

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

**MAN: FEARFULLY DIFFERENT,  
WONDERFULLY MADE**

**An Inaugural Lecture**

**By**

**PROFESSOR GABRIEL SUNDAY OLADIPO**

*B.Sc.(Ilorin), M.Sc. (Lagos), Ph.D. (Abia), FASN  
Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences,  
College of Health Science, University of Port Harcourt.*

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## ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

2.45 pm. Guests are seated

3.00 pm. Academic Procession begins

The Procession shall enter the CBN Centre of Excellence Auditorium, University Park, and the Congregation shall stand as the Procession enters the hall in the following order:

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Lecturers

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After the Vice Chancellor has ascended the dais, the Congregation shall remain standing for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem.

The Congregation shall thereafter resume their seats.

### **THE VICE CHANCELLOR'S OPENING REMARKS.**

The Registrar shall rise, cap, invite the Vice Chancellor to make his opening remarks and introduce the Lecturer. The Lecturer shall remain standing during the Introduction.

## **THE INAUGURAL LECTURE**

The Lecturer shall step on the rostrum, cap and deliver his Inaugural Lecture. After the lecture, he shall step towards the Vice Chancellor, cap and deliver a copy of the Inaugural Lecture to the Vice Chancellor and resume his seat. The Vice-Chancellor shall present the document to the Registrar.

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The Vice Chancellor's Closing Remarks.

The Vice Chancellor shall then rise, cap and make his Closing Remarks. The Congregation shall rise for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem and remain standing as the Academic [Honour] Procession retreats in the following order:

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Professors  
Academic Officer

## **DEDICATION**

This Inaugural Lecture is dedicated to the Almighty God through Jesus Christ, my Lord for all He has done for me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I want to thank the Almighty God through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour for the unquantifiable love and mercies He has shown me over the years. I thank Him for making it possible for me to witness this memorable day.

I want to appreciate the leadership of the University of Port-Harcourt currently being administered by the 9<sup>th</sup> Vice Chancellor, Professor Owunari A. Georgewill who has given me the privilege to present this 207<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture.

I appreciate the Management of the University of Ilorin, University of Lagos and Abia State University for providing the platforms and conducive environment for my trainings.

The following people gave their expertise and support for the progression of my career: Prof. B. C. Didia (my academic mentor, Thesis Supervisor and former Vice Chancellor, Rivers State University), Emeritus Prof. F. C. Akpuakav (Former Teacher and Thesis Supervisor), Dr. C.C. Noronha (Former Teacher and MSc Supervisor), Prof. B.U. Enaibe, Prof A. Okanlawon, Prof. C.I.P. Anibeze, Prof. P. S. Igbigbi, Prof. E. N. Obikili, Late Prof.(Mrs.) T.B. Ekanem and Dr. Edward J. Campbell(President, International Behavioural and Medical Biometrics Society-USA).Your are all appreciated.

The following past and present officers of the University of Port Harcourt are appreciated for their various contributions to my career progression: Late Emeritus Prof. N. D. Briggs (5th Vice Chancellor), Prof. Don Baridam (6th Vice Chancellor), Prof. J.A. Ajienka (7th Vice Chancellor), Prof. N.N. Lale (8th Vice Chancellor), Prof. S.A. Okodudu (former Ag. Vice Chancellor), Prof. C.O. Onyeaso (DVC, Administration), Prof.

Rosemary Ogu (DVC, Academic), Prof. A.I. Frank-Briggs (DVC Research and Development), Dr. Gloria O. Chinda (Registrar), Dr. Godpower Oba (Bursar), Prof. Helen U. Emasealu (University Librarian), Prof. O.N. Ekeke (Provost, College of Health Sciences), Prof. H.B. Fawehinmi (8th Vice Chancellor, University of Abuja, former Vice Chancellor, Nigerian British University and former DVC Academic, University of Port-Harcourt), Prof. C.O. Ofurum (Former DVC, Administration), Prof. K.I. Owete (Former DVC, Academic), Prof. I. M. Siminialayi (Former DVC Research and Development), Prof. Christy Mato (former Provost, College of Health Sciences (CHS)), Prof. O.O. Ebong (former Dean, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences), Prof. C. I. Akani (former Provost, CHS), Professor D.V. Dapper (Director of University of Port-Harcourt Sports Institute), Prof. C.A. Nwauche, Late Prof. A. N. Chuemere and Prof. C.W. Paul (Deputy Provost, CHS) who are all former Deans of my Faculty, Prof. K.C. Anugweje (former Director of University of Port-Harcourt Sports Institute), Mrs. Joyce C. Tamuno (former Ag. Registrar), Mr. K.O. Orukotan my Faculty Officer, Prof. F. S. Ama-Tariah, my former Associate Dean and current Dean, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences, Rivers State University, Prof. O.M. Adienbo, Dean of my Faculty, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences and Dr. J.S. Hart, Ag. Head of my Department, Department of Anatomy.

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Chief Oluwasola Oni supported my undergraduate training in University of Ilorin. Prof. John and Prof. (Mrs.) Tayo Oloyede accommodated me for a period of time in 2011. My cousin, Prof. Abdulrazak Kilani accommodated me for two months in 2002 after my appointment in University of Port-Harcourt. I say thank you to all of you. Elder M.A. Fasanmade and Mrs. Iyabo Fasanmade are specially appreciated for their pastoral care and the spiritual mentorship they provided for me while growing up as a young Christian under them. Besides, Elder M.A. Fasanmade was my secondary school principal in Iropora High School when I wrote my SSCE in 1992. I was greatly imparted by your life of discipline, dedication to duty and godliness. Thank you Sir. All other teachers who taught me at the various levels of my academic journey are specially appreciated. Thank you for being a major part of my success story.

