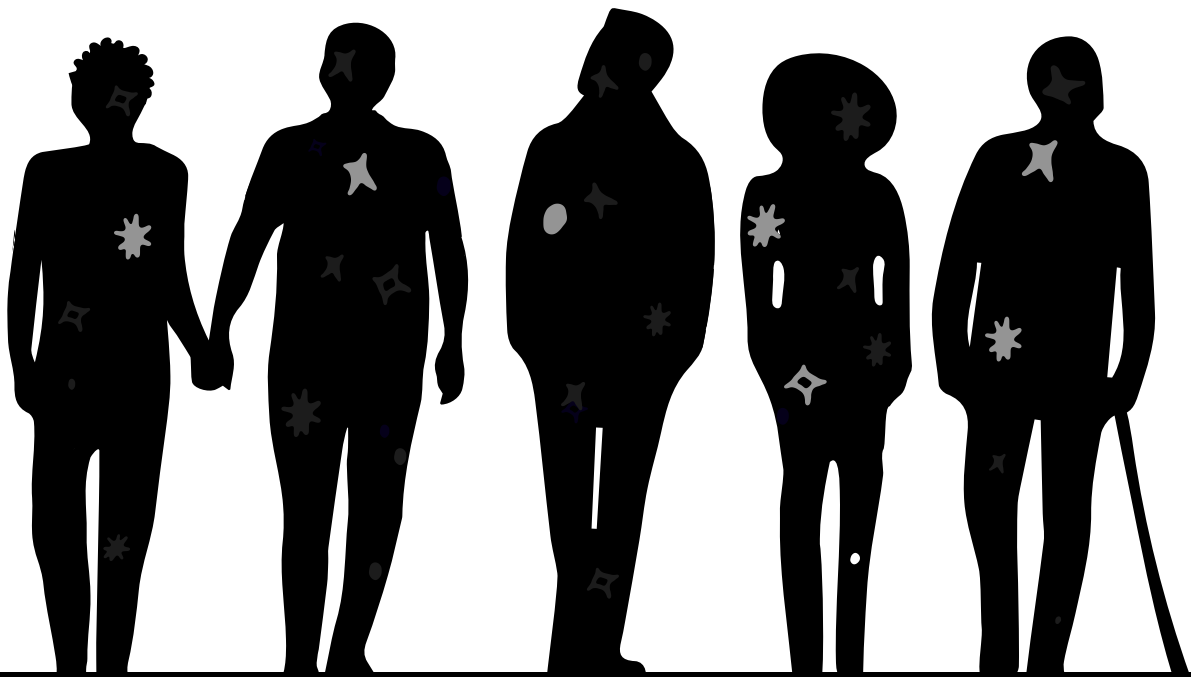


# THE COSMIC WE

Episode 4:  
Losing Your Way Generously

with Dr. Bayo Akomolafe



from the CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

- Bayo Akomolafe: At some point, healing itself is indebted to stability, but when the world withdraws this endorsement of stability, we have to become with the world, or to paraphrase Chinua Achebe responding to Archimedes, who says, “Give me a place to stand and I shall move the world.” And Chinua Achebe responds, “But there is no place to stand.” We are of the world and we must move with it. Post activism is an invitation to movement, to exile, to making sanctuary, to framing new therapeutic alliances with the world that is bigger than the individual or our images of victory.
- Donny Bryant: This podcast explores the mystery of relatedness as an organizing principle of the universe and of our lives.
- Barbara Holmes: We’re trying to catch a glimpse of connections beyond color, continent, country, or kinship. And we’re going to do this through science, mysticism, spirituality, and the creative arts.
- Donny Bryant: I’m Donny Bryant.
- Barbara Holmes: I’m Barbara Holmes. And this is The Cosmic We.
- Donny Bryant: Today we have with us, Dr. Bayo Akomolafe. Bayo has a gift for helping us to see with new eyes and in new ways. He asks reality bending questions. Dr. Akomolafe is a professor, speaker, a lecturer, a renegade academic, and is globally recognized for his poetic unconventional and counterintuitive take on global crisis, civil action, and social change. He is the author of *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences*, and *We Will Tell Our Own Story*. He’s joining us today from India, where he lives with his wife. And children. And Dr. Barbara and I couldn’t be happier about sharing him with our community. Dr. Akomolafe, welcome.
- Bayo Akomolafe: Thank you so much for having me.
- Barbara Holmes: When Cliff first introduced me to your work, I was astonished by the clarity and truth telling. It was sort of like my experience of first encountering Toni Morrison. Each sentence was so packed and took me places. I just wondered, is there any of your Yoruban background that influences that mythopoetic and narrative way in which you engage the world?
- Bayo Akomolafe: It’s really difficult, anytime I encounter that question, it’s just like the fish that has always lived its life in water, describing the phenomenon of wetness, right? It’s almost, it’s the only world I’ve ever known, this idea of elders, this idea of Proverbs, this idea that one does not speak straightforwardly, right? Which is a very powerful trope where I come from in Nigeria. That wisdom comes out from the corners of one’s mouth, right? Or that to speak ... The Yoruba people have a proverb that proverbs are the horse, or are the horses of words. That if you want to get someplace really fast, you use proverbs.
- Bayo Akomolafe: So, there’s a zigzagging world that I was born into that insight and comprehension and wisdom, and its articulation and eloquence were premised upon zigzagging through the world, and a deep sense of poetry. This is what informs, speaking about Toni Morrison, one of her friends was Wole Soyinka, right? This is what ...

