

## Reclaiming the Human: Creolising Feminist Pedagogy at Museum Frontiers

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**Abstract:** In this paper we reflect, together with a group of international students, on the affective and political power of texts and contexts. Our starting point is Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda*, a text whose form, setting, and narrative structure render productive moments of "Relation" (Glissant), in which individuals and their historical experiences – rooted in colonial oppression – establish connection to each other *through difference* rather than commonality. We outline a series of collaborative teaching workshops designed with Andy McLellan, the Head of Education and his colleague Salma Caller at the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford, which provided fresh ways to engage our students in the transnational space inherent in *Imoinda*, as well as in the tangible and intangible heritage that the Pitt Rivers Museum houses. The paper discusses how study of Anim-Addo's libretto at a frontier site between the university and the museum can enhance understandings of the text and the context from which the work was created. Specifically, we argue that the value of such frontier work lies in progressing critical thinking, although Relation here is not simply cognitive, but vitally allows emotional and sensory re-connections with musical forms and art from around the globe to enrich intercultural knowledge. A major focus is on the development of a creolized feminist-pedagogy at the museum frontiers that, without being naïve to hierarchies of power and control in the wider world of lived experience beyond institutions, is *responsible*. Such practice is dialogical in essence. It privileges careful listening and speaking amongst all participants – teachers and students – and strives to raise diverse voices through the embodied learning that multisensory activities with museum objects can promote. Most importantly, the interculturality of *Imoinda* in terms of text, music *and* context, reading, writing *and* witnessing creates another "contact zone" of sorts (to use Mary Louise Pratt's term) which demands a re-examination of our paradigms for the analysis of subject formation and representation outside conventional binaries and across the Black Atlantic.

The metaphor of racism as a kind of global political struggle for territory has often been far more than a mere metaphor. European modernity, and the colonial projects that informed and supported it (both intellectually and materially), can be understood as the effort to purify the world for whiteness. The "geography of reason" has always been understood in racial terms, and colonialism was an effort to establish Europe and North America at the center of a globe whose organizing principle was this racialised understanding of rationality.

Monahan, *The Creolising Subject*

How can radical pedagogies attempt to undo the consequences of Western modernity that our epigraph summarizes, and how would museums help, given their vexed histories? The pedagogy we are developing is deeply invested in deconstructing the "worlding" mechanism of empire (Spivak 114) and is concerned with destabilizing the notion of a transparent universal (read: European) subject. The project work at Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, which is at the centre of this paper, will show how the concerns of a Black woman writer–Joan Anim-Addo–can be made visible and privileged in a domain that has traditionally

excluded the ideas of those Other than the white male and the upper/middle-classes. In the main we draw on Anim-Addo and Barbara Christian, Black women scholars who recommend we build theory anew and empower a wider more creative analysis of the museum discourse, not just by our own students, but also of the larger visiting public. We are also indebted to the collaborative work of our AHRC Translating Cultures network (2011-13), which gave us the opportunity to test ideas in practice around the world, in Leicester, St. George's (Grenada), Washington D.C. and London. Building on the foundations of "intercultural conversation" established in particular by Giovanna Covi (23-65), our theoretical tool, a creolised feminist-hermeneutics, is seen to enable a critique of knowledge at a region we define as the museum/university frontiers. Opening up the frontier region of the museum to dialogical exchanges has proven useful to us as university educators in the USA and UK, attempting to contest the marginalization or exclusion of certain voices, too often that of the Black woman, in the academy and the museum, locations where traditionally the economically powerful display Truth and the powerless consume it (Golding 2014, xiii-xviii). In this paper we argue that a creolised feminist-hermeneutic praxis can challenge not only taken-for-granted and fixed ideas of identity-that can be detrimental for economically disadvantaged social groups, but more fundamentally, what counts as Truth, for whom and why, in such sites of power.

Placing the Triangle Trade at the core of the version of "Western Humanities II" that Lima taught at Oxford (July 2013) allowed for an initial reconceptualization of who counts as "human" after Modernity. Western Humanities I and II are mandatory general education courses at the public liberal arts college where Lima teaches in the US (the State University of New York at Geneseo). Faculty teaching the course must choose from a limited menu of Western thinkers: Descartes, Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire, Marx, Freud, among others. With few exceptions, all the institutionally endorsed thinkers on the menu are male and white. There's only one open category, "a work from the twentieth (or twenty-first) century." Geneseo students able to afford taking Humanities II abroad are primarily white and middle class. Many students resist the intellectual work the course requires and some even fear its potential to glorify all things Western. Within the context of the Humanities sequence, then, by exploring the ways human nature has been theorized from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present, the eighteen students who were in Oxford in July 2013 were able to defamiliarise conventional definitions and narratives. They were able to see how the institution of slavery developed a need for white colonists to establish dominance over Black bodies not

only in the United States and the Caribbean but throughout the Americas. They saw race and racism as byproducts of that enslavement. In the US particularly, the abolishment of slavery and the end of the Reconstruction Era created a kind of anxiety among whites about their position of power that resulted in a desire to control the activities of African-American citizens through a regime of terror—from bombing churches to assassinations to lynching. The racism that slavery ingrained in people’s minds, hearts, and even the unconscious is such a powerful force that it can completely erase the humanity of other-than-white-human beings, our students concluded.

But it was not until the class read Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko or, The Royal Slave* (1688), the first work in the British literary tradition to grasp the global interactions of the modern world, alongside Joan Anim-Addo’s *Imoinda: or She Who Will Lose Her Name* (2003; 2008), and spent two days at the Pitt Rivers Museum with Viv Golding, Andrew McClellan, and Salma Caller, that they were able to more truly *see, feel, and acknowledge* the humanity of the enslaved African. Anim-Addo’s *Imoinda* explores British colonial history in the Caribbean from a complex woman’s perspective that considers the dynamic nature of identity construction through the forced and free journeying that has impacted negatively on the present-day lives of many Black heritage peoples, but also positively on new cultural forms. Our students were also able to trace the irony in a nation (theirs) that claims to have been born for freedom and equality, and the ways in which the Black experience actually gives the lie to that kind of rhetoric and discourse. For example, as the collection of postcards at the James Allen and John Littlefield’s *Without Sanctuary* website demonstrates (<http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>), the only way white people could gather in family groups to watch a lynching is if they didn’t see that person hanging on a tree as a human being. What we want to outline below is the way a feminist-hermeneutics has been creolised at the Pitt Rivers Museum frontiers—how our pedagogy developed through creative workshops engaging students with key objects in the anthropology collection and aspects of the intangible heritage, the histories /herstories /songs / within which it is rooted.

