area where the lines are blurred and so we opt to live our lives according to a black and white framework that dictates what we should and should not do. The question “who am I?” is significant because it threatens this rigid framework to which we have become accustomed.

The purpose of questioning our identity is often to gain clarity and yet we paradoxically end up in a deeper state of confusion. This is because the question “who am I?” seeks a specific defined response. It assumes that identity is a fixed concept and tries to force us to view identity through a binary lens. In attempting to do so, however, we fail to recognise that identity is

fluid and multifaceted in its nature. It has the ability to evolve across different contexts and spaces over time. Therefore, any attempt to define a person’s identity will never amount to more than exactly that; a mere attempt that inevitably leads to failure.

In other words, the definitions that we prescribe to our identities will always fall short since our identities are constantly in flux. As Michelle Obama aptly recognises, we are all in the process of “becoming”. Once we recognise and understand that the “self” is constantly changing and evolving, we have no need or desire to question who we are as human beings. Instead, our sole focus is on who we wish to become.

By directing our energy inwards and focusing on ourselves, our values, our behaviours, our goals and aspirations etc., we finally begin to acknowledge that identity is a creative process and that we have the power to adopt the role of creator.



**Donya
Fredj**
Corporate Lawyer /
Freelance Writer

Donya Fredj is a corporate lawyer with an MA (hons) degree in French and Arabic from the University of Cambridge. Born in England to Tunisian parents, Donya first became interested in the concept of identity during her time at Cambridge. As part of a Middle Eastern Anthropology course, she wrote a dissertation on the multifaceted nature of identity in which she explored specifically the practice and expression of Tunisian identity in the homeland and the diaspora. Donya’s fascination with the concept of identity, cultural space and intercultural connection has inspired and encouraged her love for travel. She has lived in London, Paris, Tokyo, Tunis and is currently based in Dubai.

That is, we have the power to construct our own identities. The question that subsequently arises is that concerning our ability to create an identity that reflects our inner truth. Can we avoid

being blindsided by social pressure and reveal our authentic self?

Authenticity is a word that is often thrown around these days particularly in the social media space. Many people will tell you that if you want to accumulate more followers, likes and comments, you have to be authentic. But what does this really mean and how can we achieve authenticity? Is it really possible to create “unfiltered” versions of ourselves?

Social media enables us to practice the process of creating our identities by giving us the opportunity to indulge in the art of self-expression and allowing us to exert a certain degree of control over how others perceive us. Yet, at the same time, the interaction between “self” and “other” across social media platforms reveals to us the relational nature of identity, which at times can lead us to feel pressurised into creating a socially acceptable or even desirable self.

Such pressure is a symptom of social conditioning; the concept that we have been programmed from an early age to adopt certain beliefs and conform to standard behaviours generally accepted by society.

The challenge we face in reconciling our authentic selves with the effect of social conditioning not only plays out in social media but of course in everyday life too. Should we remain in our stable 9-5 job or find an alternative career path based on our passions? Should we buy a big house with a garden or go travelling around the world? All of our choices in life are informed by a pre-existing social structure.

Some may say that in order to achieve authenticity, we must learn to escape the shackles of social conditioning. But to do this would be to reject the very foundations on which society is built and to imply that there is only one right path – the path that distances us from social conditioning. Just like when

as children growing up we sometimes do the complete opposite of what our parents tell us to do, without acknowledging our parents’ point of view, solely for the purpose of breaking free from our childhood shackles.

The truth is that there is no absolute truth, there is no right path and there is no true self. However, we can all experience the pleasure and fulfilment that results from living an authentic life if we dare to live in the grey area. The grey area is the place where we reconcile self-expression with social conditioning – we acknowledge and accept the presence of social conditioning but also understand we are not bound to it and are in fact surrounded by boundless options.

Once we recognise that we have a choice in everything we do, we become empowered and liberated. We can finally let go and live right in the middle of the unknown where uncertainty meets potential.

■ DONYA FREDJ



Charlotte Gush

Shamanic practitioner

Charlotte is a medicine woman, mentor and writer. Her passion is supporting women on the journey of reconnection with their own power & innate wisdom

Have you ever considered the idea of inter-generational wounding? How the experiences of your female ancestors, grandmothers and mothers, may affect your path in life? How deep seated, often unconscious wounds, may mould a story that no longer serves you?

