Ripening Seeds: The Harvest of Approaches in Expressive Arts Therapy

Editor: Kate T. Donohue, Ph.D., REAT

Exploring the Indigenous Arts of Ghana:
The Roots of Expressive Arts

This edition of Ripening Seeds offers a slightly different format. Instead of having one voice, we hear many. These are the voices of the expressive arts therapists who traveled to Ghana last summer to experience the indigenous arts of Ghana. This will be our first contribution to Ripening Seeds from Africa, and you will hear from our trainers in their own voices and through their own experiences.

This edition is solely in English which is the official language of Ghana and how we communicated with everyone during our stay. Our journey was conceived 15 years ago on my first trip to Ghana, where I went to study dance. In my long desire to return, I finally attracted this great group of former students and current colleagues to take a trip of lifetime and “go to Ghana”. If you are curious about our trip and want to learn more, go to Facebook: EXA Ghana Journey 2014. More information on the contributors to Ripening Seeds will be noted at the end of this edition. So, let’s begin!
Kate Donohue, group co-leader

The seeds for my first trip to Africa were planted many, many years ago with my love for African art and dance. After attending an Expressive Arts Therapy symposium in Switzerland in 1996, I dreamt of Africa and of dancing there. Upon my return to San Francisco, I found a dance class and embarked on what became a renewed passion for West African dance. Soon after becoming deeply ensconced in the West African dance company, I would become a half century old and I longed to dance in West Africa.

My first trip to Ghana was in 2000, and that was how I met Ellie Schimelman, who was creating a cultural center in Nungua, outside of Accra.

This center is called the Cross Cultural Collaborative Center or more affectionately Aba House. Ellie was to become lifelong friend.

Ghana changed me. I became more sensitized to geo-political, realizing...
how different my American life was from life in Africa, where coups and economic winds are more extreme, and one’s life stability more vulnerable. The children of Ghana changed me by dancing with me every day, and they burrowed into my heart (as seen in the picture of me above with a group of children from Kopeiya, a small village in the Volta/ Ewe region of Ghana where I lived and studied dance).

Ghana changed me through its arts, dance, music, and spiritual rituals that simply envelop you. My most profound experience was attending a funeral in a nearby village with no less than 500 people dancing and drumming around an imagistically carved coffin, and the body present and honored. I was escorted into another century and levels of consciousness I never had experienced. I shared this in my professional life with workshops about death and dying, "Going into the Darkness to Celebrate Life", expanding on these Ghanaian rituals, which felt deeply connected to expressive arts:

I longed to return. My path of return crossed into other continents and countries. Guided by forces initially unclear to me, I began to teach internationally in 2011, first in Asia. My teaching was infused with cultural considerations and learning about the indigenous arts of China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and India in order to teach authentically. Ellie, my muse, one day suggested I conduct a workshop in Ghana through CCC. Yes, yes, yes was my response, and knew this was the way to share my experience with others, by sharing the indigenous arts, dance and music of Ghana, touching the roots of expressive arts through the indigenous arts.

Ellie and I had a great time planning our vision of a dream trip. Each day we would have a Ghanaian teacher visit us and we would experience the dance, music, singing, and Adinkra textile arts, traditional art forms that were indigenous to that region of Ghana. Ellie was incredible in finding the perfect artist that demonstrated a deep sense of what I had first hoped to offer. Our teacher was David Boamah from Kumasi, central Ghana, who taught us Adinkra cloth decorating.
Adinkra is a cotton cloth produced in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire which has traditional Akan symbols stamped upon it. The symbols represent popular proverbs and maxims, record historical events, express particular attitudes or behavior related to depicted figures, or concepts uniquely related to abstract shapes. It is one of several traditional cloths produced in the region – the other well known cloths being kente and adanudo.

My favorite symbol is Sankofa, which means you must go back to your roots to know where you are going. Here is the piece I created with David’s inspiration.

The African Dance and Creative Arts Collective were our next teachers, with Seidu, our master dancer, Edziwan our master drummer, and both our singing teachers and all the wonderful singers, dancers and drummers of the collective, especially Dominique, who became a great friend and guide. Below is a picture of our group gathered with them. We became quite a tribe!
We took many excursions into Accra and met Fantasy Coffin makers: below is the Sankofa coffin, which I want for my own journey to the next world!

Baba, an authority on Kente Cloth, known as nwentom in Akan, is a type of silk and cotton fabric made of interwoven cloth strips and is native to the Akan ethnic group of South Ghana.
And Asafo cloth, traditional to warrior groups in Akan culture. The word derives from sa, meaning war, and fo, meaning people. The traditional role of the asafo companies was defense of the state. As the result of contact with European colonial powers on the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), the Fante, who inhabit the coastal region, developed an especially complex version of the concept in terms of its social and political organization based on martial principles, and with elaborate traditions of visual art, including flag banners with figurative scenes. Asafo seems to be a precursor of the African American quilts.

