

A woman with her hair styled in a bun, wearing a vibrant, patterned dress with large, colorful motifs in blue, red, and gold. She is standing in a field of tall, thin grasses, looking off to the side. The background is a soft-focus landscape with more grasses and a bright sky.

VOGUE

BEYONCE'S LEMONADE PAYS HOMAGE TO NIGERIAN ANCESTORS THROUGH FASHION

The entertainer's latest release celebrates African tradition and religion through fashion and costume.

By James R. Sanders

Nigeria's roots are intertwined with the Yoruba people. Today, their faith which include 401 Orisha (Gods), inhabit the south-west section of the country on the gulf of Guinea. Those Gods are as ancient as Africa's history, flirting the line of legacy and mythology. One is said to be celebrated most recently in Beyoncé's visual album "Lemonade." But whether Oshun's presence was purposeful, or happenstance – the 60-minute tour de force uses fashion and art to tribute Yoruba tradition and folklore.

At first glance, "Lemonade" which premiered on HBO, appears to be a manifesto of girl power and rebellion set to music. While the project, which has dominated social media since its premiere on April 23rd, focuses on womanhood, the film's deeper meaning has to do with Beyoncé's plight and the larger plight of Black women.

As in African culture, there's a deep appreciation for generations displayed in "Lemonade." Several generations of Black women including some mothers of children slain due to police brutality, made cameos – including Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown's mothers. Their presence, dressed in beautifully draped couture, held their most important accessory -- photos of their sons.



The legend of Oshun, goddess of sweet water and love, is one of betrayal and infidelity. Her temper is as layered as the waters she protects. Oshun's primary color is yellow which is often the color of dress that drapes the deity in visual interpretations.

In "Intuition/Hold Up" Beyoncé emerges from a building. When the doors open the streets and steps are flooded. She destroys a car, a meter, and a fire hydrant. Water becomes a major prop in the video which isn't by accident. The showstopper is the yellow Cavalli dress that was almost not included when it came a day late right off of Peter Dundas' runway. Other than the usage of water, and the yellow dress, the song itself is about infidelity and lost love – similar to the legend of Oshun.



IN “DADDY’S LITTLE GIRL,” “LOVE DROUGHT,” “SORRY,” AND “FORWARD,” ANKARA (AFRICAN PRINTS) HAS A PROMINENT PRESENCE -- NO DOUBT DUE TO STYLIST MARNI SENOFONTE WHO BLENDS TRADITIONAL AFRICAN COSTUMING WITH MODERN FASHION. THIS INCLUDES THE GUCCI SUIT AMIDST A BURNING HOUSE, THE FUR COAT WITH THE LONG CORNROWS -- EVEN THE TWO-PIECE YEEZY LOOK ALL OF WHICH FIT IN WITH THE EARTHY AND HEARTBREAKING/TRIUMPH PROJECT.

In some of the above songs, Beyonce employs Nigerian-born artist Laolu Senbanjo to perform the Sacred Art of the Ori – in which he paints your essence on the outside of the body, also a Yoruba ritual.

Likewise, the tradition of baptism which predates Christianity and has its own version in traditional African religion was a major moment in the film. Beyonce lead a group of women to dark waters wearing loose-cut, collared silk georgette number with black piping by Daniele Carlotta.

“Lemonade” exists somewhere in the intersection of Black power and Black girl magic. The music video for “Formation” and the notorious Superbowl performance that followed are both visual protests in the vein of the Black Lives Matter Movement. The project as a whole uses African influence to tell a larger story of the historical power of Black women tracing their roots back to the various tribes of Yoruba and Africa as a whole -- from which they are descendent.