Barbara Holmes: Yes.

Bayo Akomolafe: Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe and ... That's the word I was born in. I now fully appreciate it as a gift.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah. It's a powerful world because my family comes from the Gallia country here in the United States, and we've done our DNA and traced on my mother's side back to Cameroon. In the Gallia tradition, we always grew up knowing that life is not truncated between your birthday and your death day, that there is a continuum, and the elders come back. They come back in dreams. My whole journey in life has been about interacting with those who are here in this world and those who are not. It's a very powerful background to have. I don't know how you make it in the world when you don't have that

Bayo Akomolafe: This is this, dare I say, sickness of modern civilization. This is its desire to premise growth, to premise presence on this shriveled, pixelated individual, who is incarcerated between, as you so eloquently put it, birthday and death day. The world I come from suggests quite poetically, that our lives transcend their durations. That we are cybernetic, algorithmic, poetic, diffractive, rhizomatic, diasporic becomings, and we cannot be easily situated within the calendar, if you will. My sister's name for instance is [Iye Wande 00:05:54], which Iye Wande. That is Iye Wa, that our grandmother has come back again, and I don't want to get into the story of ...

Bayo Akomolafe: And you might have heard of Babatunde and all of that. I wouldn't name it as reincarnation. Maybe I would call interarnation. I wouldn't posit or suggest that Yoruba have a cosmic sense of reincarnation. Like, there's a cosmic wheel that is churning lives back into the material, but there's a sense in which we are multiple cells, we're composite beings all the way down. So, my sister is already my grandmother, right? And Babatundes everywhere are monstrous beings. So, the sense of the individual is foreign, if you will.

Barbara Holmes: And there's also a strong sense of community that has been dissolved. I think the reason the movie Black Panther was so popular in the United States was because you got to see what you only have inklings of and hints of from our own ancestral stories in diaspora.

Bayo Akomolafe: It was quite as popular back home in Africa. Oh, I can tell you we dressed up. We dressed up for that stuff. We came out with our geles and everything, right? Because it was more than just representation. It was also a conversation between our diasporic siblings across the Atlantic. It was blackness reaching and touching itself, almost [crosstalk 00:07:41].

Barbara Holmes: I love it.

Bayo Akomolafe: That was a beautiful moment. It speaks to the wealth, the richness. Achille Mbembe calls it black reason, which isn't supposed to be some shriveled up rationality, but a sense of the Afro-scene, I call it, that our lives and our worlds are populated and much more than what our modern prisms allow us to see.

Donny Bryant: Dr. Akomolafe, your work has truly challenged me to think differently. I've been trained as an engineer. And as an engineer, I've been trained to find answers to problems, but your work has kind of flipped it a little bit and given me an invitation to ask questions more, to explore the possibility and the questions. And even one of the things that I'm hearing you talk about in exploring, even kind of this interconnectedness, this cosmic we, if you will, you talk about this idea of more than the human possibility in some of your work.

Donny Bryant: The more than the human possibility. Could you help us to understand a little bit more about what that means, and what does that idea, more than the human possibility, what does that look like? And how do we ask questions that invite us to be able to see and think differently that can be transformative and transformation in our lives?

Bayo Akomolafe: And I thank you for inviting the engine and the engineer, and the notion of design and solutions, and answers in here. We don't want to pathologize that. I think that is puerile and childish now to rule out the world in those terms. We need engineers, we need design. The impasses of modern civilization are inviting us strongly to consider that design is not a human phenomenon, right? That the engine, for instance, whatever engine is ... I'm just using the abstractural trope, or notion of an engine, is always a post-human phenomenon. It's always a more than human phenomenon.