The funeral ritual again won everyone’s heart and awe. We were invited to the Chef’s sister’s funeral and participated in the dancing and the chanting, and experienced the community in grieving their loss.
Homowo in Jamestown was a wild day. **Homowo** is a festival celebrated by the Ga people of Ghana. The **festival** starts in the month of May with the planting of crops before the **rainy season** begins. During the festival, they perform a dance called Kpanlogo. The Ga people celebrate Homowo in the remembrance of the famine that once happened in their history in precolonial Ghana.

Ghanaians gather and march down the streets to end hunger, honor twins and enter trance states. Alice invited us to her family home to view the parade. It was incredible, fun and wild! A day never to be forgotten, especially the selfies with Alice’s nieces and nephews!

There were many other events such as glass bead making by our gracious host Cede, and a Krobo Dance presentation. Most of all, we fell in love with Ellie’s “free range children” who lived in Nungua and would visit Ellie to create and find their voice. Many of us volunteered sharing what we loved. I provided a sock puppet workshop which was really fun because most do not wear socks in Ghana.
Ellie taught the children, many who are now young men and women, how to create handmade books, boxes and cards that are sold to support their education. Here is Ellie with Michael, now a young man who was a wonderful guide and friend to us, showing me one of their sugar cane paper boxes and his brother Enock who is an incredible artist. Both young men are a credit to Ellie’s love and guidance. On my last day, the children gathered around and danced with me as my farewell.

Staying a week longer, I was able to give a workshop to visual art, dance and drama teachers all colleagues of Ben, a fifteen year old friend and co-leader as well as the retired head of arts education in Ghana. Here is Ben and I celebrating after the completion of our Trip to Krobo Odumasi, his birth place and the actual center of the world I asked to call Ghana, middle earth.
These Ghanaian teachers are powerful artists and were very curious and inspired by expressive arts, and we decided to create an IEATA regional group, the first in Africa.

When you first encounter Ghana, the arid landscape, poverty and developing country environment slaps you in the face. But I wanted this group to delve deeper into the inner indigenous landscape of Ghanaian arts, music, dance and spirit. As you read the voices of most of the members of our group, you will sense that Ghana changed them as they had myself, and seeped into their souls, their imaginations and global consciousness. Many want to return and share it with their compatriots. I know this will happen for them as it did for me. Ellie and I are planning another journey to Ghana in 2016. If you would like to learn more about our trip, go to Facebook: EXA Ghana Journey 2014.
The following are the voices of individual participants and our Ghanaian trainers. Drink deeply of each of their experience.

**Ellie Schimelman, co-leader and founder of Aba House**

Cross Cultural Collaborative is an educational NGO bringing people together from different cultures to interact creatively by inviting them to Ghana. We encourage interaction between people of all ages and different life experiences to promote cultural exchange and understanding through the arts. We do this through workshops, residencies, exhibitions and culturally oriented tours. Participants live and work with Ghanaians on a personal level.

In August 2014 we hosted a group of expressive arts therapists from the USA, Canada and India with their leader Dr. Kate T. Donohue. For two weeks the group stayed at Aba House, our guest house/cultural center in a Ghanaian fishing village, and participated in African drumming, dancing and singing workshops. They took part in a traditional funeral where they were able to demonstrate their dancing skills.

As part of their immersion into Ghanaian culture the group visited Paa Joe’s and Eric Adjety’s fantasy coffin workshops, Cedi’s bead factory in Odumasi Krobo and, at Aba House, had a workshop in adinkra stamping. The experience was rounded off with visits to the National Museum, Kwame Nkrumah Memorial, the National Center for Art and Culture, Baba Muhama’s unique gallery, and a visit to Makola market, a large outdoor market in the center of Accra.

All this was facilitated by Ellie Schimelman, Aba House director, and Kate Donohue. Working together, they found ways to introduce the group to African culture, ritual and everyday life. African culture and traditions are unique and unrelated to western concepts. The Ghanaians were wonderfully gracious and invited the visitors to share, even though briefly, in their lives and ceremonies. One demonstration of this was our inclusion in the Homowo Festival. This festival celebrates the abundance of food after a good harvest and travels from town to town in the Ga areas. The group was invited to Jamestown, a section of Accra, to witness the celebration of twins. The twins are carried through town, sometimes on peoples shoulders, with much drumming and merriment.

An important element in Cross Cultural Collaborative’s program are the neighborhood children, who, lacking creativity in school, come to us and are taught to be outrageously creative. The children also benefit from interacting with artists from other cultures as demonstrated when several members of Kate’s group worked with them. It was a wonderful interaction and we feel it was a learning experience for both the children and the teachers.
Africans are modernizing many things, but still stay close to rituals that are the foundation of their society and we feel we were able to introduce our participants to these values in place of the tourist experience most visitors to Africa undergo. It was a learning curve all around as Cross Cultural Collaborative had their first introduction to expressive arts therapy and Kate’s group experienced creative growth by interacting with indigenous African artisans whose culture is firmly rooted in tradition.