The story of The Feminine, The Whole Woman, is long and winding, too much for one article alone. But reflecting on the journey of the fall & rise of The Wise Woman can help us understand ourselves a little better. Myths, fables and stories give us points of identification, a place to project and learn.

Shamanically speaking we stand on the shoulders of our ancient grandmoth-

THE WISE WOMAN - Grandmothers, Mothers & Daughters; Inter-Generational Healing...

■ With Shamanic practitioner CHARLOTTE GUSH

ers. The voices whisper that their stories must be told. In remembering & honouring them, we can reclaim the hidden Wise Woman, adding a newly written chapter to Her legacy. And it maybe that modern science is giving us words to do so.

Our Goddess Past

Sir Edward Tylor first coined the term Animism; meaning all things have a soul or spirit. He claims that the roots of human belief were Animistic; the planets ancients recognising that the earth and her creatures were 'alive'. Shamanism later became the methodology through which these beliefs were expressed and the Spirits engaged with.

At some point, as demonstrated below, by our friend from the late stone-age, these spirits became deified as Gods & Goddesses; a recognition of the sacred balance between all things, Mother Earth & Father Sky, as above, so below. This showed a state of reciprocity and balance. Humans knew they were no different from the Earth and the balance of the masculine and feminine were required.

To illustrate this - back in 1908, the oldest 'goddess Figure' ever found was unearthed in Lower Austria. Now famously known as

the Venus of Willendorf, this 11.1cm high carving of a full-figured woman, fashioned from oolite, was dated between 30,000 – 25,000 BCE. This tiny yet significant figurine, according to archaeologists, suggests goddess worship.

Oolite derives from the ancient Greek word for egg; egg Stone, a perfect choice for the rotund nature of the sculpture. I wonder if the carver of this late stone-age figure could see all the little eggs pressed together and thought, 'Ah, womanly'. Perhaps he or she was instinctually drawn to this stone or maybe it simply a coincidence? Whichever may be the truth, back in 30,000 BCE, at least one of the faces of the divine was feminine.

This is further demonstrated in the ancient oral traditions of South American. I love their Creation stories that tell of the gods gifting the unfinished earth garden to humankind for safe keeping. These Earth Keepers, both women & men, continued to create, holding sacred their commitment to care for Pachamama, (Mother Earth). Here, the goddess with all her faces still exists. This narrative is beautiful and places us as creators, nurturers, equals to each other and nature, with a responsibility.

In other parts of the world however, different stories started to emerge.

In Ancient Jewish writings, Adam, too, found himself in a beautiful garden. He was said to have had two wives, the first was Lilith; a woman who was cast out when she would not accept a subservient role, only to be replaced with Eve. Where was the recognition of the feminine equal so present in Animism? Why was female autonomy seen as such a threat?

Furthermore, in the Christian story of The Garden of Eden. God created a beautiful garden and made man in his image - Adam. Then Eve was created from Adam's left rib. Later tempted by a Serpent, Eve ate an apple from 'The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil'. Both her and Adam were cast from the garden; a story of blame, punishment, Eve's sin, and of becoming refugees for eternity.

These three myths give a very different perspective on the same idea. All were invited to live in the garden, but at some point, in our history, we ended up with the three or more different outcomes.

Just take a moment to reflect on what your creation story is and how it's affected your view of yourself.

Our Fall from Grace

Could it be that stories such as these were the beginning of the idea that women are lesser? Shamed and feared? That wanting equality and

equity somehow rocked the proverbial boat? Were these stories promulgating the idea that women are dangerous, untrustworthy and to blame?

We will never know the whole truth that led to the scales being tipped in favour of Patriarchy. What we do know however, is when stories are spun, when people are driven by fear, anger and hate can follow; judgments become clouded and consequences can be catastrophic.

The following quote represents an all-time low in both thinking and behaviour and is a stark example of the need for balance and the union of energies.

"All wickedness, is but little to the wickedness of a woman. ... What else is woman but a foe to friendship, ... a necessary evil, a natural temptation. Women are by nature instruments of Satan -- they are by nature carnal, a structural defect rooted in the original creation." [Edited]

Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of Witches), published by Catholic inquisition authorities in 1485-86.

While I know that not all witches were women the quote above does show where its heart and its fear lay.

When anyone is seen as a 'structural defect', 'wicked' or 'evil' it becomes easy to dehumanise them. The outcome for women, who were victims of this thinking, is detailed in the famous 'Letter from Rome' by Dr Conyers Middleton. Middle-

ton evidences that up to 9 million people, the majority of whom were women (accused of being witches), lost their lives through inquisitorial persecution over a few hundred years. This was genocide and some suggest gendercide.