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Finally, I want to specially thank my dear wife, Dr. Grace Funke Oladipo for her unflinching support, encouragement and prayers for more than twenty years we have been married. Without any doubt, this success story would have been impossible without your supportive role as a wife. May God bless you. Special appreciations to my children, David and John for being obedient to parental instructions. God bless you.

## **PROTOCOL**

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- ❖ Esteemed Administrative Staff
- ❖ Captains of Industries
- ❖ My Lords, Spiritual and Temporal
- ❖ Royal Fathers and Mothers here present
- ❖ Cherished Friends and Guests
- ❖ Unique Students of UNIPOINT
- ❖ Members of the Press
- ❖ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

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## INTRODUCTION

Going back to ancient story in Genesis 27, we meet Isaac, old and nearly blind, preparing to bless his son Esau. But Jacob, with his mother's help, covers his hands with goat skins to feel like his hairy brother. Isaac, puzzled, remarks:

“The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

Here we have one of history's earliest recorded cases of mistaken identity. But today, such a case would be easily resolved. Not by magic, but by science, forensic anthropology. This is my life's calling: to study the unique, God-given differences between human beings, and to apply that knowledge in medicine, justice, and the preservation of heritage.

When we look around, we see phenotypic differences, some are tall, others short; some are slim, others broad; some have pointed noses, others flat. Even identical twins, who share the same womb and the same DNA, are never truly identical. Subtle differences always set them apart.

Our bodies are full of unique features that make us distinct individuals. Our height, weight, skin colour, hair type, body shape, and even the lines on our palms carry messages about who we are. These differences are hidden in our genes and reflect in our structures. Noticing and carefully carving out these differences as they appear outwardly is the key to the science of anthropology: the study of human beings.

Anthropology asks questions like: *Why are we different? Where do we come from? How do our bodies and cultures shape us?* It is a discipline that looks at humans as a story

unfolding through time — our past, our present, and even hints of our future.

One branch of this science, **physical anthropology**, looks closely at the body itself. It asks: *Why does one group of people have a particular skull shape while another does not? Why are some populations taller, some shorter? How can we identify someone from their bones or fingerprints?*

This is where **forensic anthropology** comes in — a field that uses these physical differences for practical purposes: to identify unknown remains, to help solve crimes, to connect a skeleton to a missing person, or even to predict a person's risk for certain diseases.

And that is what this story — this lecture — is about. It is about the **Man: Fearfully Different Wonderfully Made**. It is about the discoveries of a Forensic anthropologist. It is about a lifetime journey of measuring, comparing, and decoding the hidden information in our bodies. It is about discovering that the body is not just flesh and bone, but also a **book of identity** — a book that can be read if only we have the eyes and tools to read it.

So, as we move forward, let us ask ourselves:

- Why are no two people ever truly the same?
- What do our bodies say about us?
- And most fascinating of all: could the simple lines on our palms — our fingerprints — carry secrets about our health and our future?

This is the journey we are about to take. And I invite you, to see yourself in this story of **Human Canvas Painted by Genetics**.

## UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DIVERSITY

### Diversity in Creation

When George Orwell wrote in *Animal Farm* that “all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others,” he was speaking politically, but biology agrees with him in principle. diversity is not an accident; it is part of creation.

In the Bible’s creation account, God made man before woman, and animals in different sequences. Even at birth, some are taller, some shorter, some lighter-skinned, some darker. These differences are not flaws — they are the beauty of diversity, designed for survival, adaptation, and identity.

Scientists study these differences under **Anthropology, genetics and psychology**. Anthropology is the science of humans and their cultures in the past, present and future. Anthropologists seek to examine the evolution of biology and culture through a variety of methods and analysis of various types of materials.

### THE SCIENCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology, from *Anthropos* (man) and *logos* (knowledge), is the science of humanity — past, present, and future. While it has cultural, linguistic, and archaeological branches, my focus has been on **physical/biological anthropology**, which examines how genetics and environment shape the human body. This includes differences in height, facial structure, skin, hair, and the lines on our palms.

What makes anthropology compelling is not merely measuring these differences, but interpreting them, understanding how they reflect identity, ancestry, adaptation, and even health. In essence, anthropology provides the language with which we

can read human diversity, and forensic anthropology applies this language to practical challenges such as identifying unknown remains or resolving medico-legal disputes.

## **THE CONCEPT OF ANTHROPOMETRY IN PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

Anthropometry: the measurement of the human body, is one of anthropology's oldest tools. From the span of our arms to the shape of our skulls, no two humans are exactly alike, not even identical twins. These measurements help us classify, compare, and understand variation across individuals and populations.

While anthropometry has wide applications in medicine, design, and sports science, in forensic contexts it becomes a tool of justice. A femur can estimate height, a pelvis can reveal sex, and a skull can hint at ancestry. These parameters give silent bones a voice, helping us tell the story of those who can no longer speak for themselves.

## **MY JOURNEY INTO FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY**

Forensic anthropology, then, is where science meets service. It is about turning biological differences into evidence for truth and justice. My own journey into this field began with anthropometric studies of Nigerian populations, and later expanded into craniofacial analysis and, most intriguingly, **dermatoglyphics** — the study of the ridges on our palms and fingers.

The Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu once said, 'the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step'. While searching for an interesting BSc project topic for my BSc work in 1998, I stumbled on an anthropometric work by Mbajiorgu et al (1998) involving measurement of mandibles of black Zimbabweans published in the Central African Journal of Medicine. I became

fascinated with the work and thought of having Nigerian data. Thus, I said to myself, “This can be replicated on Nigerian mandibles”. My BSc project supervisor Mr B.U. Enaibe now Professor B.U Enaibe approved the topic. This became the foundation on which my postgraduate researches at Master and Doctorate levels, which were all in Physical and Forensic Anthropology were built. I delved into the science of palmistry/dermatoglyphics during my training in the University of Lagos. Besides, I did extensive research in craniofacial anthropometry in my PhD training at Abia state University. I eventually bagged a PhD in Human Anatomy with specialization in Physical Anthropology in 2010. I was privileged to be supervised by some renowned academics and Professors during those trainings: these included Dr C.C. Norohna, Prof. F.C. Akpuaka and Prof. B.C. Didia. I also had some practical exposure courtesy of Prof P.S Igbigbi and Dr Edward J. Campbell (President, International Behavioural and Medical Biometrics Society, USA).

Using my experience as a Forensic Anthropologist, I have been involved in resolving an election dispute in a state in Nigeria in 2011. I was part of the forensic experts lead by Prof P.S. Igbigbi that was invited to help resolve election dispute in a case involving a candidate of PDP and another candidate of APC in the Delta state house of assembly election. Besides, I have carried out extensive study in physical and forensic anthropology covering most ethnic groups in Nigeria. Thus, a large data bank on Nigerians with potentials for forensic application could be made available. These and other achievements culminated in my appointment as a Professor of Physical and Forensic Anthropology with effect from October 1, 2018.

## Dermatoglyphics — God’s Signatures in Our Hands

The term comes from the Greek *derma* (skin) and *glyph* (carving). It refers to the patterns of ridges on the skin of our palms, fingers, soles, and toes. These patterns — **loops**, **whorls**, and **arches** — form in the womb by the fourth month of pregnancy and remain unchanged for life. No two people have the same dermatoglyphic patterns, not even identical twins. This is why fingerprints are used in security systems and criminal investigations. But my research has shown they have another use: they can reveal a person’s health risks.

### Loops, Whorls, and Arches

- **Loops:** Lines enter from one side, curve around, and exit the same side.
- **Whorls:** Lines form circular or spiral patterns.
- **Arches:** Lines run from one side to the other, rising in the middle like a hill.

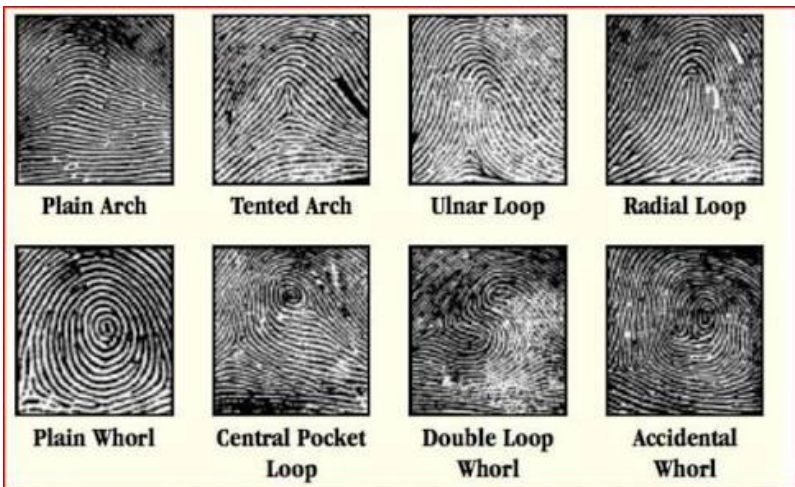


Figure 1: Basic Fingerprint Patterns (Coon, 1962)

## **THE SCIENCE OF PALM READING**

Vice Chancellor Sir, before my foray into the field of anthropology, based on my Christian upbringing, I have come to develop an aversion for anything occultic or associated with magic. What readily comes to mind when you hear palm reading is Chiromancy or palmistry – a pseudoscientific practice of fortune-telling through the study of the palm. My curiosity was aroused about the potential benefit of a sound scientific study of the palm, finger and sole prints when I was at the University of Lagos. This field of study is now called Dermatoglyphics. It will interest you to know that based on our research findings in Uniport, we can predict with a vast degree of scientific accuracy, the possibility of a 5-year-old child developing hypertension in the future. This area of study has also found very useful application in security, banking, identification and crime detection through the use of finger and palm print analysis.

Dermatoglyphics are not only important for diagnosis but also for preventing it by predicting a disease; not to describe a specific illness but to identify genetically predisposed people to develop certain diseases. Besides its use in the prediction of genetic disease diagnosis; dermatoglyphics is also used in forensic anthropology for individual identification, physical anthropology, human genetics and medicine (Rudragouda *et al.*, 2013). It has become a valuable tool in medical field for delineating a number of clinical syndromes such as chromosomal and genetic anomalies as well as congenital malformations of various organs (Sreenivasulu *et al.*, 2012). Presently, the state of clinical dermatoglyphics seems to be that the detection of some diseases can now be performed based on dermatoglyphic examination alone and, now, many dermatoglyphic researchers say a very high degree of accuracy from the features of the hand in their prognostic capacity.

Dermatoglyphic pattern and analysis differ in different disease conditions as discovered in various studies we undertook. It is interesting to know that from our studies, we can now predict the risk of an individual from a known ethnic group developing certain non-communicable diseases by mere looking at the palm. This can help to institute lifestyle changes that will prevent the development of such condition.



**Figure 2: Digital Patterns and Tri radii, ATD and DAT Angles (Oladipo et al., 2009)**

## **FROM PALMS TO PREVENTION — MY RESEARCH JOURNEY**

Mr. Vice Chancellor sir, at this juncture, I will like to expatiate on some of my interesting discovery in my quest to unravel the mystery of the intricate lines on our palms and feet and its potential to solve forensic, legal, medical and security puzzles in our country if properly explored. Over the past two decades, I have studied dermatoglyphics in relation to various diseases. Instead of overwhelming you with statistics, let me tell you the key findings and why they matter.