For a video taken of a small part of the event, paste this in your browser url bar:

HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?v=LMQ2VbrqMlc&feature=player_embedded&x-yt-cl=85114404&x-yt-ts=1422579428#t=0

AFRO DANCE & CREATIVE ARTS REFLECTIONS OF EXA GHANA JOURNEY 2014

I am Seidu Mohammed Karfo, a Ghanaian African Traditional and contemporary Dancer and Lecturer. I was born in Accra, Ghana from a mixed tribal background from the Eastern Region and Upper Eastern Region of Ghana, Krobo and Frafra. I am also the Director of Afro Dance and Creative Arts. I have worked overseas in Germany, Morocco, and other African countries as well as Israel, where I lived for 2 years. I started my dance career as a leading dancer Choreography Assistant for the Ghana National Dance Theatre for 15 years with Dance Factory, where I danced traditional and contemporary African dance. It was in Israel where I developed my Sense, Frequency and Dance (SFD) model, which uses traditional African dance movement within the practice of Dance Movement Therapy as a healing tool. For two years, I ran a series of adult and children workshops with an intuition and therapy counselling practitioner in Israel. It was here that I developed the use of traditional symbolism in Ghanaian dance and movement into a dance therapy model, with the understanding of frequency, intuition, and right and left brain theories. The main aim of my SFD workshops are to give people the tools on how to connect with their intuition and to heal any blockages that prevents people from being connected with their soul. I am also passionate in sharing our rich cultural dances and history as a way to maintain its heritage.

by Kate T. Donohue  
2014  
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With my company Afro Dance & Creative Arts, I provided a 3 day workshop on talks, discussions, demonstrations and practical dance, drumming and song on some of our traditional drumming rhythms and dances as part of the EXA Ghana journey program. Through our workshops, we centred on themes of marriage, war and death, exploring the rituals, symbols and how they exist today in dance and music, and the way they add meaning to our everyday life in Ghana in the past and present.

We shared Drumming rhythms of the Ewe people, and dances from the Ewe, Krobo and Northern tribes of Ghana. I and my Drummer explained the role of the drum language, its complex multilayered rhythms, and the drummers’ role with the dancers in creating mood, ritual support and communicating story that is traditionally passed down from our ancestors and elders. Many of the rhythms and dances are connected spiritually with our ancestors. The group learnt basic rhythms in the practical aspect of our drumming workshop, connecting them to their own bodies, intuition, and feeling the rhythm. The group then learnt basic movements of Kpatcha dance, which is part of the Puberty Rites (Dipo) traditions and a Ga song, Oshe-boo, which is a harvest song, often sung during our Homowo Festival, which was occurring around Accra at the time that the group was in Ghana. The festival energy was in the air, so it was a good opportunity to teach a song from this traditional ceremonial time.

Whilst incorporating the theory and knowledge of the various drumming rhythms and dances to the group, I incorporated aspects of the SFD model into the program, to connect the participants’ Roots Expressive Arts program framework with the traditional dances, for their deeper and experiential understanding of the aura of our traditions, which I believe can only be achieved when experiencing it through the body and the senses rather than just through the intellectual mind, which is the way many Africans orient their way around their world.

Our traditional arts are increasingly being lost in our modern times. Many of our traditional dance movements are merging in new fashionable mainstream street dance, (eg. Azonto and Akayida). I believe people are losing connection with our history and the understanding of why our cultural laws and norms exist the way it is today. My intuition, traditional cultural knowledge and skills provides me with a navigation of how to move forward in my everyday life, and an understanding of my historical rituals through dance and rhythm gives me the foundations of my values I hold when I interact with people and my environment. It reminds me that everything in life that is connected has a place and sole purpose, which needs to be respected. For example, while Dipo is only practiced to it’s full in villages, in the city there are some aspects of Dipo, which are practiced with contemporary families. The man is the provider of the home and protector, no matter what his education or progression in life and this is respected and upheld within our law, while women have rights to education and free speech, they also have a role as a

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support to the family and children. In general modern movements, equal rights and human rights movements developed over decades, has modified how some of the rituals are conducted in our everyday society in Africa. We are changing with technology and new ideas, maybe due to the influence of the West. I have found that while the West have brought to Africa a lot of positive benefits, it’s foundation and thinking is very much driven by the mind and dominates our intuition, that we collectively have forgotten that we are humans with a powerful inner intelligence. African Dance and Rhythms have always been my connection to who I am as a person, as an artist and as a cultural teacher, and supports and strengthens my confidence in who I am and my intuition, which is my inner intelligence. This is what I try to convey and teach to people through my SFD approach to teaching African dance and drumming, in addition to the fun it provides.

As a practitioner of the EXA Ghana Journey group, I had the chance to learn some of other cultural rituals and differences of ideas through our group discussions with the group.