Losing and reclaiming the legacy of the Wise Woman

When we lost these women to the noose and the flames, a huge body of wisdom went with them. When we lost the witch, we lost the herbalists, the healers, the teachings of sacred blood & sacred death. With our ancient grandmothers went the oracles & the guardians of the sacred spaces. We lost the Wise Woman and demonised the crone.

There has been an unsuccessful, and yet very human attempt, to wipe history clean of the 'Ways of the Woman'. Yet adjusting the written stories and art is not enough, it's not that simple. This is the thing with fear, vilification and hate... it's short-sighted and the universe has a long, long memory. Things that once were, do not

simply disappear, but show up as shadows in the most unexpected of places.

The Wise Woman hid on the periphery of life, in caves and woods and story books. She became the myth, the fodder for fairy tales, evoking fear in children and adults alike. She is the evil hag who may curse and kill you, poison your swine and bring rot to the village. *cackle cackle*

Finding meaning in all of this has taken years and I recognise this next point is controversial, but in the process of my own healing, I needed to find a way to step out of the role of the victim. I pondered the idea that at the highest level, (source & soul – soul being a collective) that the Wise Woman saw this coming and did nothing to stop it, knowing that at the level of soul all things have already been agreed. With this view in mind, could this be the biggest gift ever given to the masculine, her equal and opposite? Is this the biggest gift given to herself through a process of rediscovery? Perhaps she chose suppression to remain elusive, to ensure her longevity, strategically timing her re-emergence to show us the power of Her embrace when we think that all seems lost; a preparedness and a readiness to receive Her and ourselves in wholeness.

By choice, chance or conspiracy the wound left by the absence of Wise Woman is carried in our blood... not just in women but in the men also. Carl Jung knew of such things when he posed the question –

Who has fully realised that history is not contained in thick books but lives in our very blood?

A multi-disciplinary approach to personal growth. Knowledge is power and shamanism is healing.

I was not passed the torch of womanhood in a way I used to wish, and this was no-one's fault. How could my Grandmother and Mother teach me that which they did not know themselves? So

much had been lost or hidden.

They were not gifted a flaming torch to light the way and this was reflected in their beliefs and showed up in their behaviour. There was an acceptance, of less, that a man's needs came first, that living was a mechanical activity consisting of child rearing, housework and glass ceilings. This was my tutelage.

I lived their way for a while in deep discomfort and with an unquenchable longing. I hid all manner of things about myself and in doing so became taunted by the dialogue of internal stories of not good enough, less than, shame and of rejection. These choices I made to be accepted, affected my

thinking, my self-esteem and my behaviour. The model I'd been given was full of holes and the cracks started to show in my life.

It was my own pain that motivated me to find answers, to journey to find the tale of the woman. Through therapy, education, study, shamanism and its ancient roots, digging in the shadows and venturing finally into my own heart, I found The Wise Woman. She had been hiding there all along.

Healing

For me the ability to self-heal is not a myth, the stories of the Wise Woman lives within me and now guides my hand. She is strong, stoic & powerful, all encompassing, compassionate & funny.



She is rich and forgiving and above all, as her name suggests, she is wise. She bares her scars with pride, her facial creases as a map of her life, her silver streaks light up the darkness and her support unwavering. This journey to find her has taken much of my life but I am home.

Discovery

The marrying of many disciplines helped me to understand the Wise Woman's Universal Nature, the cross roads where shamanism and science met brought about an epiphany.

- The first Law of Thermodynamics tells us that energy is neither created nor destroyed and led me to understand that the Wise Woman has always been there somewhere
- Jung's question suggested that she is within me. In my blood
- Epigeneticists have discovered that trauma is inherited. Shamanically I see this as aspects of lineage. Held by our ancestors and gifted to us.
- Quantum physicists suggest that there is a field of energy all around us and within us. It influenc-

es us and we influence it. In spiritual term this has become known as the Divine Matrix and within it there are infinite choices available to us every moment. Consciousness (our thoughts and words) is its activator. The Shaman has always worked in the realms of infinity, healing the past and informing the present.

I am so grateful that science, often seen as a man's world, has given me the words to express what I have known in my heart for so long. Everything is available to us, we are not captive as victims in any story; we are, in fact, the authors, masters of our own destiny. This combination of ancient techniques and wisdom, along with modern knowledge, has become my chosen method of self-healing.