National museums have been considered universal sites to showcase the World. For Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum (qtd. in Golding 2013b: 87), museums serve to root the histories of peoples up-rooted—enforced or free—from their original homelands. As Stuart Hall (2004: 27) observes, however, radical museum pedagogy can prove useful in such context as it vitally draws attention to the notion of origins and the myths of originality, “beginnings” in Edward Said’s formulation, that museum collecting

has traditionally perpetuated. To take one example as illustrative of this point, it is now widely accepted as Golding notes (2000; 2009: 26-28) that the Benin peoples of Nigeria developed the lost wax techniques of brass casting in Africa, quite independently of the Italians in Europe, but research into the “Imperial Eyes” and mindsets to take Mary Louise Pratt’s terms, exposes the earlier politico-historical context in which the possibility of such co-creation was deemed unacceptable. Almost two thousand Benin Bronzes (actually brasses), taken as “spoils” of war from the Oba or King of Benin’s palace in Benin City Nigeria by the invading British army in 1897 are now on display in museums around the world, but interpretation rarely touches on issues such as the restitution of cultural property and the vexed relations since colonial times that underpin such collections.

Museums and texts serve to defamiliarise taken-for-granted histories and hegemonic assumptions, as our analysis of one of the “Imoinda Trails” our students have created will demonstrate. Édouard Glissant’s notion of the “*Tout-monde*” or “*chaos-monde*” follows on the long history of European conquests, which with the conquest of the Americas first brought the world as an empirical totality into human consciousness. During the centuries of direct colonial domination, that totality was mediated by a hierarchy of values represented in the universal standard of European civilizational forms and personified by the elite, white European made as exemplary subject. In the wake of processes of decolonization, what obtains for Glissant is Relation. As Nathalie Melas explains, “this is not the relation between one culture or territorial unit and another culture or territorial unit mediated by an authoritative standard but rather relationality as such—that is, the condition of existing in the midst of the co-presence of all the cultures in “All World” (654). Glissant’s notion of a “complicity of relation” is relevant to our pedagogy here, as Anim-Addo’s essay in this volume also emphasizes, since it demands accountability, which resonates in Spivak’s ideas of being *accountable* and *responsible* educators as referred to by Covi and elsewhere by us (Golding 2013: 203-211). More importantly, “Relation” marks a method of *reading* power relations through narratives of place and displacement. Our pedagogic praxis in the museum is seen as akin to a work of reading critically – reading “ourselves” in the blank spaces between words and in the margins of official texts, according to Hélène Cixous (1976: 881), and reading against the grain as Roland Barthes suggests. We can learn to read objects in space just as we can decode signs and symbols in text; both reading practices demand levels of literacy that our model of critical pedagogy enhances. It is a model that is flexible enough to bring together places and peoples linked together by history and geography.

Reading Anim-Addo's libretto thus requires a revision and rewriting of history (perhaps even a contestation of historical knowledge itself), a continual emphasis on the shifting, unstable nature of identities, and a poetic engagement with both the limits and possibilities of community. *Imoinda's* form, setting, and narrative structure render productive moments of "Relation" in which individuals and their historical experiences establish connection to each other *through difference* rather than through a bland attention to commonality that is evident in the simplicity of the 'One World' and 'One Leicester' romantic publicity texts that are placed by local government officials on train station billboards. Further, a radical pedagogy of "Relation" disrupts simplistic binary notions of barrier or borderland between those who hold the agency and active power to write and those who are seen as passive readers. The task of asking students to develop Museum Trails (guide worksheets, Appendix II) helps to break down the relationship where the teacher/museum educator writes while students/audiences read. It may be that young people, closer in age to certain audiences that museums find it difficult to attract (16-25 year olds) can help the museum to be more inclusive. We suggest that each time Imoinda Trails are constructed by diverse writers, at different museum locations and times, new audiences might be enabled to better learn and understand subjective experiences of dislocation and ongoing negotiation of the slave trade legacy. We are casting fresh light on notions of teachers and learners, spotlighting local personal connections and shining a broad beam of global historical context. In this multifaceted light, the transcultural heritage of Caribbean cultures forged from a history which so distinctively shaped Enlightenment thought can be retrieved from the margins to the core of attention and care as Sandell and Nightingale recommend. To achieve this transformation of "Relation" in reading and writing, our pedagogy is founded in an inclusive feminism where men and women work together for social justice, through a creolized hermeneutics that challenges prejudice and stereotype and calls for the building of a wider critical community.

### **The Pitt Rivers through a Creolised Feminist-Hermeneutics**

While Augustus Henry Lane Fox (1827-1900) was born into a reasonably wealthy landowning family in Yorkshire, he was obliged to work for his living and after training at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst (1941-45) he served in the Grenadier Guards (1845), the Crimean War, and in Malta, England, Canada and Ireland before retiring in 1882, at the age of 55, as Lieutenant-General. Soldiering income enabled Lane Fox to marry in 1853 and adequately provide for their nine children, but in 1880 he

unexpectedly gained great wealth, inheriting a substantial country estate from his great uncle, as well as a lifetime annual income of almost £20,000, on condition that he took the Pitt Rivers family name.

Pitt Rivers's fortune enabled him to indulge his interest in the history of firearms that was sparked during his military career and a growing passion for ethnology, as he amassed a vast ethnographic collection from dealers, auction houses, and members of the Anthropological Institute. He donated 22,092 objects to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford on 30 May 1882 but kept another large collection in his personal museum at his estate in Farnham Dorset, where he was concerned to display the objects of human skill—typographically—to show “progression” from the “primitive,” in accordance with Charles Darwin's evolutionary ideas from natural history. He states that sequences of objects could demonstrate

the successive ideas by which the minds of men in a primitive condition of culture have progressed in the development of their arts from the simple to the complex, and from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous....Human ideas as represented by the various products of human industry, are capable of classification into genera, species and varieties in the same manner as the products of the vegetable animal kingdoms...If, therefore we can obtain a sufficient number of objects to represent the succession of ideas, it will be found that they are capable of being arranged in museums upon a similar plan. (Rivers xi-xii)

The Pitt Rivers Museum today keeps the typological organization, but, as stated at the website, it “does not (and could not) show the supposed evolution of objects from the simple to the most complex” ([http://history.prm.ox.ac.uk/collector\\_pittrivers.html](http://history.prm.ox.ac.uk/collector_pittrivers.html)). The education team, Andy McClellan and Salma Caller, reinforce this message during face-to-face pedagogical interactions.<sup>1</sup> They employ a handling collection of original objects from all over the world to engage visitors in dialogue, which lies at the heart of the creolised feminist-hermeneutic pedagogy we have developed during the Translating Cultures project and that resonates in Covi's “conversational” praxis.