![Darci Adam](image)

My name is Darci Adam. I am a Registered Art and Expressive Arts Therapist from Winnipeg, in central Canada. I have a private practice, work as a school counselor and am starting a training center for art, drama and expressive arts therapy called WHEAT Institute. I was inspired to attend the Indigenous Roots of Expressive Arts Therapy training in Ghana because I have been deeply moved and impacted by local Anishnabe and Cree Indigenous ceremony and world views in here in Manitoba. Winnipeg has the highest Indigenous population in Canada, and I work with many Indigenous students and clients, and we share a community together. Because Indigenous traditions are so grounded in the arts, understanding and participating in them seems a natural fit to me. I believe in the teaching of the medicine wheel, that we need to balance our parts including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Exploring Indigenous use of the arts has resulted in profound spiritual experiences and insights, and I feel honored to live in an era when these understandings can be shared openly and respected fully. Winnipeg also welcomes many newcomer families from Africa who may be refugees or new immigrants. Approximately one-third of the students with whom I work in my public school would speak a language other than English as their first language, with probably at least one third of those students coming from Africa.

We were very fortunate to attend a funeral in Ghana. Experiencing the drumming and dancing at that sacred ceremony was such a visceral teaching about the therapeutic power of art. The process of honouring the person who had passed was such an embodied one, grounded in dance, and so different from the Western funeral services I have attended wherein the sharing is much
more through the spoken word. Although song is used, the guests are typically much more passive in their participation in the ceremony.

I was also highly impacted by the presence of the children in the community in which we were staying. Expression through dance and rhythm was so natural to them. Whether it was in a formal class setting or at a celebration, quite consistently they were comfortable expressing themselves through movement and quick to jump in to participate. It seemed evident that movement and rhythm were foundational aspects of their lives.

The prevalence of proverbs and their visual expression through the Adinkra symbols was one of the most powerful initial cultural impacts in Ghana because of their daily presence. One of our Ghanaian teachers, Ben, stressed that every Ghanaian believes in some kind of higher power, and the prevalence of proverbs reinforced a sense of morality and responsibility to each other and a higher power as underpinnings of Ghanaian culture. The traditional manner of preserving the Adinkra symbols through the creation of cloth prints made with natural dye, in addition to seeing these symbols in the city on wall murals were beautiful ways to preserve beliefs about our responsibility to one another. I am excited to use these symbols as teaching tools with my students and clients.

Without links to traditional cultural practice, Western “culture” can become divorced from movement. I believe it is one of the reasons we struggle with obesity in the West. In addition to an over-abundance of process foods, we lack fundamental cultural practices that ground us in respect for and expression through the body. We might attend dance classes; however it is not the same as growing up with cultural practices that involve rhythm and movement such as the funeral we participated in. In addition to African Indigenous cultural practices, we have local Indigenous practices which are more centered in balancing all aspects of the self including the physical and spiritual aspects, which are frequently not given equal priority in our school setting. I am very interested in sharing these practices through the school system.

I am hopeful to maintain a connection with the Expressive Arts community in Ghana, and create links so that teachers there might collaborate with teachers and therapists here to glean a deeper understanding of the meaning of the arts from Indigenous perspectives, including Indigenous cross-cultural similarities and differences. Traveling to Ghana I was able to experience firsthand the significance of living in a truly global community. Being able to share the experience with
new friends from United States and India deepened and broadened my process, and left me very excited to venture forth to India for the next Indigenous Roots of Expressive Arts program. In Ghana, the world became smaller for me, while my understanding of the Indigenous roots of EAT became embodied and vastly larger. I am very excited to become a part of an interconnected, global, expressive arts community.

Perry Clark

My name is Perry Clark, I graduated in June 2014 from Sofia University (formerly Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, ITP) with my MA in Counseling Psychology. I consider myself a transpersonal creative expression therapist, who is just beginning. At ITP I specialized in Creative Expression, and my final project was African-inspired Mask’s.

These translated the wisdom of West African symbols as they connect to what I had learned in the therapy process. The following month I was at the 45th annual convention for the Association of Black Psychology as part of a group of Art/Creative Expression focused Therapists who presented a workshop on Masks and their clinical application for working with African/Black American clients. Come August, I set out for Ghana.

The trip to Ghana was to learn about the Indigenous Arts of Ghana. This was my surface intention for this trip, but there were much deeper reasons for making the trip. At the deepest levels within me there has always been a call to go to Africa. As I studied the history, culture, and spirituality of where my ancestors came from, I was a prodigal son returned home. Even if it wasn’t the exact area my ancestors came from, it is at least a part of the lands they came from.

In seeing Africa, being in Ghana I saw many things, which are different from life in the United States, but also saw things that are very much the same. I saw things that I thought were good and bad. One of the experiences was in learning about the creation, and application of the Adrinka Symbols. I had used them on my masks for my final project. In learning more of the symbol’s history and usage, it cemented a connection about how they help shaped the thinking and expression of people’s lives, and how they address the lessons the world teaches. The thought concepts that make up the Adrinka reflect how our Ancestors viewed the world and life. Another strong experience came with the dance trip that taught us...
drumming, singing, and dancing. Whenever they performed, other people came to watch, listen, and if possible perform by drumming, singing, or dancing as well, no matter what their skill level. They were encouraged to do all that they could, to express their dreams, their joy, their hopes. This struck me the strongest, because I immediately heard the sound of African/Black American parents, and families shouting at their children to “Stop that,” or “Stop acting a fool,” a pride that is filled with dollar signs for the future, or a longing to be again what was crushed within them long ago. The cultural shift for me was looking at how much a sense of expression has been lost and/or mangled in the years since my ancestors ended up in the United States. How much the needs and ways of expression are much more alive in Ghana, in just a simple neighborhood gathering. Ways of expressing not just of self, but of expressing the sense of a collective well begun, and of community, which is often at odds in the United States.