Bayo Akomolafe: I've often shared with some others that, when we speak about going to the moon and all the achievements of mankind, and doing all the things we did, the internet and stuff, we often rule out, out of our sociality of design, we rule out the influences, the instigation of the more than human world around us. Psychologists are telling us, for instance, today, that we have ... That cognition is not as well packaged or as coherent or not as brain-based as we think it is. That cognition is an algorithm that already ties in the external world, hence the notion of the external mind.

Bayo Akomolafe: So, it's not just spiders that think with their webs, right? It is that humans are implicated with and entangled with ecologies, archetypes, ancestralities. So, the furniture that I'm sitting in right now, and the way it's affecting my posture, has sometimes imperceptible effects on how I communicate, that escapes language, such that design has always been infiltrated, exposed to ecologies, but our language doesn't know how to attend to that, you see. So, we rule it out and then we claim, like Nebuchadnezzar of biblical fame that we built everything.

Bayo Akomolafe: But as that biblical narrative says, when he started to speak too much, I don't know if you guys go to church, well, I don't, but that biblical account, is Nebuchadnezzar is saying, basically I built everything. Look at this empire, and God turns him into an animal basically. I think there is a becoming animal. There's a becoming other than human that is at work, afoot right now, that design has always been the work of microbes, has always been the work of theologies, has always been the work of fruits and vegetables, and furniture, and colors, and textures.

- Bayo Akomolafe: That the world, in world in itself, brings all of these things together. It is not us doing it. We are doing it with. It's a cosmic we. That's the idea of the post-human, I guess.
- Donny Bryant: What you just introduced to us, you placed value on design, in the concept, and you also introduced to us this idea of language and how language, for many of us, is the framework where we understand our reality. We create narratives. We articulate, right? We communicate. And language can be very freeing, could be very comforting, but at the same time, as you just introduced, language can also be very limiting. It can become something we've become dependent on in that limiting dependency, you discuss in some of your work, is oftentimes a challenge for us. So, could you speak a little bit more about that in ways that help us to be able to see how language is one way, but also can be a limiting factor for us at another way?
- Bayo Akomolafe: It depends on how we put language to work. There is an epistemology that would think of language as a human right or something ... If you think of the world as a binary in terms of human exclusivity versus the world, then language is the barrier with which we endorse or exert our influence. Language is the way we claim exclusive rights to transcendence. It's the way we control and manipulate the world outside of accessibility. In that sense, we've given language too much power.
- Bayo Akomolafe: And I'm echoing the echo feminist and professor of feminist studies, my dear friend, Karen Barad, that we've given language too much power. What that does is that it creates this notion of representation, right? Which has, as one of its insidious effects, a codling effect on the human. It basically makes us separate from the world. It treats us as exclusive and distant and disassociated from the world in its mattering.
- Bayo Akomolafe: But there's another way we can think of language. Not as unlimited, but as creaturely. Language that is ecological, or to say that words do not come from some sovereign and independent place that is unique to the human. It comes from ecology. My people think of language as archival and memory as ecological. I said this to some controversial effect some time ago, that even if the Yoruba language were wiped out, and it's one of the list ... Yoruba is listed as one of the languages that is under the threat of extinction, that even if it were wiped out, that is all Yorubas because cease to exist in an instant.
- Bayo Akomolafe: Thanos snaps his fingers. That the language, it doesn't necessarily mean the language wouldn't survive, it doesn't necessarily mean the language wouldn't thrive in different ways. I use some speculative fabulation to talk about how the language would then become green or morsels of some microbial matter that ants would carry into the jungle and store in some storehouse that is only unique to ants. And when nature, what I might rudely call nature, needs the language again, it would find its speakers.
- Bayo Akomolafe: One mode of engaging with language is to reduce it to syntax, to lexicon, to

words, to phrases, to grammar. But I'm thinking about the more than grammatical characteristics of language, how the world gifts us with a how, or how the world gives us with groaning and moaning, how languages sprout and takes stability, right? It's more than human. It's extra human, right? And in this sense, I think we're being invited again and again, especially in these times of troubling cyclicity, to seek out the modern human, the animist world around us, or we risk victory, the victory of arrival.