Prior to our museum visit we engaged McClellan, as Head of Education, in dialogue via email. Lima, bravely entering a frontier of museum work that was new for her, expressed a concern that our project address the curricular needs of Geneseo students who would be taking the Humanities course in Oxford. In sharing our expertise of African objects in the Pitt Rivers that relate to transatlantic enslavement and

Anim-Addo's libretto, *Imoinda*, that rewrites that history, a programme was finalised that involved two days at the museum following two days at the university engaging with *Imoinda*. In addition to their own close textual reading of the libretto, the students watched a 2008 production of the opera.<sup>2</sup> In the week Lima's students spent reading *Imoinda* and seeing the first full production of Anim-Addo's opera, they had begun to explore some of the complexities relative to a Black British identity, of being simultaneously an outsider/insider. Failing to find any professor at Oxford's 24 colleges whose area of expertise is either Caribbean and/or Black British Literature, her students echoed Nalini Persram's impatient question: "In which institutions, and through what kind of politics do people with more than one nationality celebrate who they are, where they have come from, and how their origins are different but equally legitimate?" (212). As modernity entails the imperative that "everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender," in Benedict Anderson's formulation (3), how can we devise alternative pedagogies to do away with the hierarchy inscribed in existing binaries? Placing the margin at the center, to borrow John Beverley's title, is an attempt to change present conditions, a way to rewrite the world.

It has also been very difficult for North-American students to accept the fact that they are not the primary audience for texts like Anim-Addo's *Imoinda*. One of the ways we have tried to respond to this challenge is to lay bare the most important/ strategic contradictions at work in the classroom, as a way of breaking into the normative patterns of interpellation carried out in traditional literature classes. In particular, we want to show how our collaborative work at the frontiers between the university and the museum facilitates critical thinking on and concerning binary oppositions of self and other, nature/culture, Black/white. We focus on dialogical engagement, a vital part of a feminist-hermeneutic method. Dialogue involves posing questions, often difficult questions as we note below. It also importantly involves all participants—teachers and students—*listening* to diverse answers. For example, at the outset of the project Andy McClellan led an introductory session from the centre of the lower gallery. After we introduced ourselves, Andy outlined the history of the Pitt Rivers museum. Then we divided the students into small groups of two or three and involved them in a free exploration of objects in the handling collection. McClellan prompted dialogue through posing questions regarding themes such as the material properties of the objects, their age, functions, the country of origin, their makers and their users, until the limits of knowledge through handling became evident. After that, he gave each student group a map to

locate an object in the display cases similar to the one they handled and they set off to find detailed textual explanation that they shared with the other groups on their return.

The students' initial explorations through the galleries echoed the object's biographical routes to the museum, which led neatly into Caller's first session where she shared her mixed ethnic heritage and route from a science degree to art and through her present museum job which forms an important part of her identity, as she acknowledges. The complexity of Caller's identity resonated amongst our visiting group, where only one member described herself as Chinese "pure-blood." Next, Golding's session began to connect Anim-Addo's opera *Imoinda* to the Pitt Rivers museum. She spoke about her longterm professional relationship with Anim-Addo over three decades, as she showed slides of objects at the Horniman Museum where they engaged in collaborative project work according to feminist-hermeneutics. Finally she played an audio of Anim-Addo reading her poem, "Was that Sethe or her sister (after Toni Morrison's *Beloved*)," which was composed at the Horniman. The poem powerfully illustrated for the students Anim-Addo's creative movement between a beautiful c.19<sup>th</sup> century Eloi maternity figure on display, terrible histories of enslavement and Morrison's nobel prize-winning novel. A major part of the museum project for the students was to examine how we might work with the contemporary text *Imoinda* to "build the bridge" (*Imoinda* 92)—at the in-between frontier region—that divides the material culture at Pitt Rivers and the lived experiences of visitors such as themselves today. How could we connect the glass cases so densely packed with objects holding terrible histories, such as enslavement, conquest, and colonization, with contemporary lives and brighter more convivial futures (see Paul Gilroy). Inspired by Anim-Addo's libretto was a route beyond self/other, either/or divides, not simply for the students themselves. We wanted them to think about developing a "museum trail" with specific objects and creative activity highlighting *Imoinda* that might further critical thinking of subsequent family audiences (see Golding 2013b: 92-96).

Most of the *Imoinda* Trails (Appendices I and II) attempted to represent the wealth and complexity of African cultures in order to undo ingrained European assumptions which considered Africans an entirely different species, not part of the human race, but closer to nature and the animal kingdom. These racist views, which have been extensively documented and widely discredited, are exemplified by representations of African arts and culture alongside natural history in traditional museums, rather than as part of western arts and crafts, as Golding, Coombes, Clifford, and Karp, Kreamer and Lavine amongst



others observe. Western museums of ethnography such as the Pitt Rivers have, increasingly in the twenty-first century, attempted to address some of the problems of interpretation and mis-understandings that have arisen from displays of the Other, most notably for this paper we firstly note the lack of named artist-makers in exhibitions, which echoes in Anim-Addo's text *Imoinda: or She who will Lose her Name*. Naming is a vital aspect of language that marks humanity and we would argue that ignoring the name of the mask-maker or refusing to recognize the name of the enslaved is to deny the essential personhood of African heritage peoples. Un-naming is to mark Otherness and its distance from "us." Secondly we observe the traditional focus on just one aspect of the material culture on display—the mask—which is one "part" of the "whole" to use Gadamer's terminology. Museum displays rarely show the important costume that completely covers the masquerader's body as it was usually just the mask that entered the collection, nor, we would argue, do museum exhibitions sufficiently highlight the ways in which the mask is animated in performance, although there are some examples of footage from ethnographic field trips that accompany displays, for example at the Horniman Museum's African Worlds exhibition.

Pedagogically, a major task for our collaborative project was to connect the parts and the whole—the gaps and silences in museum displays—which the contemporary Pitt Rivers Museum is concerned with. Collaboration with museum staff enabled us to emphasize the dynamic nature of *all* cultures around the globe as well as the long, rich and varied tradition of mask and masquerade across the huge continent of Africa. The museum educators also collaborated with the curatorial and conservation staff, which meant our student group was able to benefit from a behind-the-scenes tour of objects including African masks that were to be included in a major re-display. In the conservation lab our direct bodily access to the cultures of Africa was once again largely reduced to the visual, although without the barriers of glass between. Here with conservators, as with the educators throughout our museum visits, knowledge was exchanged and learning progressed as conversations flowed. Question and answer has been a key aspect of radical pedagogy. As educators we need to accept Stuart Hall's (1980) claim that "difficult" questions may need to be asked. For museums, doubting part of the central role of the museum's mission "to preserve," was one such "difficult" question that Lima was not embarrassed to ask in front of her students. She asked about a three-quarter life sized Japanese figure made from a bamboo frame and clothed with badly decayed brocade that had consumed years of museum time and money: "I don't understand why you are spending so much time and effort on this hideous thing." This question is one that museums in the twenty-

first century struggle with. In time of decreasing financial resources how can expenditure be justified and balanced between competing roles of conservation, interpretation and access.