Since returning from Ghana, I seek very much to include expressive arts in my work with my clients of any ethnic background; if possible, to use their cultural background as a way to help them. I have been formulating projects for the future. These projects of creative expression are meant to be worked with African/Black American clients, and also address the spiritual/ancestor connections that are missing in their lives. The goal here is to find what concepts and ideals mean for and are shaped by them. The social/media messages that are often given about them are negative, and don’t really define them. Ghana has reminded me that the ways and means of expression and especially creative expression are not an optional element of being someone of African heritage, but are an essential part of what it means to be a healthy, functional, and complete person of African heritage, alive in this day and time. We are not as separated from the lands, people, and ways of Africa as so many believe or have forgotten.

Karen Estrella and her daughter Margaret

Knowing and unknowing:
Not long after returning from Ghana, one of the participants, Chandini Harlalka, shared a multimedia piece she created in response to the trip. This led me to write this poem:

by Kate T. Donohue www.exaculturaljourneys.com
For Chand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life gives</th>
<th>But we think</th>
<th>To reclaim</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>We are grown</td>
<td>That which we have</td>
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<tr>
<td>To know</td>
<td>Not knowing our hearts</td>
<td>Lost</td>
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<td>To be known</td>
<td>Not knowing our family</td>
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<td>To celebrate</td>
<td>We die a thousand deaths</td>
<td>And yet</td>
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<td>Why then is anxiety</td>
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<td>My western eyes</td>
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<td>All I can feel</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Cannot see</td>
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<td>Mother earth</td>
<td>We have forgotten</td>
<td>My western heart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother Africa</td>
<td>How to care</td>
<td>Flutters in fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you are the one</td>
<td>For each other</td>
<td>For all that is unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>To whom we must return</td>
<td>For our earth</td>
<td>My western hands</td>
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<tr>
<td>We are lost</td>
<td>For our bodies</td>
<td>Are empty from all that is</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your womb so full</td>
<td>It is not wrong</td>
<td>Undone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your back so strong</td>
<td>To go back</td>
<td>Like a mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>You could hold us</td>
<td>For that which we have</td>
<td>You wait</td>
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<td>Small children close</td>
<td>Forgotten</td>
<td>You watch</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You offer us</td>
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<td>Another chance</td>
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I traveled to Africa with my daughter – mothers, daughters, opportunities, fear, the known and the unknown, arriving and returning – all would become themes of my trip. I kept telling people I was going to Africa. I said Africa because many of us in the US do not make a distinction between individual countries in Africa – instead we see Africa in large swaths – North Africa, West Africa, South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the land of safaris, the land of war, the land of Afro-pop and drumming and dance, or the land of disease (it seemed that Ebola had replaced the AIDS crisis we had come to associate with Africa two decades ago). Africa - a place in my heart of mystery and grief. Mystery, because there was so much I really didn’t know (my children had the opportunity to take African studies in high school, but for me that had never been an option – what did I really know about Africa), and grief, because, although I am ashamed to say so, I was trained to see Africa as needy, as less than, as victim. We in the west are all trained to see it that way. Could I come to know Africa as a place of creativity, joy, peace, hope? As a place not with a “singular story,” (if you haven’t seen Adichie’s TED talk, I highly recommend it)\(^1\) but with many stories, with rich diversity and variance?

I grew up in the 1970s and my first conscious awareness of Africa was of a continent riddled with starvation and war, the nightly images of the starving children of Biafra on the evening


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news were the only real encounter I had with Africa as a child (it wasn’t until reading Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel, *Half the Yellow Sun*, that I even realized that the Biafra of my youth was a failed secessionist state of Nigeria, a country with a rich history of its own). As I prepared to go to Ghana, my images of Africa were now being shaped by novels – novels such as *Ghana must go* by Taiye Selasi, *Americanah* by Adichie and *Open City* by Teju Cole. I was trying to find that multilayered story, as Africans are trying to tell a multilayered story – a different story from the one told about them by the West. In Nov 2014, the Ghanaian British music star, Fuse ODG, turned down the opportunity to sing with Band Aid 30, because he felt the lyrics and images proposed for the music video perpetuated an image of Africa as “diseased, infested and poverty-stricken” and he didn’t want to be a part of that. In fact, he has been actively fighting to encourage a love for the continent, and a more positive image of Africa both for Africans and others with his songs about T.I.N.A

(This Is New Africa - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_pbBkXQg20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_pbBkXQg20)).