This made healing the narrative of The Wise woman possible for me. I reasoned that if the wound is present then so are the memories. By sharing the little I do know, investigating my inner realms and sharing the steps of my journey with others, I was able to activate Her.

I learn more each day, knowing knowledge is power, and shamanism is healing. Things have changed

and are continuing to change. We are active in the process. We cannot be the whole woman without the aspect of the Wise Woman. My personal journey to find Her, using shamanic practice, has revolutionised my thinking and my heart.

Conclusion

History may inform us but does not define us. We can become active in writing our own version of the story of our lives, of the worlds within worlds. We could all become an avid researcher, a student of the healing arts, the Lilith of your own domain and uncover your own version of the story.

For the Wise Woman to be present within and among us we only need claim her. Invite her back to our lives, welcome her silver streaks and listen to your heart beat with her stories. We are not only healing the wound but transforming the story completely.... We write a new story with The Wise Woman placed firmly on her throne.

We no longer need to manifest the future from the past. In writing the new chapter of reclamation, we heal ourselves and the lineage of our grandmothers.

■ CHARLOTTE GUSH

WOMEN AND MENTAL WELLNESS

■ With Educational Advocate / Entrepreneur AMA MAHER

“Always take care of number one”

In trying to be Superwoman, the body soul and minds of women go through so much wear and tear. Women are expected to give and give until they burn out.

I am writing this article to encourage women to devote some time to self-care and recharge their batteries. You are never too busy to have some me time.

I have learned to take care of me. After years of playing everyone’s Saviour, I became burnt out and mentally broke; this was my light bulb moment. I realized that I had to take care of myself spiritually, psychologically, socially and emotionally.

The first thing I did was to prepare a plan for myself; I had to detox all areas of my life. Unfortunately, I broke some hearts in the process, lost family members and long time friends but it had to be done. I also quit a job that was toxic.

The reward is my life has become much better and I am happier than before.

You will often hear words like de-cluttering and detoxifying the mind. They are actually the same. De-

cluttering and detoxifying means removing things that are toxic, unnecessary, that do not add worth to you in anyway and creating space for more positive thinking and behaviours.

It is a process of adding little touches to daily habits and routines. Detoxing your life is not as difficult as you think; once you start this process it becomes easier with time. All you need is to take the first step. The results are often positive: you gain confidence, you are happier and you feel better about yourself instead of feeling guilty.

“Do one thing every day that scares you” Eleanor Roosevelt

Mental Detox

Whenever you feel anxious, here are a few tried and tested activities to help you relax.

1. Reading a book. This curbs the temptation to check your social media accounts out of boredom. It takes your mind off what others are doing and rather focusing on yourself for a time.
2. Listening to music is calming. I personally invested in cds that I



Ama Maher

Educational Advocate / Entrepreneur

For most people, working with people doesn’t sound very interesting. For Ama helping people is her passion. As a graduate of both university of Ghana and Westminster (London) Ama’s potential of every team through training and development, enabling any company to be ultimate team.

Ama currently works in the Higher Education Sector, where she is applying her skills, knowledge, training and experience in helping young adults achieve their full potential and be a success in their careers.

play most of the time. I enjoy cooking and listening to music at the same time. A common chore like washing the dishes is accompanied by music or podcasts. Try to put excitement in what you do. Even if it is ironing clothes or driving to work, or taking the children to school. Play some music and sing along with the children. Learn

to enjoy your own company and those around you.

3. Have a media detox time. Take time off social media for an hour or two during the day. I have set alarms on my phone telling me when to take a break from social media and making calls etc.

Social Detox

1. Socializing with healthy friends is another positive step. Unfortunately, horrid relationships are not great for your mental wellness; they put you down instead and suck your energy.
2. Walking is great; spend some time enjoying nature at your local park.
3. How about attending an activity class to learn a new skill? I try to attend events on my own so I can meet new people.
4. Volunteering with local charities during free times are wellness boosters. Helping others in need will boost your confidence and you will learn new skills that you can apply in your daily life. After volunteering for my local charity shop, I have learned to recycle clothing and even PAT test electrical appliances.

Physical Detox

1. Eating well is something women ignore; you will be surprised at the power of a healthy meal. Nutritious food can help you feel better and happier.

Make it a habit to stop eating junk food and snacking healthy. Comfort eating is a symptom of low self-esteem. A healthy meal can help you feel better and happier. Take vitamin supplements especially if you are in your forties and above.