## **1. Diabetes Mellitus**

In South-Eastern Nigerians, we found that people with unusually high ridge counts, especially between certain points on the palm, were more likely to have diabetes. This means that, in the future, a simple palm scan could be part of early diabetes screening.

In our study of the dermatoglyphic patterns of diabetic and non-diabetic Nigerians from South Eastern Nigeria, analysis of 49 cases of diabetes mellitus and 52 non-diabetic individuals were carried out. The parameters studied included the digital patterns, at angle, a-d ridge count and distance a-d. We found significantly higher values ( $P < 0.05$ ) in a-d ridge counts in both hands of male and female diabetic patients (Oladipo & Ogunnowo, 2004). What this means is that the risk of developing diabetes is higher in South-easterners whose a-d ridge count values are higher than the mean for respective sexes. Thus, the parameters studied could be used as a noninvasive anatomical marker and screening tool for diabetes mellitus. In simple terms, this means that, in the future, a simple palm scan could be part of early diabetes screening.

## **2. Essential Hypertension**

Hypertension is a major, growing public health crisis in Nigeria with estimated overall prevalence of 28.9% and a prevalence of 29.5% among men and 25.0% among women (NHS, 2024). From “palmar dermatoglyphic patterns in essential hypertension among Rivers State indigenes” (Oladipo et al 2010), we discovered that among Rivers State indigenes, those with whorls on both thumbs and very high total ridge counts had over a 90% chance of having essential hypertension. In a country where many live far from a clinic, this could be a lifesaving screening method.

Vice Chancellor Sir, the implication of this result is that for any indigene of Rivers state with a whorl pattern in the first digits of the hands, there is an estimated risk of over 90% of developing essential hypertension. Such should begin lifestyle modification very early to prevent developing hypertension.

## 1. Prostate Cancer

Prostate cancer is one of the most common cancers in men, especially those over 50. It affects the prostate gland in the male reproductive system and can be deadly if not detected early.

In my research study which studied whether **fingerprint and palm patterns (dermatoglyphics)**, Oladipo et al. (2009) could help in early detection of prostate cancer,

We, compared 30 men with prostate cancer to 30 men without the disease. Here's what we found:

- Men with prostate cancer had **different fingerprint patterns** compared to healthy men.
- Their **ridge counts** (the number of tiny skin lines between certain points on the palm) were **higher**.
- Their **ATD angles** (a triangle-shaped measurement on the palm) were **lower** ( $41^{\circ}$ ) than in men without cancer (normal range is  $42^{\circ}$  to  $44^{\circ}$ ).
- Other ridge measurements (A-B and B-C counts) also showed significant differences.

This means that fingerprint and palm features could serve as **warning signs** for prostate cancer. If properly used, dermatoglyphics could become a cheap, non-invasive way to screen men at risk, long before symptoms appear.

#### 4. Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers in women worldwide. It develops in the breast tissue and can spread if not detected early. Genes, family history, and lifestyle all play a role, but from my research I have also discovered that **fingerprint and palm patterns may reveal risks.**

In another of my study, the fingerprints and palm prints of women with breast cancer were compared to those of healthy women. The results showed:

- Women with breast cancer had a **higher occurrence of ulnar loop patterns** (a type of fingerprint) in most of their fingers.
- They also had **lower ATD angles** (the triangle-shaped measurement on the palm).
- Their **total ridge counts** (the number of small skin lines between key points) were also **lower** than in women without breast cancer.

#### What does this mean?

These palm and fingerprint differences may serve as **early warning markers.** By simply examining hand patterns, it may be possible to identify women at higher risk of developing breast cancer.

#### 5. Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. Those who suffer from it may hear voices, struggle with emotions, or withdraw from society. Scientists believe it has a strong link to both genetics and early brain development.

Now here's the fascinating part: the **skin and the brain develop from the same tissue in the womb**, the ectoderm. That means any disturbance during early development that affects the brain may also leave a mark on the skin, especially in the fingerprints and palm lines.

I wanted to see if this was true for people with schizophrenia. So, I studied the palms and fingerprints of patients from psychiatric hospitals in Rivers and Edo States, comparing them to those of healthy individuals.

The findings will surprise you:

- People with schizophrenia showed **more arch patterns** on their fingers than normal controls.
- They had **fewer whorls and loops** compared to healthy individuals.
- Their **ATD angles** (the triangular measurement formed by lines on the palm) were **larger** than in people without schizophrenia.
- They also had unusual crease patterns (**Many: Sidney line; Few: Simian crease**), which have been linked to other genetic conditions.

This tells us that the differences in fingerprints and palm lines are like silent footprints of abnormal brain development. They suggest that dermatoglyphics can be a **window into the brain**, giving clues about who might be more vulnerable to schizophrenia. In plain terms: **the same tiny ridges that make your fingerprint unique could also carry the hidden story of your mental health**

## 6. Autism

Also allow me to share with you one of the most touching moments in my research journey, our work with children living with autism.

Autism, as many of you know, is a developmental condition that affects how children interact, communicate, and sometimes even how they see the world. These children often live in silence or struggle to connect in the way most of us do. Their condition has puzzled scientists and parents alike, and many still ask, “*Why does this happen?*”

With the consent of parents, my team and I took the fingerprints and palm prints of autistic children in Port Harcourt and compared them with those of children without autism. What we discovered was both fascinating and humbling.

The autistic children had **more arch patterns** in their fingerprints, while non-autistic children showed more loops and whorls. Their **ridge counts**, those little skin lines between key points on the palm, were also **lower** compared to non-autistic children. In simple terms: their palms carried a signature, a silent imprint of their unique neurodevelopment. This discovery confirmed what we had suspected that disturbances in early brain development leave their mark not only in behavior but also in the ridges of the hand.