- Barbara Holmes: I think the gift that you give us Bayo is a shifting of lens. We've all dealt with a particular lens of what the world is, who we are, and where we come from. What you say is that things opened up for you when you lost your coordinates, your map, your direction, your sense of the lens you had been given, and that you no longer needed to be certain about the world or the road that you traveled since you arrive at the moment that you set out. Can you tell our listeners a little bit more about your awakening?
- Bayo Akomolafe: Thank you, dear auntie. Let me put it this way, that my father was my greatest cartographical project as a teenager. I looked up to him. He was my best friend in many ways. He was a model of masculinity that I looked up to. He was tall and handsome and diplomatic. Then he was just taken away. He died when I was young. That was a very severe losing of my way. Suddenly I started to ... The world kind of became open and perverse at the same time. Perverse at first, because he was like a sense of ... He gave me a sense of theological closure. The sense in which a father, maybe a supreme deity or father might offer to a worshiper, a sense of closure.
- Bayo Akomolafe: He was my end of time experience, right? Then suddenly, for that whole narrative, for that eschatological narrative and story to be undone was quite upsetting for me and my family. So, I lost my way. Yes, my people do say that in order to find your way, you must lose it generously. That became, for me, like a coming home. Losing my father ironically became an invitation to find a new way of being at home with his loss, with his migrancy, and with the things that had been taken away from me. But me writ large. The Yoruba culture, what my commitments to my Christianized world denied me a sense of participation in.
- Bayo Akomolafe: It became for me, an invitation to become different. In a sense, I still feel my father is with me, in a sense that he couldn't have been if were physically present. Maybe that's one way of answering it, the question.
- Barbara Holmes: Yeah. It's an opening to the gifts that you're now giving to all of us. Bio, in the United States, we are just emerging from the pandemic maybe. For some reason, here in the United States, we process the death, the social devastation using whatever political lens is comfortable for us. By contrast, in your essay, I, Coronavirus. Mother. Monster. Activist. You offer a playful thought experiment. And you say, what if the virus were an immigrant, an alien visitation, an archetypal force that we've always known, but don't know how to recognize? What is that archetypal force that you are referring to?
- Bayo Akomolafe: I think in that same essay, which is an essay-book-monstrous-chimeric thing that I don't know how to name yet, I also say that it could be this situation. I speculate that it might even be an answer to our prayers, to activist prayers, to prayers for the new,

because the new is never convenient, right? There is a sense in which the modern expects the new to come with within the family way, to come within the normal ways we expect things to roll out, but the world is promiscuous.

Barbara Holmes: Oh yes, it is.

Bayo Akomolafe: And it doesn't settle easily along ideological lines. Using feminist new materialisms and Yoruba indigenous cosmologies, I felt invited to rethink the virus in more than epidemiological terms, right? Instead of thinking of the virus as a thing apart, there's something ... This is something reductionistic that it is convenient, but it's also risky. It's like reducing climate change to climate emissions or reducing organizational responses to climate chaos, to CSR, corporate social responsibility. And then basically asking the question, why isn't anything changing? Aren't we giving enough money to those activists? Aren't we pumping enough money to these legislations?

Bayo Akomolafe: There is a sense in which reductionism cuts a lot out, right? But I think of the world in terms of rhizomes, that the world is rhizomatic and chimeric, and often disturbingly diasporic. In this sense, the virus is more than just a thing, more than just this infinitesimally small thing that we have to get rid off. I wanted to ask questions about, what else could the virus be? Here, in India, people raised an altar and worshiped the corona goddess, right? Which, to many scientific minds, is utter rubbish.

Bayo Akomolafe: This is rubbish. This is primitive. This is not how we should face this problem. But that is a form of imperialism, to insist that the world is objectively noble. I'm not trying to rule out objectivity, but I think of objectivity in terms of accountability to what we are welding together with the world. The story that this is an enemy from without and our work is to get rid of this enemy and get back to normal is echo metaphysical true, but it is not the entire story. It cannot possibly be the entire story. It only shows up in part. There are other stories we can tell about this, that this might just be an invitation for us to lose our way together.

Bayo Akomolafe: This might be a portal through the space-time fabric of modern. This might be an invitation for us to prorate ourselves before the more than human. I don't know what this might look like in terms of politics, but I have glimpses here and there of how people are responding to this moment, in terms of the new questions this pandemic has raised up with on schooling, with how we shape work and the economy.

Bayo Akomolafe: In that sense, Barbara, I really feel that this is an activist of a phenomenon. This is a mother. This is a monster. Just one quick question before I wrap this idea up. I asked a group of people a question some time ago that think of any particular leader in the world, Obama, the Pope, I don't know, Desmond Tutu before he went, left us behind, think of one leader that had the clout to send every one back into their homes because of maybe greenhouse emissions.