Our students were drawn to the masks created both on the Ivory Coast and Nigeria, as far as we know, from at least the 17th century. Salma Caller outlined the purposes behind some of the masks. She highlighted traditional uses for specific practices and performances at festivals, religious ceremonies, weddings and funerals. Color was one distinctive feature for our students. In the Pitt Rivers museum the black and white masks stood out for them. Caller pointed out a mask made by the Ibo peoples of Nigeria (*Ibo mask, Nigeria, Awka;1938.15.7*) that was half black and half white. She noted how black is a colour signifying health and well-being on the portrait masks in many regions of Africa, while white is associated with a “deadly” pallor and ghostly presences. Caller expanded on how white facial colouring is connected with death and the wider realm of the ancestors who are traditionally thought to hold an important role in the lives of the living community and need to be appeased. Black and white masks represent characters existing between the “spirit-world” and the “real-world” and can be employed to intervene in the world of the ancestors, to ask for them to positively impact on the everyday lives of the community. The students were interested in the Ibo and other funerary masks from Nigeria such as the Yoruba-speaking peoples’s Egungun masks, which were also used during special ceremonies to connect with ancestors.

Salma Caller pointed to the importance of animating the masks in performance, which re-connected us with Imoinda in the opera production seen on the video and Imoinda within the pages of the text. The masks in the museum are still behind the glass vitrines, yet they can be animated in performance. It is when dancing with the mask that the performer connects with and gives over their living body to be temporarily replaced with the spirit that was called upon. Salma also spoke of how the meanings of certain masks and the renewal qualities of the performances were lost to African communities during the slave trade and colonization, for example through missionary activity that regarded them as ‘heathen’ embodiments of evil. One of our students noted in her reflection that she wanted to include a mask in her paper trail “to represent the relationship Africans have with their ancestors,” which she understands is “a common feature among all cultures, although many societies connect with relatives in different ways. The link between people and their ancestors transcends skin color and culture,” she concluded: “it is a common facet among all members of the human race.” Radical pedagogy, moreover, accords with Les Back’s description of listening as an “art” or a “form of openness to others”, not only “one specific voice”

but the “background and half-muted” tones that encompass the socio-cultural context of production (8). At Pitt Rivers our work involved listening in the “here” and now space that always “contains elsewhere”, that Back (22) highlights as the legacies of the past, and that creolisation theory notes as both positive in the creation of something “new” and negative in terms of racism and sexism (Golding 2013). In the context of the museum listening may be seen as an under-theorised aspect of the dialogical method that characterises the radical pedagogy arising from Paulo Freire’s key text *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970[1968]). It is now more than forty years that Freire observed how critical and liberating dialogue should result in action in the process of “becoming more fully human” (47), a point which remains relevant to our museum praxis today.

The artifacts displayed at the Pitt Rivers and other museums around the world help to preserve certain cultures that have previously been disregarded, giving voice to previously ignored societies. Seeing objects that people like Imoinda and Prince Oko used, and imagining the people who created them, really made the characters seem so much more real and identifiable. Our students emphasised that objects in the museum amplified the connection they were able to make with the characters, because they were able to truly imagine, “what *would* it be like to be ripped away from everything I’ve ever known? What *would* it be like to be dehumanized and treated like farm animals or objects?” This way our students realized they were not only connecting with people from a distant past who experienced these things, but they were able to take it one step further and consider the contemporary legacy of slavery and racism today. Texts and museums have the power to help us reconnect with each other as human beings and with our common history. Anim-Addo offers us a contemporary mirror, recreating Imoinda as a powerful, independent woman with a voice, a prince now susceptible to weakness, and a former servant Esteizme who becomes the teacher in the new order. Mina Karavanta (2013) points out that it is Esteizme who highlights the necessity of remembering for survival and holding fast to the “impossible dream” that underpins Covi’s pedagogy. Karavanta highlights the importance of recalling who they are and where they came from that will enable them not only to survive the perpetual threat and reality of the whip but to build and maintain new communities, to make “a new family” in the new world (*Imoinda* 57, 59). Esteizme’s song for remembrance provides alternative ways to read reality and develop strategies of survival, part of which is an acknowledgement of a new community and new affiliations that can be built when recognizing the pain of others. Esteizme recalls the words of a wise woman back in Guinea who instructed her connection with

land as a way to ‘search out answers’, *listening*, we observe, is key to ‘hear answers in the wind, in the leaves’ and the patterns of the phenomenal world (*Imoinda* 60).

Listening directly impacts on critical and reflexive thinking. The revelation of the true evils of slavery initiated a moment of critical introspection in our students. How have they indirectly benefitted from such evil? How unaware have they been of white privilege and hegemony? They were overwhelmed by Imoinda’s strength, as she gives birth to a child of rape, and even when she proclaims her despair that the child is “a girl born subject to such misery,” she still also declares her decision to remain and raise the child: “I have chosen life” (*Imoinda* 94). The School of the Arts production (2008) underscored the importance of community central to Anim-Addo’s libretto, as Imoinda’s survival depends on the strength of its support. Such community was beautifully depicted by the chorus whose voices and bodies gathered in a powerful cloak of sound, recalling the final scene in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1988).

In *Imoinda* we are transported to a complex imaginary time-space that lays bare the racist perspectives of colonial power and highlights the creative power of the Black woman to undermine the capitalist system underpinning human enslavement. Imoinda, aided by her community of women, in the act of giving birth and choosing life, interrogates and overthrows her bondage. Giving life to a newborn—as Imoinda does—is not necessarily to accept future enslavement. The intellectual act so dramatically argued and felt in the body of Imoinda, as she brings the baby forth into the world, points, rather, to the end of enslavement. Imoinda’s baby, who arrives with great pain, blood, sweat, and anger, also signals a renewed sense of possibility for a different *human* future. When Imoinda holds her newborn baby girl high above, we perceive our common humanity—selfhood and community value—that will break the bonds of oppression both physical and psychological. As Karavanta writes (also in this issue),

by displacing the focus from European civilisation and its commodity culture as the centre of the colonising enterprise in the Americas to histories of resistance, insurgency and revolution that reconfigure our understanding of modernity and the human, Imoinda contributes to the urgent task of reinventing democracy and community in the present. Its intercultural and translation politics force its readers and audience to bear witness to the making of community out of its ruins and the birth of another imaginary, another collectivity, another politics, to witness, in other words, the

writing of other histories, the dissemination of new aesthetics, the excavation of the dormant archives of modernity and the making of new narratives.