What I found when I reached Ghana was a complicated nation. What I found when I came home was a more complicated me. I wanted to go for many reasons – but mostly, I wanted to go to create a new vision of Africa for myself. I wanted to go to create a new vision of myself. I would be beginning a sabbatical from my teaching job at Lesley University, and I knew that travel forced me out of my comfort zone, it forced me out of my “worldview,” and it forced me to think in a new way about those things I took for granted, those things I considered “normal,” “everyday,” and “necessary.” Ghana was a chance to encounter my imagination again, to find a new TINA in my imagination and to find a new me in my imagination.


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**Chandlini Hartlalka**

**BIRTH/ DEBIRTH/ REBIRTH**

3 flights and 20 hour journey I was finally on African soil. I was desperate to get out of the airport and treat my eyes to the sights of Africa. We made it to Abba House driving past dusty roads, noisy street sides …I soaked in the African Air. Africa had always intrigued me. The people, the culture, the art and the archaic-ness had me always caught in an aura of wonder and awe. Did the two countries share anything in common being thousands of miles apart?
Countries, the world sees as poverty stricken and ancient? Cultures and practices, which were skeptically read and rarely, understood? Was being third world our only connect?? May questions needed answers.

As we drove past the peripherals of the city one sight that was most common was of how a single piece of colourful fabric had tied a baby to her mother. The mother was going about her chores, walking, eating, shopping, living… the child was snuggly attached to the “Mother”, like she was meant to be.

I yearned from that moment on to experience this before I left Ghanaian soil, unaware at that time that Africa had already started making in-roads into my soul.

Birth/Death/Rebirth
Drumming, dancing and celebration is a common scene at funerals in Africa. A complete contrast to what we experience in India. This was an awakening of sorts; celebrate death ? Indian concepts of rebirth and Karma are concepts that we grow up listening to. I only understood the complete essence of it in Ghana.

I also had the wonderful opportunity to carry a child on my back. The experience was indescribably soulful. I felt connected to the child, the child to me and a greater connection to mother earth and the universe. I had come full circle!!!

As we went through many days experiencing African art, culture, music, etc., I felt India and Africa had a lot in common. Both countries are rich in tradition and ancient rituals. It was truly amazing to see a common thread run through both countries, which lay thousands of miles apart! I had new respect for my own country and a fresh perspective on ritual and its importance in our everyday life.

Journeying to Ghana has definitely impacted my work. I try and include more of our culture into therapy with my clients back in India, and see how we inherently carry so much knowledge which gets brushed off due to modernization.

I came back with so much respect for Abba House and the work Ellie does with the children in the neighborhood. The friendly beautiful children at Abba House and the love and truthful insights from Mr. Ben, TalkTrue and his Ghanain food, and Kate for her compassion, knowledge and love for the Arts and Therapy.

Across oceans and new continents… I finally found my roots!!!! Sankofa!!!
Hello! I am Kathleen Horne, MA, LMHC, REACE, co-founder of Expressive Arts Florida Institute. www.expressiveartsflorida.com. I teach Expressive Arts to students interested in bringing this work into a wide variety of settings, including education, community building, therapy and healthcare.

Why did I go to Ghana? “Come with me to Ghana” said Kate’s email, and I felt the beat of a distant drum echoing inside my heart. At first I pushed the idea away, but the strong pull would not leave me. I have learned to trust my own inner knowing, and, eventually, I said “yes”, and signed up. I wasn’t sure why, and my intention was to stay open and see what emerged. That phrase – “stay open and see” became my mantra for the entire trip.

Kate was one of my original expressive arts teachers. I had experienced her mastery at weaving – cultures, experiences, modalities – and I knew I was in good hands.

In preparation for the journey, I read “The Healing Wisdom of Africa” by Malidoma Patrice Some. This book moved me deeply, and I reconnected with something I have always believed about Expressive Arts – it provides our modern (Western) culture with a pathway in to the extraordinary, to that place of collective and individual power where deep change is not only possible, but inevitable.

Now, five months later, as I reflect on the Ghana experience, there is so much I could say, and, at the same time, so little. The experience itself was a pathway to extraordinary and touched me on many levels. And yet, even after some time has passed, I am challenged to find words that describe it. I am assimilating my experience through the arts, while those words – “stay open and see” provide a rhythmic backdrop.

I created this painting/collage immediately upon my return from Ghana. I began with a journal entry and added images from the trip. A spontaneous goddess-like symbol emerged to hold it all.
David Boamah, offered our first full day workshop in Ghana. I learned that Adinkra symbols reflect traditional values, mores, and social/cultural standards. The meaning and interpretation of the symbols is multi-layered. This teaching gave me a new and potent lens for viewing life. I have now begun stages of series of layered acrylic paintings that reflect the personal and universal meaning of these symbols. I was deeply affected by this workshop. I find myself spontaneously sharing Adinkra symbols and teachings with my students and clients, as I continue my reading and study.
The Sankofa symbol (return to your roots; go back and fetch it) speaks powerfully to me, and I am exploring it in an evolving painting.

On the evening of this writing, I was inspired, in the moment, to bring the Sankofa symbol into our class, to guide the students in a process of honoring their own history and excavating the foundations of expressive arts in their lives. What a meaningful lens for extracting the potential of past learning as we bring our full presence to our evolving future!