Bayo Akomolafe: To say, everyone go to your homes for three months, no one go anywhere. What person in the world had that power to do that? No human.

Barbara Holmes: Nobody.

- Bayo Akomolafe: And yet, this tiny thing just comes and steals into our lives and sends everyone back home. And for a brief moment, we saw animals on the street, even if it was just for this brief, fugitive moment, we saw animals on the streets. We saw planes parked in their hangers. I feel that we should be asking more questions other than just trying to rush into a solutionism that re-installs or re-inscribes the problematic normal.
- Barbara Holmes: I agree. I think we're unwilling to ascribe power to anything except humans and their political and social organizations. There are other types of powers. I'm not so certain that anything will ever go back to what we used to call normal.
- Bayo Akomolafe: No, I'm not sure either, Barbara. I think we're ... Just like the United States never returned to a pre 911 era, right?
- Barbara Holmes: Oh, no. Yeah.
- Bayo Akomolafe: There's no pre 911 now. It reshaped the nation's state, it executed or affected new anxieties and new ways of thinking about the migrant or the stranger or borders. I think the virus is, even if we eradicated in a moment tomorrow, it has inexorably changed our lives. We cannot be the same anymore. There's no normal to return to.
- Barbara Holmes: No. And that may be the cosmic portal through which we save what needs to be saved and we shed what needs to be shed.
- Donny Bryant: One of the things that, as you were speaking about some of the changes that experiencing this pandemic has created, it seems like it also has invited many of us to look at this idea of power, this idea of privilege, this idea of human rights. I wanted to see if you can speak about your thoughts and how your perspective on how that has changed, or how you have experienced, or what you have seen individuals and how they have responded to the impact of the coronavirus, and how people have become more aware of privileged power and rights, human rights.
- Bayo Akomolafe: This is what the introduction of a transversal brings to the normal. It upsets the established order, and it invites new questions, phenomena to be noticed that we're not designed into the blueprint, that we're not part of the map. Suddenly the map is spilled open and design becomes geodesic, right? Curves coming to a place where straight lines were considered before. Long before the pandemic, I read a paper, I cannot fully reference it at this moment, but the storyline of this paper was that hygiene is not as hygienic as we think it is.
- Bayo Akomolafe: What I mean is that there's something about the rationality, the rectilinearity of modernity that wants to do away and sterilize the external world in order to create health for citizens. And that somehow this actually is counterproductive. It's killing the microbes, the helpful microbes in our guts that give us health. Because it treats the individual, the citizen, as a complete hole, external to everything else. I read this paper and the memory of that paper came up again when the pandemic started to take root.
- Bayo Akomolafe: I don't have empirical evidence to back this speculation up, but in the favelas and in the slums in India, in Brazil, in the places that have been named dirty and need to be washed in Nigeria and parts of Africa, it seems that there was a lot more resilience



in those places than in the pristine, hygienic places of the world. Now, I don't know what that tells us, but I think it suggests that well-being is ... We have to reframe what well-being means. That well-being is participatory. It cannot be a self-explanatory phenomenon. We need to reach out in order to be ourselves. I don't know if you understand what I'm saying with that. We can no longer afford the science of the individual of separation and enclosure.

Bayo Akomolafe: We are exposed, but Donald, my brother, your question wanted something else. Could you remind me of where I've tripped off into the universe and gone somewhere else?

Donny Bryant: Yeah, no, no, no. This is good. This is really good because it's speaking ... You're getting to that. It was more around how the experience, the global participation in this pandemic, what is your perspective on how has this brought awareness to this idea of privilege, this idea of human rights, this idea of power.

Bayo Akomolafe: That's where I was going with this idea hygiene, right? And the categoricity of hygiene and its implication with well-being being upended by the virus. And suddenly, there are new spaces of power. There are spaces of the otherwise, where power is practiced differently. You probably have heard of Fela Aníkúlápó Kuti, The father of Afro beat.

Donny Bryant: Fela.

Bayo Akomolafe: Yes, Fela. And Fela mocking human rights. Everyone in Nigerian knows what he means when he dismisses human rights. He's not trying to dismiss justice or to discontinue the need for that. When he sang the song about human rights and singing the one dash me human rights, he was trying to say something that there is a world that exceeds that. To anthropologists, it might be called an animist world, which was their way of demeaning this thing that did not rise to the level to the glorious heights of white modernity.

Bayo Akomolafe: But he was trying to say that there is something, there is a world, so to speak, that exceeds this rectilinearity and its sense of entitlement, which you might call human rights. In a sense, you might even say that he was claiming animal rights. And not the rights granted to the animal by the state, by the nation state, or by justice, but that there's a sense in which justice gets in the way of transformation. That sometimes justice might be conceived as the software of the familiar, the way the nation state tames the citizen.