Reflecting on *Imoinda* within the Pitt Rivers, our students' Trails (Appendices I and II) were intended to promote a new scene of creative learning in the museum. They aimed to explore how Anim-Addo's opera might be employed to make visible connections between the material culture of sophisticated African civilisations, the appalling histories of enslavement and the optimistic choice of "life" *Imoinda* makes towards the future. Such creative work might challenge the historical situation and even, to a certain extent, through a creolised feminist-hermeneutics, break the power hierarchies of who speaks and listens at the Museum.

The hyphen in a creolised feminist-hermeneutics deliberately points to a "both and" region: both Black *and* British or both African *and* Caribbean, for instance. It highlights a movement away from the essentialism and fixity of binary thought that characterizes the Enlightenment. Hyphenation articulates the dynamic process of fusion in the "multiple" (Minh-Ha 107), a conversation that emphasizes similarity *through* difference and marks a perpetual process whereby we risk our comfortable notions of self and other to recognize broader possibilities for future selves "in the making" (Minh-Ha 113), which we have described elsewhere (Golding 2005; 2009; 2013a). Our pedagogical thought on the hyphen resonates in Hans Gadamer's discourse on understanding, which he sees as occurring in a "fusion of horizons" or "frontiers" to use our preferred term that geographically denotes the museum and university here. Openness and receptivity are essential if horizons are to be fused in genuine understanding of another human or a work of art, which biased or prejudiced viewpoints hamper. Gadamer speaks of individuals bringing "prejudice" or prejudgements from their histories or traditions to bear on dialogical work in the present. It is from the acknowledgement of biased positions that new knowledge and understandings can grow in dialogical exchange. He further argues that for exchange to be productive, the dialogue needs to be mutually respectful, an "I-Thou" conversation, which is a term he borrows from the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. The conversation model is central to our pedagogy, which signals respect and goodwill for the human self and the other interlocutor, which is vital if understanding is to be furthered. It also centrally involves a creative "play" of language (Gadamer 446) that opens participants not only to new ideas but also to broader possibilities for their future lives. Simply expressed, reflection and questioning

on the past in the present can lead to transformation in the future. Acknowledging the degree to which all subjectivities are constructed discursively (and that these discourses always involve power), the key point we want to emphasize is that it's not enough that students cast aside their prejudice to finally see clearly; what we want is for them to recognize through the fluid interchanges that museum spaces enable, the degree to which their own sense of self and of other(s) is part of such dialogical processes.

### **Pedagogy, Critical Exchanges, and (New)Knowledges**

Our critical pedagogy privileges radical questioning. It employs the feminist-hermeneutic idea of negotiating meanings in, as far as possible, non-hierarchical dialogue, although it recognises the special knowledge(s) and responsibilities of those who hold positions of power. In other words, while striving to facilitate new voices and locate the students at the centre of discourse, we do not deny our own positions and voices, but aspire towards a more radical dialogue that breaks traditional hierarchies of power in terms of who speaks and who listens. This is “mindful” (see Janes) and removed from the shallow chit-chat of mindless chatter (see Beryl Gilroy). It demands questioning that empowers critical thinking and action. The way educators pose questions and respond to the questions of visiting students is vital. Questions can direct closer attention to the material features of the museum objects and, more importantly, their biographies and entanglement with social injustice, which can in turn be directed at taking action to transform aspects of inequality in the wider world. In other words, critical pedagogy based on a creolised feminist-hermeneutics at the museum frontiers is crucially concerned with raising political questions and inspiring action. Such work requires the museum to break from being a traditional ‘temple’ site to a more open discursive forum space of exchange and engagement with new voices, notably *Imoinda* in our case (Karp & Lavine 39).

*Imoinda* highlights possibilities of collaboration to transform the museum, self and society. It points to the possibility of establishing social justice, constructing new, wider self-community images in opposition to the restrictive notions of human self and sub-human other that the discourse of slavery initiated. Crucially, ideas inherent in *Imoinda* can educate those who see and listen. But this has to be accomplished through a pedagogy that implies “always seeking *together* a solution to a question,” as Covi emphasises in her contribution to this issue, “taking a path without knowing the destination—effective teaching is the travelling, *not* the arrival” (emphasis added).

Building their individual *Imoinda* Trail, then, has enabled our students an understanding of abstract ideas by mapping them onto concrete things. The Pitt Rivers Museum allowed for ways of ‘connecting’ human geographies and object biographies, pasts to futures. Uniting reason and imagination, such Trails can effectively prompt critical thought. As Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi and Rick Robinson observe, “with the help of information, imagination, and empathy, the viewer can in fact share the dreams, the emotions, and the ideas that artists of different times and places have encoded in their work” (71). We would add a political dimension to this statement. *Imoinda* for us aids the practice of radical education in the context of the museum frontiers. At Pitt Rivers, as a team of university/museum educators we were able to highlight the economic “unevenness” of the world at a special space of active learning through dialogue and multisensory engagement (see Radhakrisnan). This learning space is understood as full of possibilities to construct new understandings and connections that echo with Gadamer’s positive notion of the ‘fusion of horizons’ but in ways that underscore the importance of political action (see Gadamer; Golding, 2009). In the fusion of horizons, active processes of new understandings arise from feminist-hermeneutic dialogue and multisensory activity, which make it impossible for anyone—human—to simply stand by and watch inequities taking place. In other words, at the space of fusion, unthinking “prejudices” that inevitably arise out of tradition can be examined and possibilities for the future widened. This opening up involves considering the horizons of our blindness to reveal the realms of insight from which thinking agents can become empowered to act locally and have an effect on our shared world.

Victoria Sandock’s reflection on the *Imoinda* Trail she created at the Pitt Rivers (Appendix I) emphasizes the importance of the collaborative teaching workshops in creating context for students’ reading of *Imoinda* with the artifacts of daily African life, spirituality, and stolen history. Victoria was able to see the tangible and intangible heritage represented in the museum, which helped her reimagine the lives of Imoinda and Prince Oko. She concluded that texts and museums have the power to help us reconnect with each other as human beings and with our shared history. Her museum trail reflects the connections she saw between artifacts in the museum and other objects. From a practical perspective museums are concerned not only with these different modes of therapeutic spaces where communities that have been previously excluded can finally see themselves represented positively. For our students we centrally positioned this interface between objects and audiences, histories and futures, time and space, so central to our project. What we managed to avoid was for the objects displayed at the Pitt Rivers to stand

metonymically for distant African Others, anthropology's former denial of coevalness Johannes Fabian condemns. More important, tangible things can forge readings of history that are significantly different from those derived purely from textual sources and can generate more comprehensive critiques of colonization. Students were able to see how Imoinda, Prince Oko and Esteizme embody the struggle of Africans to maintain their culture and self-identity—they were able to acquire a much greater understanding of the characters and their cultural background, coming to realize the way of life they were forced to leave behind when they were enslaved and moved from their homeland. Many noted that through their experience at the Pitt Rivers, they came to realize that we are all very similar in many ways. Most students emphasized their wish to celebrate the beauty of African culture when creating their Imoinda trail, and demonstrate the idea that we are all members of the human race, which causes us to share similar values.