And I must confess to you, it was deeply moving for me because, I realized that their palms were telling us a story that words could not. A story written before they were even born. This means that dermatoglyphics could become a valuable tool in the early detection of autism, helping parents and doctors to understand risks sooner and provide the right support.

Ladies and gentlemen, the hand of a child is not just for holding, it can also whisper to us the hidden truths of their journey.

## **7. Dilated Cardiomyopathy**

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me to share yet another remarkable discovery from our research, one that connects the tiny ridges on our palms to one of the most dangerous heart conditions known: **dilated cardiomyopathy**.

For those unfamiliar with dilated cardiomyopathy, it is a disease where the heart's main pumping chamber, the left ventricle becomes enlarged and weakened. The heart struggles to pump blood, and patients often live with constant fatigue, shortness of breath, and sadly, many do not survive without treatment. It is a silent and devastating condition.

The question I asked myself was this: *if the skin and the heart both develop from the same genetic blueprint, could problems in the heart leave their traces on the skin ridges of the palm?*

To explore this, my team and I studied patients from the Kalabari ethnic group in Rivers State who had been diagnosed with idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy. We compared their fingerprints and palm prints with those of healthy individuals.

The results were clear and consistent. Those with dilated cardiomyopathy had **smaller ATD angles** on their palms, the triangle formed by certain ridge points. They also showed a **lower total ridge count**, especially in male patients, compared to the healthy group.

In other words, the disease had quietly inscribed itself on their palms long before it was diagnosed in the clinic.

Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot forget the moment this truth sank in. I was no longer just looking at fingerprints — I was looking at the possibility of predicting a heart disease from birth. Imagine the power of being able to identify those at risk early, before the heart begins to fail, simply by examining their palms.

This is why I often say: the human hand is more than a tool for work or expression. It is also a **canvas painted by genetics**, carrying silent warnings about our health.

If we listen carefully to what the ridges are telling us, we may save lives — by moving from late treatment to early prevention.

## **DERMATOGLYPHICS AND ETHNICITY**

### **Beyond Disease — Clues to Our Origins**

Having established the interesting application of dermatoglyphics in disease conditions and given the fact that dermatoglyphic patterns are genetically determined, we attempted to apply this in establishing differences among tribes and ethnic groups knowing fully well that ethnic groups often carry the imprint of our genetic make-up. As a Nigerian, I have always been fascinated by the incredible diversity within our nation. From the Yoruba in the southwest, to the Igbo in the east, the Hausa in the north, and the many riverine groups in the Niger Delta — our languages, our cultures, and even our physical features carry stories of history and ancestry. But could these differences also be seen in our fingerprints and palms?

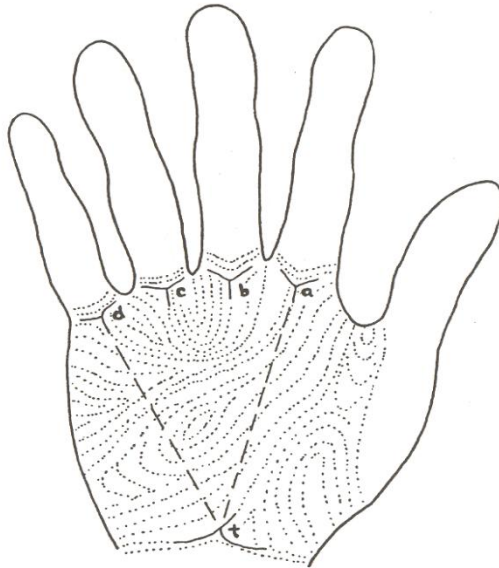


**Figure 3: (a-b) Finger Ridge Count in Dermatoglyphic Patterns (Coon, 1962)**

To answer this question, my team and I carried out studies comparing dermatoglyphic patterns among various Nigerian ethnic groups. We carefully collected palm and fingerprint data from groups such as the Igbo, the Okrika, the Kalabari, and others, and then analyzed them.

The results were eye-opening. Each ethnic group carried **unique patterns** in their fingerprints and palms. Some groups showed higher frequencies of loops, others more whorls, while others carried broader or narrower ATD angles. These variations were not random — they reflected the deep-rooted genetic and historical differences between groups.

- **Igbo vs. Okrika:** Our comparative analysis showed that Igbo participants had significantly higher average total ridge counts, while Okrika participants displayed broader ATD angles and higher frequencies of whorl patterns.



**Figure 4: Palm Ridge and ATD angle.**

- **Yoruba vs. Hausa:** The Yoruba group showed a predominance of ulnar loop patterns, whereas the Hausa sample revealed more arches and lower ridge counts overall, indicating population-specific signatures.
- **Riverine groups (Kalabari, Okrika etc):** These populations demonstrated unique palmar configurations, with higher frequencies of central pocket loops and distinctive triradii positions compared to inland groups.

## **STUDIES THAT SHOWED ANCESTRY RELATIONSHIPS AND NON-RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS**

### **1. Investigation of Ancestral Relationship of Ikwerre with Bini and Igbo Using Level 2 Dermatoglyphic Patterns**

In this study, fingerprints of 1,200 volunteers were scanned and analysed across three ethnic groups, the Ikwerre, the Bini, and the Igbo. Only individuals whose parents and four grandparents belonged to the same group were included, ensuring a true ancestral link.

What did we find? The **Ikwerre patterns overlapped significantly with both the Bini and the Igbo**, showing near-equal chances of shared ancestry.

**Insight:** the Ikwerres seem to carry dermatoglyphic signatures that point to a mixed heritage, almost equally tied to the Bini and the Igbo.