Bayo Akomolafe: And Fela's trope was about migrancy and becoming and movement and nomadicity, which the nation state tries to counteract by creating stable settlements. But I digress. When I think of power, I think of circles of convergence. I'm using the metaphors, the figures used by French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, right? It's just a place of containment, that power is a form of containment. It's how the rhizome is put to work to reproduce images that reinscribe or sustain the recognizable. But there are moments when the world becomes illegible, intelligible. That's how the new emerges.

Bayo Akomolafe: Our work then as creatures of the familiar is to stifle this difference, is to pathologize it, is to name it names and to squeeze it and to take out the life from it. But we do

ourselves harm in that way. Yoruba people speak about, for elders, I think even Wole Soyinka has spoken about the slave ships coming, and how Eshu, the trickster, traveled with the slave ships across the Atlantic. I usually use that trope to invite people to notice the difference between power and ecstasy. That there's something that is more powerful than power, and that is ecstasy. That Eshu snuck into those ships and traveled under the noses of those masters and slave drivers, and became the creolized world in the Caribbean, in the Americas, and became different kinds of religions and practices.

Bayo Akomolafe: Santeria, Gayap, Candomblé, Capoeira. And maybe my point here is this, that we do need power. We cannot dismiss ... I think none of those positions are sustainable, pro-mask, anti-mask. As a non-American, I usually look at these conversations with a chuckling in my mouth. There is a sense in which we need power, we need the stability, but there is the warning of the trickster, that if you get yourself to a attack to that place of convergence, you become the jail cell, you become the prison, and you lose sight of the risks of being victorious, right?

Bayo Akomolafe: In one sense, you can think of it as a politics of recognition and think of it as the politics of identity politics of situating ourselves in the nation state, of getting rid of the anti-maxxers, of vaxxers, or something like that. But on the other hand, we are being invited to notice the trouble with winning the war, right? And that we need a different politic that might veer close to what I sometimes call fugitivity, that if we do not leave the plantation, if we do not learn to start exiling ourselves from the plantation, we will reproduce the plantation.

Barbara Holmes: Wow. That's a powerful statement.

Donny Bryant: Challenging.

Barbara Holmes: It certainly is. I'm think about what you were talking about with regard to power and hygiene, and the power to declare something dirty and in need of cleansing. It goes right into the religion, the ways in which Christianity was spread throughout the world, how is it that Jesus is usually depicted in white flowing robes when there were no washing machines, no Clorox, no bleach. He was walking. There were no limousines. There is no way in the world that Jesus could have been walking in presence on the earth in pure white clean hygienic clothing. Not in the middle east, in the dust storms, and among people who had no access to what we modern folk call hygiene. There's a way in which you say power coops. It's a way of making Jesus smaller and less accessible, and confining the spirituality. Those white robes bother me.

Bayo Akomolafe: If that is not a wonderful book title, I don't know what is. Those white robes bother me too. I grew up just hanging onto the threads of that white robe, the search for purity, the search for transcendence, the Balduran myth, that eventually in the by and by, we can arrive at some utopian place. And our work, the work of decoloniality is to return to an original, or to restore an original image. It lends itself quite remarkably to the imperial, to the colonial, to the master, right? I like dirty messiahs. And not messiahs that are made up in the figures of the human.