There were obviously gendered choices in what our students focused their attention. One of them wrote, “Looking at the African Jewelry at Pitt Rivers with the other girls from the class, at something a woman like Imoinda would have worn and talking about how some of the pieces look very much like things that would be highly fashionable or that we would wear ourselves today, was a powerful experience. At that moment, I truly felt connected with Imoinda and the women she represents, thinking about how African girls like her and her women friends probably also gathered around pieces of jewelry just like these, even these same items, and talked about them much the same way we did. This was truly a moment where I felt almost like I was honoring Imoinda and the women she represents, by acknowledging and remembering their existence and humanity.” As human beings, most concluded, we all have a right to be treated with humanity. Texts and museums have the power to help us reconnect with each other as human beings, even as we work to reflect on our differences (and the reasons behind them). This demands work. It is dependent on addressing the complexity of our histories, both the personal and the deeper/longer socio-political. Such work is not simply cognitive but involves complex emotional engagement. For example, connecting with the suffering of the enslaved Imoinda contrasts markedly with the “adorned” Imoinda that we were able to recreate through the jewelry collected in the Pitt Rivers cases. It is through such complexity that museum objects allow us to relate as fellow human beings in all our differences.

Theoretically the notion of the journey, routes, is a central concern of “in-betweenness” at the contemporary museum, especially those sites that hold collections from colonialism. At Pitt Rivers our



students were asked to consider the ideas of roots and return, to the terrible colonial histories and to what the Museum of the American Indian references as “the longer time before,” through objects in the collection. Overall we presented a picture of learning as conversations at “contact zones” or “frontier” regions, which Golding notes are spaces beyond the restrictive essentialism of Enlightenment thought, the either-or of binary thinking. Just as conversations are never completed or finished, but as Gadamer notes “adjourned” to be picked up again and again over time and space, so our project marks a beginning. We have begun to critically observe the possibilities of working at the museum frontiers, the realms of danger and creativity, where we might risk our comfortable idea of self and other to forge new allegiances and progress global citizenship. So our “method,” as Barbara Christian emphasizes, is not fixed but relates to what we read and to the historical context of where learning takes place. For us, “every work suggests a new approach, as risky as that might seem” (Christian 78).

### **Acknowledgments**

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<sup>1</sup> We want to register our gratitude to Andrew McClellan and Salma Caller, who worked with us in the planning and implementation of our journeys through the Pitt Rivers Collection. We could not have done it without them. At least one of my Geneseo students from the summer class wants to work in a museum when she graduates. You've really made an impact—thank you!

<sup>2</sup> The first full production of Anim-Addo's opera took place in May 2008. Glenn McClure composed the score in collaboration with School of the Arts students and Alan Tirre, Musical Producer and Conductor of SOTA Orchestra (Rochester, New York). Students worked closely with a variety of professionals to research elements of the Atlantic Slave Trade to write the music, create the costumes and stage setting for the production. Of particular interest was the way in which collaborative art-making gave birth to new insights about racial relations in an inner city high school. We would also like to mention the 2014 production of "The Crossing" at The Actors Church, Covent Garden, London. Anim-Addo developed this piece from *Imoinda* in collaboration with the Cuban-American composer and conductor Odaline de la Martinez. While we were not able to attend this production, our research partners note Anim-Addo's creolising creativity, once again building community anew.

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## **Appendix I**

Victoria Sandock

I found that after my exploration of the museum, my trail related to Anim-Addo's concepts of a shared history and global relationships, as the trail looked at historical artifacts from multiple perspectives, finding different connections that in turn displayed cross-cultural influences. The trail also mimics the opera in that it rewrites the narrative of these artifacts for a different audience in order to emphasize certain aspects of the artifacts or to cater to the demographic of the audience.

The connection between Anim-Addo's narrative and the African artifacts of the museum was easy to make, as I was able to identify objects that could support Anim-Addo's feminist portrayal of Imoinda: the West African masks. The spiritual strength of women in this culture emphasizes the significance of Imoinda as the physical and spiritual mother of the Caribbean, especially her power in giving birth and choosing life and survival for her people. It was this connection that inspired the center panel of the trail I created for the museum. In my trail, I created a few separate connections between the artifacts we were shown that specifically relate to the story of Imoinda; I drew attention to the burnt remains of the palaces of Benin, the stolen Golden Stool of the Ashanti people, and the kidnapped spirit-object Mavungu of the Congo. I then urged students to consider the repercussions of imperialism on a personal level, looking at the destruction inflicted on individual cultures and peoples, especially in the context of Imoinda's narrative. On a separate note, I discussed the qualities of humanity and spirituality displayed in the West African masks, relating the ideals of these cultures to those seen in Anim-Addo's feminist portrayal of Imoinda, a depiction that contradicts Aphra Behn's original characterization. The main point of my trail was to place the portrayal of Imoinda and her slave narrative into a historical and cultural perspective,

and then to urge students following the trail to really think about the artifacts they will be looking at, connect them to people, and connect them to their previous knowledge of colonization and slavery.

While creating my trail, I started to understand the importance of writing out connections and relationships between cultural artifacts from different places and times; Trails help you look at history from different perspectives, make different connections, and relate a narrative to an audience in an effective and productive way. The trail follows a pattern of reinterpretation, displaying Anim-Addo's point in rewriting Imoinda's story for a new audience: the twenty-first century world. Her opera provides a new historical narrative, rewriting an old story in order to fit a newly available audience, in order to address history from a different perspective that could not be supported by the dominant ideology or the pedagogy at the time Aphra Behn was writing.

In general, I find it difficult to look at museums as spaces where people can feel pride in the display of their cultural history. As an Anthropology major, I am acutely aware of the disturbing history of theft and cultural injustice perpetuated by anthropologists and museums. For centuries, the prizes of imperialism, the trophies of the rich and ambitious "explorers" have been on display in American and Western European museums. The question has to be asked: who has claim over such cultural material? While humanity as a whole shares a common past, the material history of a specific culture belongs to those people, and should be treated as such. What claim does the British Museum have over the statues of the Parthenon, what right does Rome have in owning thirteen Egyptian obelisks? Are museum artifacts really displayed for the sake of the cultures they belong to and the histories they represent, or are they merely a showcase of imperialist trophies and propaganda? With that said, the Pitt-Rivers does seem to be a museum in a class of its own; its typographically arranged displays not only depict cross-cultural relationships, they inspire interaction and education. Should museums choose to similarly take this anthropological stance in looking at humanity on a global scale, in an attempt at general education, I believe they would indeed be spaces of positive representation and overall cross-cultural interaction.