### **2. Comparison of Palmar Ridge Counts in Igbo and Okrika People of Southern Nigeria**

Here, we compared the palm ridge counts of 200 Igbo and Okrika volunteers. Though the numbers may look technical, the meaning is simple: the **Igbo consistently showed higher ridge counts than the Okrika**, with significant differences in several regions of the palm.

**Insight:** The palms of the Igbo and Okrika people are marked with measurable differences — biological imprints of their separate ancestries.

## **Bringing the Findings Home**

What these two studies tell us is simple but profound: just as our languages and customs distinguish us, so too do the silent carvings on our hands. Our palms carry **ethnic signatures**, imprints of ancestry that link us to our forefathers and separate us from other groups.

Ladies and gentlemen, I often say that a nation's diversity is its strength. In the same way, dermatoglyphics shows us that even in the smallest details of our skin, diversity is written. These studies remind us that our differences are not only cultural but biological and that they should be **celebrated, not feared**.

So, when next you look at your hands, remember: you are not just seeing lines. You are seeing heritage, a living record of the people and place you come from.

## **APPLICATION OF FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION AND MY CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT**

Vice Chancellor sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, although our research findings have not been significantly applied in legal jurisprudence in Nigeria today due to the usual palpable disconnect between the academic and the industry in terms of application of research findings, there are however several findings of ours in Forensic Anthropology that are of great relevance and application in Forensic application. I will mention a few instances where Forensic Anthropology and our work have found great usefulness.

1. In the revered case of election petition between Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola and ORSV. Olagunsoye Oyinlola & ORS. Court of Appeal. CA/I/EPT/GOV/98/2008 CA/I/EPT/GOV/31/2008 on the governorship election held on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2007, the burden of evidence was on the appellant (Mr. Aregbesola) to provide evidence of

electoral malpractices. Forensic experts were invited who examined the ballot boxes in all the local governments and testify to the court that majority of presumed fingerprints on the ballots were not humans. He proved that it was palm kernel that was used to thumb print most of the ballot papers especially in areas where the 1<sup>st</sup> respondent (Mr. Oyinlola) won. He was later declared the winner of the said election. This is a clear case of application of forensic dermatoglyphics in criminal investigation.

2. Another interesting scenario was when a staff of Total Energies Ltd, one of the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, was alleged to have drown in the sea while in active service sometimes in the year 2011. Expert divers were immediately deployed to do a deep-sea search which produced bone remains supposedly belonging to the staff. It was therefore concluded that he must have drowned and eating by fishes. The legal department investigating the case sent the recovered bone remains to our forensic experts led by Prof. B.C Didia here in Uniport to ascertain if the bone actually belongs to the missing staff. The forensic report however showed that the bones were those of hippopotamus and not even that of humans. This is another important application of forensic anthropometry to legal jurisprudence.
3. In 2011, I was part of the forensic experts lead by Prof P.S. Igbigbi that was invited to help resolve election dispute in the tribunal involving a candidate of PDP and another candidate of APC in the Delta state house of assembly election. The appellant alleged multiple voting during the election. Our job was to prove by forensic dermatoglyphic evidences that there was multiple voting by same group of people or by the use

of other finger print mimicking objects. This we intended to prove by comparing the thumb print of voters using dermatoglyphic instruments. Finger prints belonging to the same individuals and prints made by the use of non-living things will readily be detected since no two individuals can have same finger print configuration. Those prints from none-living materials will be identified due to absence of well-defined finger print patterns. Unfortunately, the respondent obtained a court injunction that could not allow the investigation to continue. All these are striking cases of application of forensic anthropology to criminal investigation.

4. Forensic anthropology, as earlier stated, is about identifying unknown persons using available body parts of humans and animals from any part of the body including teeth. Thus, several equations that could assist in estimating age, sex, stature and ethnicity in humans which are key to revealing the identities of unknown persons have been developed as a result of my research over the years. These are cheap and valuable forensic tools that could form part of criminal and forensic investigations in Nigeria.
5. As a result of my several studies, a large anthropometric data bank covering several ethnic groups in Nigeria especially the Niger Delta Region is also available. This could be very useful in comparing people of different ethnic groups and tracing ancestries among these people.
6. Our studies on the association of finger and palmar prints patterns with a number of diseases with some genetic undertones have highlighted specific dermatoglyphic features that could be used in their early diagnosis.

## **MENTORING AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO TRAININGS**

Mentorship has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. Over the years, I have not only pursued research but also invested in raising the next generation of scholars and professionals. Many of my undergraduate students have gone on to become medical doctors, dental surgeons, nurses, anatomists, physiologists, and biomedical technologists. At postgraduate level, I have supervised **20 Master's Dissertations and 13 PhD Theses**, with several of these graduates now serving as Professors, Associate Professors, and senior academics across Nigeria.

Mentoring, for me, goes beyond supervision. It is about nurturing curiosity, discipline, and resilience in my students — values I myself received from my own teachers. One of the proudest fruits of this labour has been seeing former mentees become mentors themselves, creating a chain of academic influence that will outlive us all.

In recent years, this calling has extended beyond the university. I have been involved in the training of military personnel, particularly officers of the Nigerian Navy, on the identification and analysis of human remains. These trainings equip them with forensic skills critical for national security and disaster response.

Thus, my contribution to mentoring is not just in numbers, but in lives shaped, careers launched, and capacities built for science, medicine, and national service.

## **CHALLENGES OF FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY IN NIGERIA**

Every discipline has its hurdles, and forensic anthropology in Nigeria is no exception. My journey has often been marked by

the reality that this specialty is still in its infancy in our country. For many years, I discovered that no Nigerian university could provide full undergraduate or postgraduate training in forensic anthropology without support from foreign collaborators. What we had in our curriculum was only a minor component embedded within human anatomy. This limitation slowed down the growth of the field and created a vacuum of local expertise.