- Bayo Akomolafe: But when the Messiah or the messianic becomes this ecological orchestration of the next, the applause of plant, and food, and music, and dance, and colors, and things that escape design to the chagrin of the engineer, right? That we are not going to design ourselves out of this. There is no messiah at the end of time who's going to redeem us from the messiness of things, because we are the messiness of things, exploring itself in an endless teenage fascination with the next.
- Barbara Holmes: Yes, and our myths are nice, and our myths are entertaining, but we don't know what the world is or will be like, not really. You talk a lot about post-activism. And for Americans, particularly BIPOC people, people of color, we can think toward a post-activism, because we never finished the original. We didn't get there. We thought we did. But what we realized too late was that there was no goal. There was no finish line, that everything is cyclical, including the poison of racism. So, you say post activism is when we have come to the end of the rope, to the very end of the world and there are no more words. Is there action though, if there are no more words, how do we get beyond the troubles of trying to be neighbors?
- Bayo Akomolafe: I think this is where Black Panther comes in again.
- Barbara Holmes: Yay, I love Black Panther.
- Bayo Akomolafe: The King of Wakanda, I invite you in again, that there is something to be learned about the post-colonial experiences of Africans in their search for independence that is not talked about enough. Of course, Chinua Achebe, and Chimamanda Adichie, and Wole Soyinka, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and these African writers have always been, have long been part of a conversation between the African diasporic communities and the continent. But I think we need it, even more desperately, now. Part of the conversation I'm speaking about is learning from the experiences of Africans, the underbelly of winning the war against our colonial masters.
- Bayo Akomolafe: Like the fights from the '60s to the '70s, and even from the 19th century in Algeria that swept through the continent, all the way to the '70s, chasing away the British colonialists, bringing down the Union Jack, we defeated them is what I'm trying to say. We chased them away. We won back our independence. But when left, we suddenly realized that we were no longer the same, right? We had changed in the very heat of the conflagration of our fighting. We had become, in defeating the enemy, we had taken up the shape of the enemy, because now we had flags, and systems of government, and imperatives that meant we needed to connect back with those people we had chased away in order to thrive in the new environment.
- Bayo Akomolafe: So, in winning the game, we became the game. That is the heart, if I could say, the storytelling, the speculation of post-activism. That, what if, in winning the war, we become the enemy? What if the ways we respond to the crisis is part of the crisis. What do we do when healing becomes iatrogenic? The term iatrogenic, of course, is the medical term for the scenario where the attempt to heal re-inscribes a sickness. The medicine becomes sick. In that moment, when healing becomes sick itself, you need a break. When the cycle becomes toxic, you need interruption, you need a fault line, you need an earthquake, you need a seismic shift. And this is where the trickster bursts

into the bubble.

- Bayo Akomolafe: This is where we need Hathor, the goddess of destruction. This is where Eshu bursts into the slave ship and creolizes the world. This is where the virus becomes more than just an epidemiological figure. That's what post-activism is, is the creolization of continuity, right? It is marking the territory of discontinuity. It is saying, oh, I don't think we can continue to do what we've always been doing because that doesn't seem to be productive. Lauren Berlant called this cruel optimism, right? When our desires for something actually stands in the way of our flourishing. That is the point of post-activism.
- Bayo Akomolafe: It's not like after activism, we're done with activism, this is the new thing now and y'all are dinosaurs. It's not to say that this is some new spiritual trope. And if everyone gets onboard this ship, we'll arrive in the by and by in some mystical future. No, it is to say there are different ethnographies of responsivity of responsibility they were being invited into that may not be available for conversations around solutions, but that we need to embark upon if we are to probably thrive. This might look like a becoming monstrous, this might look like a becoming child. This might look like a becoming animal, right?
- Bayo Akomolafe: Because at some point, healing itself is indebted to stability. But when the world withdraws this endorsement of stability, we have to become with the world, or to paraphrase Chinua Achebe responding to Archimedes, who says, "Give me a place to stand and then I shall move the world." And Chinua Achebe responds, "But there is no place to stand." We are of the world and we must move with it. Post activism is an invitation to movement, to exile, to making sanctuary, to framing new therapeutic alliances with the world that is bigger than the individual or our images of victory.
- Barbara Holmes: I'm attuned with that, because during a visit to Eldoret, Kenya, some of the children started calling me [foreign language 00:47:25], which means white woman. My hair was properly all braided down and everything, and I'm black as you are. And I'm like, "What are you doing? And why are you calling me white woman?" I really got an attitude about it. One of them said to me, "But you talk like a white woman, you act like a white woman, you desire the things that white women desire." I was in shock.
- Barbara Holmes: Since that point, I have been working with how much, my battle during the civil rights movement, internalized something at me that changed me and made me take on that which I was fighting. What you've just shared with us, Bayo, sounds like a path forward for a new generation in black lives matter, the old generation of the civil rights movement, a path forward that doesn't require that we continue to battle. Perhaps we can ultimately find sanctuary
- Donny Bryant: And piggybacking on Barbara's story, and as you're dealing with this idea of post-activism, it sounds like, and I want you to ... Maybe this is a question, is post-activism also a questioning of one's self? Is it also like taking inventory or a self evaluation, or taking self responsibility, even looking at Barbara's story in our participation of what we're intending to be an activist against? The external activism, is it taking inventory of our contribution or our own consumerism and our own habits and our own

selfishness? I want to just ask, is post-activism, another way of really looking at it is, not just an activist against some social concern, but is there some inner reflection that is part of how you define post-activism?