Global interaction is a large aspect of both Imoinda narratives, as cultures from three continents are seen together for what is, historically, the first time. The Pitt-Rivers Museum really demonstrates cross-cultural relationships in its organization; as a typographical museum, artifacts are arranged by their similarities, thus showcasing their differences, in a way that transcends time and place. It is an

anthropological style of showing the connectivity of humanity, as well as the way in which cultures interact with and influence each other. Each case of the museum shows not only how we, as humans, are similar in thought and need, but also how different cultures can take inspiration from their environment and from cross-cultural influence. This is a huge part of what Joan Anim-Addo demonstrates in rewriting Imoinda's story: the connectivity of humanity, and how culture is constantly evolving with global interactions. Her narrative displays this evolution in the way it rewrites an older narrative in the context of a new historical period and awareness. She also portrays the resulting cultural collaboration of the globalized world in her portrayal of the birth of Imoinda's baby, a symbol of the Afro-Caribbean culture. In her narrative, Joan Anim-Addo depicts the dichotomy of global, cross-culture interactions: the conflict and the connectivity. In rewriting Imoinda's tale, she displays the negative effects of cultural interactions such as the violence of slavery and colonization, as well as the overwhelmingly negative effect such imbalance of power has had on global cultural exchanges.

I HAD NO IDENTITY

OWNED IN BODY

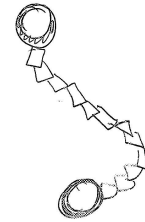
INDEPENDENT MIND

NEVER GIVES IN TO

DEATH

AND CHOOSES LIFE

M  
O  
I  
N  
D  
A

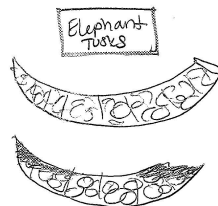


A CULTURAL  
TRAIL OF  
THE  
PIT-RIVERS  
MUSEUM

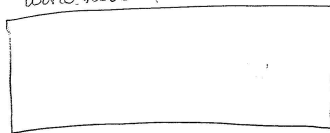
Victoria Sandcock

BENIN

The British Burn Benin Palaces.



How does destroying the material  
culture of a nation affect the  
world view of those people?

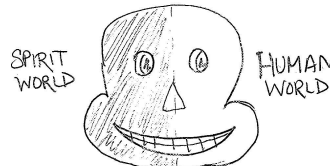


The Golden Stool



An important Asanti artifact held  
only by the King. When the British  
demanded its ownership, the Asanti  
people went to war.

WEST AFRICA



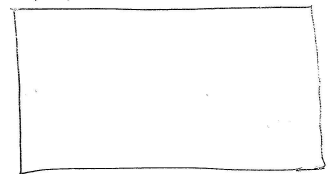
The Spirit Masks are a collaboration  
of physical and spiritual. They  
represent significant cultural unity,  
importance and power.

MAVUNGU

A powerful spirit-object stolen from  
the Congo and traded through Europe.



How does destroying the  
spiritual culture of a nation  
affect the world view of those  
people?



What do you think of Imonda's role  
as an African woman in  
regards to the spiritual significance of women, and their power,  
in this culture?





## **Appendix II**

Further Selected *Imoinda* Trails from our students at Pitt Rivers Museum

Here's an example:

I  
M  
O  
I  
N  
D  
A

• Now try your own with Prince OKo:

P  
R  
I  
N  
C  
E  
O  
K  
O



• The West African spirit masks were used to call upon ancestor's spirits and pray for luck, health, and prosperity.

• What do you think the white masks mean? The black ones? And even the ones that contain both?

• Now try drawing your own that you think may have been used in Imolinda's.

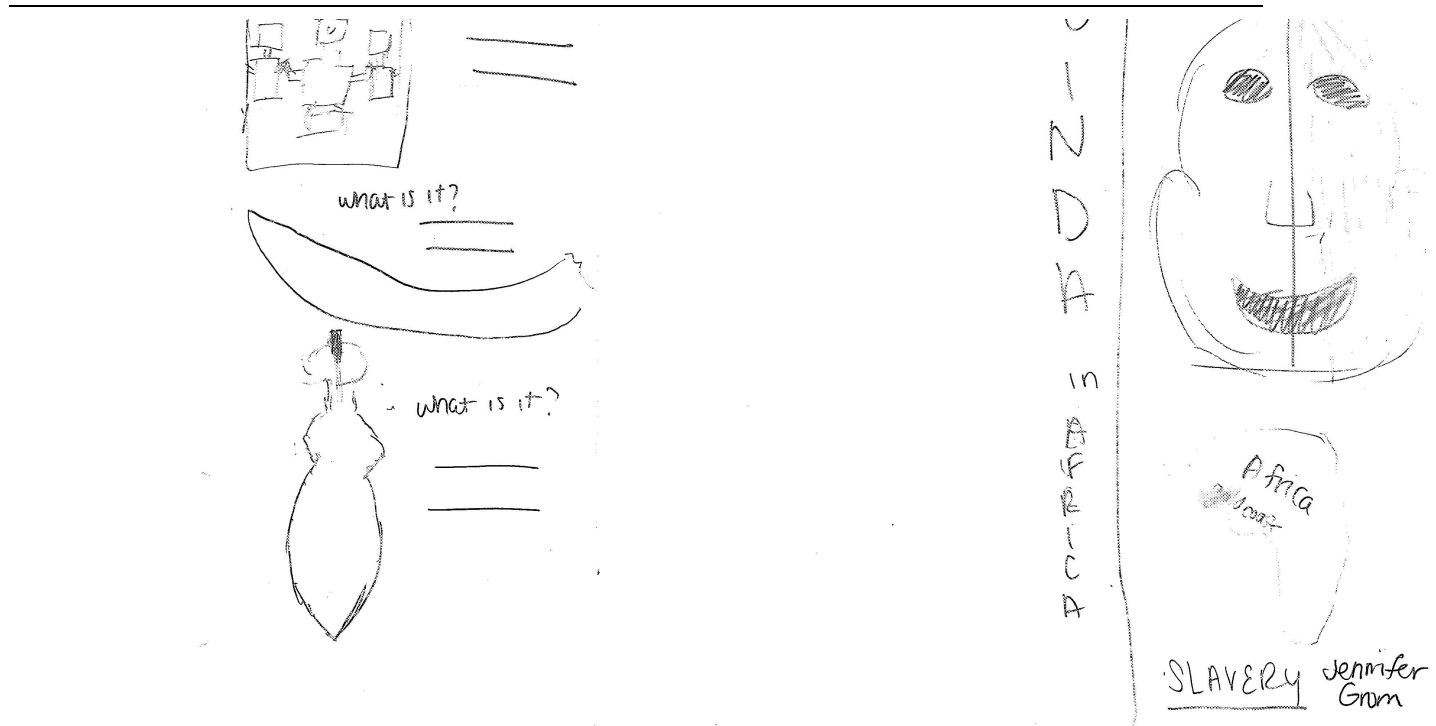
Draw Here



• Mavungu is a West African Spirit Sculpture. A person would ask a deviner (known as a nganga) to, nail into Mavungu to get revenge on someone. After the nganga of this revenge would come in the form of sickness.