Another challenge I have encountered is the **lack of training facilities and modern equipment**. Forensic anthropology is a science that thrives on precision — yet, in many cases, we have had to improvise, using basic anthropometric tools where advanced instruments were required. While this has sharpened our creativity, it has also limited the speed and depth of research.

The **shortage of trained experts** in this field is another serious obstacle. On several occasions, I have been one of the very few called upon to provide forensic expertise in sensitive cases. While it has been a privilege, it also highlights the urgent need to raise more professionals who can sustain and expand the field in Nigeria.

Perhaps the greatest challenge has been the **lack of government and private funding**. Many promising research projects could not advance because of limited support. Sadly, most available grants are foreign-based and not tailored to Nigeria's forensic needs. Yet, I remain convinced that with adequate investment, forensic anthropology can transform criminal justice, disaster response, and medical science in our nation.

In all these challenges, however, I see not despair but opportunity — an open field where future scholars and institutions can build, innovate, and leave lasting impact.

## **FUTURE PROSPECTS AND DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH**

Vice Chancellor Sir, ladies and gentlemen, before I conclude this lecture, I will like to bring to your attention that we are beginning to explore new frontiers of knowledge in Forensic Anthropology. For a very long time, age estimation in forensic analysis has been a serious challenge. Age estimation is of great importance in dental, medical and forensic science. Often the data for chronological age is not available and sometimes doubtful. It therefore becomes necessary to devise a more reliable means of establishing age of individuals. This has informed our current research direction which we intend to pursue with rigor till our objectives are achieved.

1. We have commenced conducting research on a population specific age estimation of Nigerian population using different odontometric variables and methods.
2. We have equally commenced studies on establishing possible forensic applicable relationship between chronological and dental age of Nigerians using the Atlases of Wits and London and we hope to validate these and later develop the Nigerian atlas of dental age assessment.
3. Another area we are currently working on is Machine Learning and Forensic Anthropology. All these have the potentials of becoming vital forensic tools in Nigeria.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. I strongly recommend the establishment of National Institute of Forensic Science saddled with the responsibility of holding and managing anthropometric and forensic data bank of Nigerians. This will greatly enhance crime detection and help law enforcement agencies in their operations.
2. Establishment of an Institute of Forensic Science or Centre for Forensic Anthropology in University of Port-Harcourt: this could create large revenue for the University, create jobs for qualified graduates and set the pace for anthropological and forensic research in Nigeria.
3. Presently, there is no institution in Nigeria that offers undergraduate and post graduate degrees in forensic science, University of Port Harcourt could be the first to commence such a programme.
4. There is need for the creation of a more research friendly environment in the university that could encourage budding researchers and attract foreign research collaborators especially in Physical and Forensic Anthropology.
5. I advocate for the establishment of a robust relationship between university's forensic experts and the national law enforcement agencies to enhance administration of criminal justice in Nigeria.
6. There is need for the introduction of regular training-the-trainer's programme that will help experts in the field of Forensic Anthropology to update their knowledge and acquire new skills due to the constant emergence of new approach, models and skills.

## CONCLUSION

As Psalm 139:14 declares, *“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.”* Indeed, this truth is inscribed not only in our hearts but also in our very hands. The lines on our palms are more than patterns; they are divine signatures — silent testimonies of our individuality, ancestry, and even our health.

Throughout my journey, I have come to see that our palms are books waiting to be read. They tell the stories of where we come from, the uniqueness that separates one ethnic group from another, and the risks we may carry for certain diseases. They also provide evidence that can defend justice, settle disputes, and reveal truth where words and witnesses fail.

Thus, the odyssey of my career as a forensic anthropologist is really the story of discovering that **the human hand is not only a tool for work, but a canvas painted by genetics, carrying hidden tales that science can unveil.**

Let us therefore learn to read these stories carefully and use them wisely — to heal the sick, to protect the innocent, to preserve our heritage, and to strengthen the bonds of justice and humanity in our nation.

Let me once again thank the Vice Chancellor for giving me the opportunity to present this Inaugural Lecture. Permit me, Sir, to say that this university is ripe enough to have an Institute for Forensic Studies that will set the pace for other institutions in Nigeria in the field of Forensic Science. Knowing your capability and style as a digital Vice Chancellor, I am convinced you will set the pace as recommended so other can come to learn here. Thank you and God bless you.

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## CITATION ON



**PROFESSOR GABRIEL SUNDAY OLADIPO**  
BSc. (Ilorin), MSc (Lagos), PhD (Abia), FASN

Professor Gabriel Oladipo was born on Sunday 24th September, 1972 in Iropora, Ekiti State to the family of late Chief Joshua Oladipo Owolabi and late Mrs. Victoria Oladipo. He attended St. Philip Primary School, Iropora, Ekiti State from 1978 to 1985. Being a very brilliant pupil he represented his school in several interschool quiz competitions. He had Distinction in his Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination and emerged as the best graduating pupil of 1985 set. He proceeded to Iropora High School, Iropora-Ekiti in 1985 for his secondary school education. He was the best graduating student of his set (1988) in Junior Secondary School Examination with Distinctions in all his subjects. In the senior secondary school level, he was the Senior Prefect of the school in the final year and a member of the school relay team. He won several prizes and awards as a junior and senior

secondary school student. Besides, he represented his school in several interschool and interstate debates and quiz competitions. He completed his Senior Secondary School in 1992 as the best graduating student with 7A's. The Principal of the school was so impressed with his performance that he facilitated his immediate employment as Laboratory Attendant in order to oversee the Science Laboratories as well as teach Physics in the school where there was no teacher as at that time. By some divine arrangement, Prof. Gabriel Sunday Oladipo was admitted to study Human Anatomy in 1993 at the University of Ilorin. After crossing several huddles including those of prolonged ASUU's strikes, he graduated with Bachelor of Science in Anatomy (second class, upper division) in 1999. Following the completion of his First Degree, he went on to undergo the one-year mandatory service with the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) at Kaltungo, Gombe State between 1999 and 2000. During the service, he taught Human Anatomy and Physiology in the School of Health Technology, Kaltungo. He also served as the Zonal Coordinator of the Nigeria Christian Coppers Fellowship [NCCF] in charge of Kaltungo zone and laid the foundation of the present NCCF Secretariat at Kaltungo. This building was taken to window level during his tenure as the coordinator. Today, that secretariat is being used by NCCF, Kaltungo and some of the former members of that Christian Fellowship are seated here today to bear witness.