Bayo Akomolafe: You can think of post activism as a form of sensitization. We are desensitized by our exposure to the environment, to politics, to protest, to desires that are not ours. We are activated, moved, instigated, oriented, swayed by desires that are not our own because we move and act within community. That's a beautiful thing. We act as an extra hyper organism, but there's also a risk of that, because in terms of that kind of assemblage thinking, we run the risk of becoming desensitized to movement. And modernity exerts that kind of power.

Bayo Akomolafe: It cradles desire and traps it, so that even our desire for, this is what Achille Mbembe talks about, the technologies of racialization have moved even beyond the skin to how we engage with the internet. It's not just at the level of the skin. We're also talking about how capitalism controls how we desire things, how we want things. The thoughts that we have about the future are just, are matters of algorithms that exceed our individual desires or tastes. That's one thing to say. I think of post-activism as, in a sense, taking inventory. Yeah. It is a sense in which we come to a place where we're suddenly deterritorialized, we are suddenly made aware of things that were part of our assemblage, but were largely invisible.

Bayo Akomolafe: And we didn't notice them before because, well, we are not available for that. But now something bursts through, like the virus came into India, an Indian mother started to ask questions like, what's the idea about school again? Or why do we go to work? Because suddenly, people are working at home and there was a new possibility, and the question about work and going to work became possible. In that sense, is a taking inventory. But I want to really situate this and emphasize that post-activism is a disability.

Bayo Akomolafe: It is not like a place of new capacities and we're taking up stuff, and this is a new arrow in our quiver of arrows, right? It is a place of undoing, of radical failure that is yet generative. So, I call it generative incapacitation. It is like sprouting, Donald. It's like waking up in the morning tomorrow and you sprouted three legs and you cannot explain it. So, you cannot go to work because you now have this other legs that you don't know how to fit into your jeans or something, or your engineer's clothes. And your work, you suddenly become embarrassed with that and you try to hide it, get back into the normal.

Bayo Akomolafe: Post-activism is convening community around this monstrous tentacle. It's like, what do we do about these other legs, right? This disability. It's convening community around this crack. That's why post-activism is always a matter of rupture and cracks. It is generative incapacitation. And I think black joy, the kinds of futures we look forward to will not come at the tail end of our genius. It'll come at the place where we're broken open by a world that exceeds us.

Barbara Holmes: What a wonderful way to end this interview. Is there something forthcoming that you're doing that you'd like to share with the audience so they can participate or be

part of it?

Bayo Akomolafe: Nothing comes to mind. I just feel my mother's hospitality. Yeah, let's just come to the house. I may not present a menu now before you or a recipe, but there's always food to eat, and there's always a lot to go around. I just offer an African mother's, black mother's hospitality to say, come, there's food. Let's just eat together. We'll find each other somehow.

Barbara Holmes: Thank you, Dr. Akomolafe, for sharing this hour with us.

Barbara Holmes: Thanks for listening. We'd like to leave you with a reflection from this episode. I don't know, Donny, the thing about the conversation with Bayo Akomolafe is that he is such an intellectual and he sees things from a perspective that I've never considered. I mean, just to take for an example, he's talking about losing your way generously, finding a new way of being at home in the world. I mean, I've talked about viewing the world differently, but I've never thought about losing your way, getting out of your box, getting out of the space you created for yourself, that it's too tight, doesn't fit anymore. Losing your way. What a wonderful idea.

Donny Bryant: The invitation that he affords all of us is an invitation to see differently. You're correct, this concept of not finding your way, but finding yourself through losing your way is actually very counterintuitive and countercultural. I think part of our conversation with him was also about how there's insight found in the questions.

Barbara Holmes: Oh, yes.

Donny Bryant: It causes me to want to reflect on how I approach solving problems. We talked about me being an engineer, how I, Dr. B., I'm always trying to solve a problem. He had an interesting take on that and how design, he talked about engine and design, and the engineer, and how design is not a human phenomenon. That design has an impact, that there's something in design in the engine, as he called it, that is at work. There's an other than human at work. So, there was an invitation there to even see differently to have a different perspective on what's our surroundings, and the interactions with that.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah. He kind of pierces our little scientific hubris by saying, the world is not objectively noble. We think it is. And we have our little formulations, but what if everything is mystery? How do we wake up in the morning and begin a day that is going to be 100% mystery? Live into that as part of a community who can't plan ahead, who don't know what's going to happen, but who trust, and by faith, can negotiate the space?

Donny Bryant: Wow.

Barbara Holmes: I'm just wondering. Are you willing to lose your way generously? Nobody wants to get lost without a map or a GPS, or perhaps that's the only way to be found.