• Unscramble the words to figure out Imolinda and Okoko might have a: a nganga to drive a nail into Mavungu

FHELI	NKIG
-----	-----
EESOVERR	RVIDER
-----	-----



who fell in love with Prince  
Oronoko but soon were  
sold into slavery. They  
traveled across the Atlantic  
to Surinam to work  
at a plantation.

U  
I  
N  
D  
A

knowing



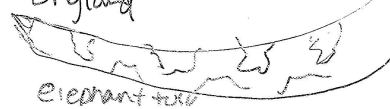
What art would have  
surrounded Imoinda?

West African masks  
were examples of  
powerful religious  
art of the time. The  
white represented beauty,  
women, and life; the  
black represented death and  
men. Dancers used their  
masks to call their ancestors  
to ask for things.



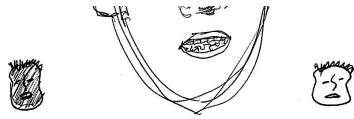
What happened to all the  
Imoinda's objects when  
she was sold into slavery?

The Brits would have  
looted the castle as they  
did in Benin, Nigeria.  
These looted objects are  
still in the museums of  
England.



elephant tusk

who was thought to  
command/hunt down  
the rainforest



African masks were used for rituals and "plays." These plays were performed to encourage the spirits to bring good health & prosperity. Do you think Eminda had this in her tribe?

{ Draw your own African mask. What would you use it for? }

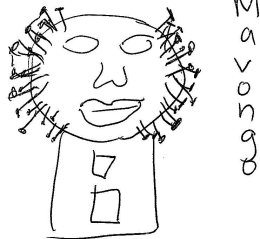


It atrocious right  
of the Caribbean  
Inhabitants, culture  
Not even the slave  
owner and  
Dinner could take  
Away her strength  
past, and identity.  
(Put PNs here)

Nicde Curtis

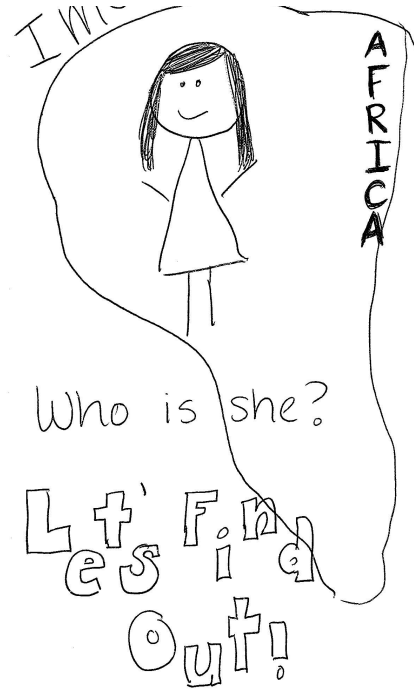
Intrelgwing to an ...  
Native men, but she  
Didn't give her heart  
Away.

⑨ People in Imoinda's  
time paid witch doctors to  
make deals with the spirits.  
He made contracts, which are  
represented by each nail.



Pitt  
Rivers

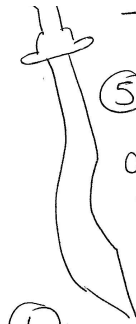
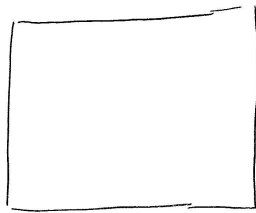
Caroline  
water



worshipped.

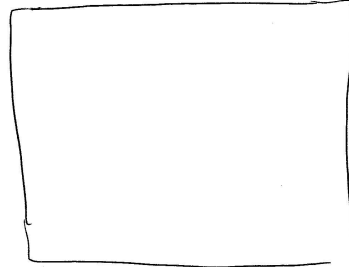
② How did they celebrate?

③ Draw one here



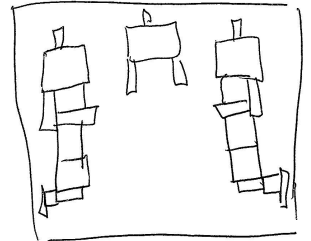
⑤ Do you have any similar skills?

⑥ Draw one of the objects they created

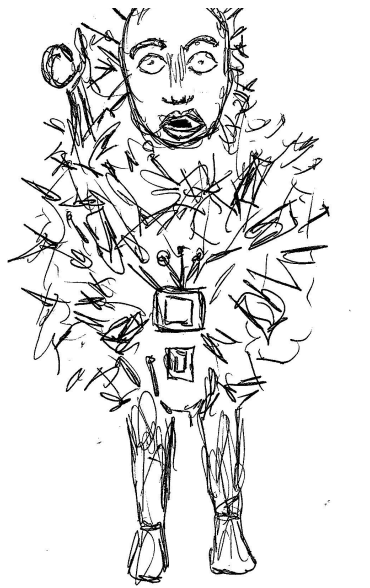


(hint it is displayed in the metal work case on some objects).

⑧ Finish the drawing of the King



(there is a similar one in the case)



His spirit seeks justice, just like the slaves wanted.



spirit masks. They were taken away from their homes and people, just like the Africans and other enslaved people.

JESS GERBER

O  
H  
N  
D  
A





motherhood mean to you?  
How do you feel about  
your mom? How do  
you feel about being  
a mom?

Akuaba  
Fertility Doll,  
used by women  
desiring a child  
FONMENA, ASHANTI



What do you think  
being a mother or  
a son/daughter meant  
to the slaves? Do you  
think it was harder to be a mom?

and often relay  
symbols of power  
and status.

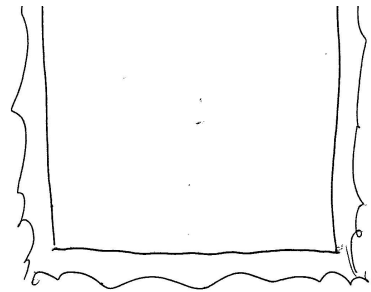


Metal  
Carring



Ivory  
Carring

Can you draw  
something that makes  
you think of power,  
like these objects from  
the Court of Benin? Draw  
some on the next page.



Oroonoko and Imobinda  
were probably used to  
being adorned and  
surrounded by these  
status and power symbols  
only to be taken from  
their home court, just  
like these.