On his return from National Youth Service, Prof. G. S. Oladipo enrolled for the Masters of Science programme in Anatomy at the University of Lagos which he completed in 2002 and was awarded Master of Science in Anatomy on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May of that year majoring in Developmental Anatomy and Anthropometry [Dermatoglyphics]. Later that year, he joined the service of the University of Port Harcourt as an

Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Anatomy and obtained his Doctorate Degree in Anatomy with specialty in Physical Anthropology from Abia State University, Uturu in 2010. He was promoted to the rank of Lecturer II in 2005, Lecturer I in 2008, Senior Lecturer in 2011, Reader in 2014 and Professor of Human Anatomy with bias for Physical and Forensic Anthropology in 2018.

As an erudite scholar, Professor Gabriel Sunday Oladipo has 3 monographs, 5 chapters in different edited books, 3 conference proceedings and more than 150 scholarly research publications, mostly in peer reviewed and indexed journals to his credit. He is well respected in the field of Physical and Forensic Anthropology in Nigeria and abroad especially in the areas of craniofacial anthropometry and dermatoglyphics having pioneered several researches and established reference data for most ethnic groups in Nigeria. He has attended and presented the outcome of his research works in conferences locally and abroad. The outcome of his work on Palmar Dermatoglyphics in Essential Hypertension Amongst Rivers State Indigenes was presented virtually to the admiration of all attendees during the International Behavioural and Medical Biometrics Society (IBMBS) conference that held from 16th to 18th October, 2009 at Clarion Hotel and Suites, Las Vegas USA while his work on Measurements of Head Circumference, Intercanthal Distance, Canthal Index and Circumference Interorbital Index of Ikwerre School Children was presented physically in the First International Conference on Research and Rural Development at Centre for African Wetlands, University of Ghana, Legon-Accra which held between 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2010.

Professor Oladipo has served as External Examiner to several universities in Nigeria both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A few of them are: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Ilorin, Ilorin; Federal University of Technology, Akure; University of Uyo, Uyo; Delta State University, Abraka; Alex Ekwume University, Ebonyi; Ambros Ali University, Epoma; Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti and Bowen University. Iwo-Osun State. He has also served as a member of NUC Accreditation Panel for evaluation of Anatomy programme in some Nigerian Universities. He has assessed candidates for promotion to professorial cadre and supervised several BSc. Projects, 20 MSc Dissertations and 13 PhD Theses. He is a reviewer and an editor to several journals and was once the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Anatomical Sciences, an official publication of Anatomical Society of Nigeria between 2014 and 2021. He has served as the Vice President of the Anatomical Society of Nigeria and the Nigeria Association for Biological Anthropology. He is a Fellow of Anatomical Society of Nigeria. He has also served as a resource person to Navy Intelligence School, Ubima, Port Harcourt, Rivers State-Nigeria, Nigerian Natural Medicine Practitioners, Nigerian Sports Coaches and Massage Therapists. He has presented guest lectures in scientific and academic conferences.

Within the University, he was the Coordinator/Ag. Head of the Department of Anatomy between 2007 and 2011, Associate Dean, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences from 2016 to 2018, Ag. Dean of the same Faculty in 2018 and Dean from 2020 to 2022. He was the Chairman, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences Degree Result Verification Committee from 2012 to 2016, Chairman, Departmental Postgraduate Board for the Department of Anatomy from 2018 to 2021, Faculty Representative at Senate for Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences

from 2016 to 2018 and has served as member of a number of Committees and Boards which include: University of Port Harcourt Institute of Sports, School of Science Laboratory Technology, School of Public Health, School of Graduate Studies, University of Port Harcourt Review Committee for the Port Harcourt Strategic Research Plan, University Demonstration Primary School Board [Senate Representative] and MacArthur Foundation. At present, he is the Chairman, Departmental Disciplinary Committee on Examination Malpractice for Department of Anatomy, member of University of Port Harcourt Senate Business Committee, Research Ethics Committee, College of Health Sciences Board, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences Board. He is a member of Senate of the University of Port Harcourt.

Outside the academic world, Professor Gabriel S. Oladipo is the Ag. Chairman of Board of Directors of Venus Medicare Limited. He is also the Founder and General Overseer of Ecstatic Revivalists Church which he founded in 2014. He is the author of, “The Power of Prayer and Fasting”, a 13-page pamphlet on prayer and fasting for Christians. Prof. Gabriel Sunday Oladipo is married to Dr. Grace Funke Oladipo, a professional Counsellor and a Senior Counselling Officer with the University of Port Harcourt. They have two children, David and John.

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you a gentleman, an erudite scholar, a researcher in Physical and Forensic Anthropology, a prolific writer, a teacher, a prophet, a loving husband, a caring father and a mentor, Professor Gabriel Sunday Oladipo, PhD, FASN, the 207<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecturer.

**Professor Owunari A. Georgewill**  
Vice -Chancellor