Working with Afro Dance and Creative Arts over a period of days was such a gift! Drumming, dancing, singing, and learning about the culture with Seidu, Dominique, Edziwan and all the others was so beautiful. We learned a song, a dance, and a rhythm. The song—Awoo Awoo—still echoes in my heart.

I purchased a beautifully crafted and intricately carved kpanlogo drum from Edziwan and I am taking drum lessons with him, via Skype.
An awareness of rhythm has entered my life, and my drumming explorations are deepening and supporting me in this.

I have enjoyed sharing the rhythms in our classes and teaching the “Awoo” song to others.

The children at Aba House:
Whenever anything was going on, they were there. They participated in everything - sometimes watching quietly and respectfully from the sidelines, and, when invited, jumping right into the center of things, ready to write a collaborative poem, learn a new art skill, join in the dancing or drumming, or find you a taxi.

I had the opportunity to work with the kids on the IMAGINE Project. The directive we started with: “if I learn from you and you learn from me, what can we imagine”?
The CEDI Bead Village, the fantasy coffins, the Homowo Festival, market, art center, kente cloth, asafo flags, the traffic, sounds, sights, smells….all those too form a collage of the senses that I carry in my body, mind, and spirit.

And the people: Kate, Ellie (Aba), Ben, Talk True, Seidu, Edziwan, Dominique, Alice, Priscilla, Florence, Michael, Enock, Roger, Karen, Margaret, Suzanne, Darci, Donna, Chandini, Belinda, Perry, Svetlana, Anastasia, Vivienne, Paa Joe, Baba, David, and all the children….what we have shared is something that will live in my expanded heart always. The discoveries, though still uncharted, are treasures for which I am forever grateful. Stay open and see.

Svetlana Kreimer, LMFT:

Africa for me was, first of all, an archetypal "cradle of humanity", the start point of our collective history and consciousness, and that's why I jumped at the opportunity to visit Ghana with a group of fellow Expressive Arts therapists, knowing that together we will be looking deep for cultural roots and meaningful experiences; I looked forward to possible influence of it on my work, though wasn't sure how specifically it might turn out.

And now, looking back and trying to integrate the experience, I realize that it is still very hard for me to write about Ghana: my impressions turned out to be so conflicting and full of opposites:

- So much cultural richness - and so much poverty;
- So many friendly, open people around me (both our Ghanaian hosts and my lovely fellow groupmates) - and a feeling of loneliness and isolation in the middle of foreign culture;
- So much beauty in African traditional arts and in nature surrounding us - and so much pain and ugliness in its bloody history of slavery and oppression...

We witnessed and fell in love with so much liveliness - a precious, funny, practical, loving, hard, joyous, communal, traditional day-to-day life - and so it's that much more striking to realize how many of the rituals, traditions, and meaning of the culture are centered around each person's death.
Now even the Ghanaian flag reminds me of this wealth of emotions: green pastures and golden sun and red blood are all present here in abundance. And, of course, the most controversial of colors - black: a skin color of a striking beauty and an archetypal color of evil thoughts; the choice color for elegance and the choice color for trouble; a wonder of a night sky and a fear of unknown. The richest most fertile soil and the finality of death are both described as black.

Throughout our trip these themes came up most powerfully during our participation in a village funeral, and in witnessing a local Homowo festival - a joyful jeering at hunger in remembrance of the past instance of a bad famine, which historically turned into a wild and boisterous celebration of fertility itself, with many couples of twins adorned and venerated as festival's mascots during a carnival-like street parade. Both times it was a hard mix of a solemn event and a celebration, of highly spiritual and profane, of praying and partying. In the whirlpool of sights, sounds, and smells, it emphasized to me how life and death themselves are two sides of the same proverbial existential coin, and how even the "dark unknown" does not have to be scary - rather, an inevitable and mysterious world of beloved and respected ancestors, as Ghanaians perceive it. They even communicate with the unknown, expressing themselves through drum music, dancing, and pictograms - traditional adrinka symbols - the practice that seems an ancestor of an Expressive Arts therapy itself.

As a therapist working a lot with grieving adults and children, I feel this experience of Ghana is a very precious gift, confusing and controversial as it is. It might take more time to "unpack" and integrate it fully, but my presence, my understanding is already altered as a result of the trip, and I am very thankful for that.

Let's remember and celebrate together:

*Everybody, everybody, bring your calabash, bring your calabash...*

![Belinda Rego](image)

The Indigenous roots of Expressive arts therapy with Kate at Aba house marks an important transition in my growth as a therapist. I had studied Art through college and had been an art teacher for many years. As a teacher I was drawn to the deeper processes and outcomes that
always accompanied the making of art and was awed by its reach and influence. This had got me very interested in Art therapy.