2. Go on a date with your bestie, after all that's what friends are for. You can go shopping for birthday presents together.
3. Dancing is another way to relieve stress
4. Exercising is a great energy booster. It helps you to relax and have a good night sleep. Not sleeping well can affect your moods, as we approach menopause women have to learn to get enough sleep.

Emotional Detox

I have put positive quotes on my walls and especially on the fridge door. Most of my quotes are in my kitchen, where I spend most of my time. You can do the same for yourself; it could be on your office desk or bedroom.

You can hand write them yourself or print them in your favourite font and colours. Why not be creative by framing them?

Add some spiritual care to your list, go to church where you can sit in the silence and renew your mind.

I had a habit of reading

my mail before leaving for work. It was not a good idea believe me. I would even stop the postman to request my mail. I'll read my mail on the bus. By the time I got to work I was in a bad mood. That had to stop immediately. It was a toxic habit that was preventing me from functioning well.

It is the same with our friends, family members and co-workers. We have to walk away from drama started by others if we can. I talk to myself anytime I find myself being drawn into other people's drama, this helps me stop me and think.

"You have to take care of yourself so you can take care of others"

Self-care activities will equally help after childbirth, hysterectomy and during menopause. There is no cure for being overwhelmed we have to fix it ourselves, by identifying what causes us stress. When you realize that you have taken too much upon yourself, ask for help. Say positive things to yourself, smile and laugh more.

Reclaiming time for you is not selfish it is smart. You are giving your body time to re-arrange itself. Make yourself a priority. Add little touches to your daily routine and reward your progress with some pampering.

■ AMA MAHER



Claudia Maria Wilson

Vintage Belle / Artist

Claudia studied Art History at University and worked as a professional photographer in the portrait and wedding industry before deciding to become an Art Teacher. She is an avid lover of vintage style, ranging from the 1920's to the 1970's and has a keen eye for the kitsch and quirky. She has always been interested in the political world, she has been Maldons MYP for 3 years and has attended youth debates at the House of Lords. She lives in Maldon, Essex.

I have always been interested in times gone by. Be that fashion, interior design or good old fashioned values.

Being, as the editor of this magazine calls me, 'a vintage belle' is something that defines me, and is a huge part of who I am. I adore vintage clothing, I have a love for antiques and I really adore men looking dapper, and ladies looking pretty.

There is a huge scene across the world that encompasses

FEMINISM VS EQUALITISM

■ With Vintage Belle / Artist CLAUDIA MARIA WILSON

the vintage lifestyle, with festivals, weekenders, shops and bars that give these people a place to be around like minded people.

I think that the vintage lifestyle appeals to so many because it takes us back to a time when classic style was the norm. Both men and women alike had expectations in fashion and it is sad that some of this has been lost over time. The cars, fashion, music and interior style being some areas I am sad to see lost.

Obviously, it cannot be forgotten that a woman's place during the mid-century, (around the 1950's), was very different to today, and as a woman in the modern world I can only be grateful to those who have fought through history to ensure I have the freedom that I have today. Naturally, I get asked a lot about this, being a vintage belle in a modern world, and whether I believe in 'vintage values'. That is a complicated question to answer, as my views can overlap, and I would hate to be preserved as old fashioned in my political stand point.

I am a true believer in equality, and would rather fight for this than feminism on the whole. However, I also believe the modern world is gradually losing its manners, for want of a better term. Just because we have a more equal position

in society, does not mean that we should stop acting like ladies and gentlemen, in my opinion. Being polite and respectful to each other is a simple thing.

The fact that young woman feel so empowered today is fantastic, it is something that has been fought over for so long, but the fight is not over. To me, the fight is now to ensure that things remain equal for both men and woman, and do not swing too far the other way.

Men have their own fair share of problems in life, but these can get brushed aside a lot, and I feel that men deserve to have their voice heard too, hence why I define myself as an Equalist, not a Feminist. Yes, woman have fought for female emancipation throughout history as we have always been considered the weaker sex, but now in this historic time of feminism it is important that we do not forget men and how the world perceives them too.

A man must be strong, masculine, fit, have a powerful job and earn good money - is this really the vision we should be projecting into the world?

I have thankfully never found myself in a position where my sex has held me back in my career or life, but I know people have, and this is a sad thing to hear about and

is something that certainly needs to be addressed.

We are almost at a point where it is acceptable for a woman to be anything she wants to be, so why is it still looked on as odd for a man to want to teach nursery children or be a makeup artist, surely we have all heard of Max Factor?

Please do not misjudge me, I am a feminist to a point, after all I am a woman, and will always fight for woman's rights. I just feel that we need to look at the things as a whole, as opposed to segregating our rights into male and female, and as a 'vintage lady' I can see how this outlook could be seen as contradictory.

Feminism is such a broad term that has changed and developed over time. To me it is the fight for continued freedom and equality, and the ability to be a lady in a modern world.

The way feminism has been projected into society can be looked at differently depending on when in history you look at it. For example, during the 1800's, feminism was a fight for complete freedom from male oppression, and was a tough fight indeed. The fight that woman took part in, and some lost their lives for, must never be forgotten, but in the modern world feminism is a fight for equality among people, and I think sometimes this gets forgotten.

We now live in times of such acceptance, never before in history has the world been so free, and have people been able to be themselves so publicly. Obviously, society is not perfect, and probably never will be, but we should be celebrating the fact that compared to the past we are so very free! I am aware that as a woman

who dresses as a lady, that it may seem this freedom should not interest me, but it really does. This freedom allows me to be a lady, I can choose to be who I want to be, I can dress how I want to and be the person I want to be, as can everyone and anyone. All it takes a little self-confidence and personal acceptance, yes this may be hard for some, but no one should ever feel anyone but them self.

As I sit here writing this article, I am also putting together outfit ideas in my head for 1950's weekenders I am attending and getting excited at the prospect of spending a few days revolving around pretty dresses and dancing. I will always adore a lifestyle of ladies and gentlemen, good manners and mutual respect for our fellow human, and for this I will not apologise, and regardless of your outlook on feminism or equality, I hope that reading this may have given you some food for thought, or maybe even just of a hint of nostalgia.

■ CLAUDIA M. WILSON

INTERVIEW WITH **Dianne Regisford**

■ With Social Sculpture Practitioner **DIANNE REGISFORD**

YT: Hello Dianne, tell us a bit about yourself:

DR: Greetings! Thank you for inviting me to Grey Areas.

I am a multi-faceted being! Amongst the strings on my bow, you will find; a mother, who has honed a career that began in journalism and expanded to strategic communication consultancy as a development practitioner focussing on cultural advocacy in Africa. I am also a contemporary ARTiviste (artiste-activist), a social sculpture PhD researcher and practitioner, and a healer.

Through all my works passion expressions, I am invested in artistic enquiry, which creates spaces for cultural and poetic acts of encounter and transformation.

I experience my being as three river streams flowing within me. The three rivers bring fluidity and flow to my artistry ... (in no particular hierarchical order)...

One river is that of my visual and performance art practice expressed as poetry, painting and movement. This flows alongside another river revealed in my social sculpture and connective practice artistry. It is an evolving social practice and research exploration, which explores voice, participation and representation of African-Caribbean Diaspora communities through cultural advocacy in the civic space of urban sustainable development.

The third river stream is one of healing and energy medicine. I

am a KaHuna Lomi Lomi body-work practitioner. In my healing practice, I creatively merge ancient principles of African matriarchal and Polynesian Lomi Lomi (the loving touch) wisdom to support women in their evolution through contemporary rites of passage to personal freedom and self-actualisation.

All three rivers meet in an estuary, that of my being, my body, my universe and my offerings to an expansive, mystical ocean called society.

YT: What is social sculpture? What three words would you use to describe it?

DR: A difficult question to answer in three words! ... In three words, I would say: transformative social practice....

Originally conceptualised and developed by the German philosopher, artist, social justice activist, politician and visionary, Joseph Beuys, social sculpture has been described as: 'the philosophy and practice of freedom'. Social sculpture practitioners explore the dynamic relationship between the imagination and transformation through aesthetic processes. These are processes, which through various practices are able to connect and transform the power dynamic between social issues, communities and social renewal.

YT: What is the role of women in social sculpture? Is there a place for feminism? If yes what would it be?

DR: The field of social sculpture



Dianne Regisford

Social Sculpture Practitioner
PhD researcher

*D-Empress Dianne Regisford
Artiste Profile
The Urban Indigene.*

D-Empress Dianne Regisford is a multi-sensory, contemporary artiste invested in artistic enquiry, which creates spaces for cultural and poetic acts of encounter.

Dianne's artistry pivots around ideas of voice, participation and representation of women in the African-Caribbean Diaspora.

Dianne's creations churn the soul soil of identity, heritage, mythology and humanity excavating narratives as pathways to social renewal.

Crafted as The Urban Indigene, Dianne works with the socio-cultural fabric of Diaspora voice, (re) constructed identity and sense of place in a urban spaces. Dianne is also particularly interested in the experiences of African feminist perspectives of gender, sexuality and sensuality.

Her artistic practice includes the visual arts (painting, sculpture), poetry and performance. She is inspired by cultural and spiritual systems of Africa and her Diaspora. D-Empress was a participating artist at the world's leading contemporary art platform for African art, the Dakar Biennale in 2014. She has also exhibited in France & the UK, and has performed in South Africa, Ethiopia, France, Malta and the UK.

www.dianneregisford.com / dianne@dianneregisford.com



is open to all who are committed to transformation. As a woman who is a social sculpture practitioner, I feel a deep sense of harmony and integration in this field. Equity and justice are ethical cornerstones of the field. Creating a just, egalitarian society shapes part of the impulse of our various expressions of practice. We are aligned to the principles of sustainable development and Ban Ki Moon's (UN Secretary General) call for a new social contract to, 'leave no-one behind', as articulated at the launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2016.

As such, all social freedoms, not only feminism, and the quest for equality, diversity and inclusion of all, is a critical goal for social sculpture practitioners.

I see International Women's Day as a global call to each

of us, no matter our colour or creed, occupation or proclivity, to actively engage in issues of gender parity. Being a feminist is not only an act for a day, it is about social practice, which, when sustained can bring about social justice for women as a fundamental human right. I am captivated by the possibilities for advancing the cause of gender parity, which come alive in field of social sculpture. As practitioners, we are seeing an increase in demand for deeper understanding of what it is to be human and how we can live more equitably. The space for reflection, engagement and advocacy of such issues is a vital need for our society.

YT: Is social sculpture a science? A practice? An educational approach or a philosophy?

DR: Social Sculpture is an expanded concept of art, which includes philosophy, proposals

for fresh approaches to education and yes, our field could be seen as a version of social science.

However, the artistic dimension, and the plethora of ways in which it is translated, is what positions social sculpture as a transdisciplinary field where practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds.

I have developed my research explorations and practice in the contemporary expression of the field of social sculpture, as led by Prof. Shelley Sacks and other practitioners in the Social Sculpture Research Unit at Oxford Brookes University.

Building on the work of Beuys and other practitioners, Prof. Sacks has evolved the field to include the practice of connective aesthetics with a particular focus on the invisible materials such as beliefs, attitudes and our values. There are multiple strands of enquiry and focus in the field. I believe the most effective way to illustrate the value of the field is through the work itself.

YT: Please share the theme of your research and what prompted your interest in this field?

DR: My doctoral research is entitled: Evoking Belonging: Igniting *Ubuntu* as a cultural meme through social sculpture strategies, participatory performance practice and cultural mapping, in the context of urban sustainable development.

I discovered the field of social sculpture at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, I researched the field and Prof. Shelley Sacks and through research and conversations, was captivated by the notion of ecological citizenship in social sculpture. Through this research project, I have developed an experimen-

tal, participatory governance research practice referenced as: *Evoking Belonging*. I look at issues of migration and social inclusion of African-Caribbean communities in urban spaces. I am particularly interested in the relationship between belonging, civic engagement and participation.

What brings me to this work? In over 25 years of working in the field of development practice and cultural advocacy, I was increasingly dissatisfied with projects that achieve, what could at best be described as social change with faltering evidence of deep level transformation.

So, seven years ago, I left, South Africa, my dwelling space for over 15 years, to come to Oxford, UK, to conduct this research. I arrived in Joburg two years after the first democratic elections and in the following years, lived through an unfolding into 'freedom' in post-apartheid South Africa.

There, my consultancy in cultural advocacy included working with a range of international and local NGOs, private sector and government departments and agencies. As witness, participant and co-creator of a new sense of liberty, I was captivated by the governance processes, which ensued as, what was heralded at the time as one of the world's most progressive constitutions was created. The Mandela government of the day, incorporated the African philosophy *Ubuntu*, as a cornerstone of the constitution.

Longing to be able to work in 'development' in a more transformative and equitably participatory manner, I came to social sculpture with an impulse to explore *Ubuntu* in a governance context. My personal experiences of an urban nomadic lifestyle, always raise questions

of belonging, identity and cultural equity both within me and my work. As such, exploring migration and social inclusion in the creation of sustainable cities, struck me as a particularly poignant opportunity to work with the individual and collective cultural imaginary as transformative practice.

Ubuntu, an African Bantu word, is the nomenclature, which illustrates an African philosophy of humanity. Enveloped in the notion of *Ubuntu* is the idea: 'without you, I do not exist'. I came carrying with me the spirit of *Ubuntu* to questions of civic participation amongst migrant communities in Diaspora contexts such as the one we live in here in the UK. As a Social Sculpture practitioner and researcher, my works churn the soul soil of identity, heritage, mythology and humanity. I work with oral narra-

tives and imaginative practice as pathways to social renewal in urban spaces.

YT: Upon successfully completing your research this year, you will be the first black woman to hold a PhD in social sculpture. That will be a fantastic achievement. How do you view this milestone?

DR: Thank you... I look forward to accomplishing that milestone! I am currently in completion phase and look forward to sharing *Evoking Belonging* practice globally.

This PhD has been a pivotal journey of discovery, identity shaping and practice re-orientation for me. Being socially inclined by nature, a dreamer and a creator, I am endlessly inspired by the terrain that exists in the relationship between



the imagination and transformation.

As a daughter of Africa and her Caribbean Diaspora, I relish, with pride, the opportunity to shape and share a participatory governance practice emanating from the field of social sculpture based on the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*.

It is symbolic and important for the legacy of my ancestral heritage, that I, a black woman, can shape a pathway for global recognition of African cultural values and beliefs. Beyond recognition, I'm particularly committed to the potency of the imagination as a transformative capacity for cultural research and work in the development field.

The research is poignant and critically timed. The African Union have declared 2019 as the year of much focus on displaced peoples, here we face the impending fiasco of Brexit, all around the world, issues of belonging are placing people's lives under threat.

As a Social Sculpture practitioner and researcher, my works churn the soul soil of identity, heritage, mythology and humanity. I work with oral narratives as pathways to social renewal in urban spaces.

It is the political agency that I am honing not only for me, but for all communities, less heard and less motivated to participate, that drives me in this achievement.

YT: What is the meaning of the term 'impulse' in social sculpture?

DR: As human beings, we sometimes feel a deep, sometimes un-named or unconscious call to act. This feeling, this urge, this longing, can be considered an impulse. As researchers, we come to our explorations with an impulse that is a deep longing, a desire to understand deeply, questions about social issues that make us uncomfortable.

We believe that longings exist within all human beings. Through our work, we aim to nurture capacities, which enable us to see and grasp our questions. We work to come closer to our impulses, on both an individual and societal level. It is the dynamic space in-between the two where opportunities for social transformation can occur.

YT: In what ways does social sculpture add value to the current political landscape of our 21st century?

DR: This is a huge question! I'm of the firm conviction that in the context of sustainable development, social sculpture enables regenerative political processes and social practice, which looks and creates beyond the horizon of sustainability.

To narrow it down, I will speak of my practice. The world is currently experiencing unprecedented rates of migration and urbanisation.

Through my work with *Ubuntu* and *Evoking Belonging*, I'm keen to contribute to new narratives of Africa's part in the migration conundrum. This African philosophy has much to offer a fragmenting world searching for what it means to

be human at all levels and in all spheres of society.

I'm captivated by potential value and regenerative potency of the dimension of 'culture' and the notion of ecological citizenship.

I vision diaspora communities of African-Caribbean descent and other ethnic origins, actively engaging in local governance process in ways, which meaningfully shift our beliefs and attitudes and enable tangible expression of the notion of 'participatory governance'.

In my humble opinion, social sculpture practice can foster regenerative processes, which enable voice, participation and equitable representation of less heard communities in politics.

This is what drives my research and what wakes me up every day, to, with the courage of my conviction, develop the next phase of the practice, post PhD, which will be the *Ubuntu caravan*.

A mobile practice space where we will bring policy actors and civil society bodies together to explore, examine and share the participatory practice of *Evoking Belonging*.

It is my belief that no matter where we come from, ultimately, the current political landscape requires all of us to migrate towards becoming ecological citizens, regardless of our ethnic origin. As such, are we not all migrants? ■

D-Empress Dianne Regisford (Illustration – Grace Exley)
Dianne Regisford Artist Biography (short) 2 January 2017



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