I completed the foundation course in Creative arts therapies in 2012 and this was a catalyst for many changes in my life. Thus began my journey of self-awareness with the desire to understand and rediscover myself, and find my larger purpose. One of the steps that I had committed to was to be open to new learning and experiences. I was stepping out as a therapist, which was both exciting and challenging. I was also discovering a new kind of artist in me - whose creative stirrings were drawn from deeper places and expressed in newer ways. I sensed how my personal growth had a direct impact on my professional work. So when Kate’s invitation to Ghana came, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to fulfil my desire to deepen my understanding of Expressive arts in therapy and have a mentor and guide like Kate to navigate us through the rich and amazing indigenous arts of Ghana.

Being Indian, I could relate to how the Arts in Ghana were not separate but integrated into the very fabric and life of the people. The Arts connect the Ghanaians to their inner self, to their community and to their source. Their relationship to nature, to their ancestors, and to God is expressed through a living culture which nourishes the spirit, body and mind and which in turn is nourished by life. I loved the way every transition and passage including death was honoured and celebrated and seen as a part of a larger cycle of life. I could see how the spirit of Africa despite all her struggles is strong and eternal. In therapy, I have become more aware of the importance of showing respect and honouring these transitions through art based rituals. It has also affirmed the importance of nurturing the soul in my therapy work and being sensitive to its ways.

Drumming was another highlight for me! Edwjwan eased us into it so smoothly that before we knew it we were calling and responding to each other’s drums quite organically. The rhythm and energy of the drum really moved me and I realized that when I surrendered to it I was able to drum easily and my body responded spontaneously.

David, a wonderful teacher introduced me to the power of the Adinkara Symbol. The way the essence of an object could be used to symbolically to express qualities which could have both personal and universal meaning really inspired me. “Sankofa “offered me the space to go back to my roots and engage with some deeper questions of my faith that I had struggled with. Through the art processes like the story telling and my experiences in Ghana, I was able to integrate the two - my indigenous Indian roots and a foreign Christian faith. I feel so grateful for this personal transformation and birth of a new Christ for me!
A very big part of my learning came from Kate, Ellie, Ben, and all the beautiful people in our group and our time around the table whether it was doing art processes or conversing. I know I gained so much just by being with each of them. I was moved by their personal, meaningful sharing and excited by the different perspectives they offered. Aba house and the sea, Talk true, the opportunity to interact with the children and the young adults there, all these added flavour to the Ghana experience that is so dear and precious to me.

Suzanne Laberge

I had never wanted to go to Africa.. But last winter when I saw the notice of the trip Kate planned to Ghana I signed up instantly. I was tired beyond boredom of my private practice, of kid clients messing up the studio, of writing notes, of Maine, and I was ready to go anywhere. Furthermore, I turned 75 in June, the trip was tax deductible, and granted CEU’s. And more specifically, since I have known Kate for some years, I had no doubt of an outstanding adventure.
I arrived at the Accra airport at 5 a.m. in gray drizzle. The cab ride to Aba house took an hour, during which I became more and more dismayed, wondering what I had done. The African man who cooked for Aba, and for us while we were there, had been sent to meet me, and he and the taxi driver engaged in what seemed to me a dangerous and incomprehensible argument. The highway was alternately smooth and bumpy, alternately paved and dirt, typical of the roads we traveled in vans and buses for the next 2 weeks. The buildings were tiny, many unfinished or looked unfinished. Later in the day they would open as shops and hair dressing salons.

In a sizeable, though unpaved, village we turned into an even more rutted lane to Aba House by the sea. We were greeted by chickens and the several children of the family who lived just outside her walled yard. A young girl of about 12 took the suitcase I could barely lift, hoisted it to her head and carried it through the yard to the spacious 2 story house.

That was when I knew I had made the right decision.

For the next two weeks my eyes and spirit and ears and soul and tongue were awakened and refreshed and saddened and appalled and thrilled by colors and sounds and sights and tastes. The immediate response to a smile, the warm lingering handshakes, the brilliant patterns of the clothes against black skin, the red dirt roads, the strength of the people, the magical feat of carrying all shapes and sizes of objects on their heads; from piled flats of raw eggs, to huge platters of peanuts, to glass cases of pastry.

The disgusting beach, trash in sand and water. Always the back of some man peeing. The drumming, the humor, the fresh grilled fish, the pervasive spirituality. The terrible position of women. The funeral, the festival, the factory. This last a series of buildings without walls where an astonishing variety of recycled glass beads have been made by hand and fire for generations.

What stays with me these months later is the wonder I feel after certain dreams, in which I discover that my house has an unexplored attic storing intriguing treasure that I had never known was there. In truth, I have discovered new rooms in my world, a new awareness of space and time, a new connection and closeness to all people.
Ghana has lived in me for 15 years and as I said goodbye Ghana last summer, I was changed again, and a part of me still stands on the beach in Ghana waiting for my return. I urge you to join us in Ghana in 2016!

PLEASE SUBMIT TO THE RIPENING SEEDS COLUMN

Ripening Seeds contributions have spanned the continental United States, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, China, Japan twice in Canada and Ghana. I hope we will have more offerings from our international community. We need to hear many more voices.

Please email me questions, ideas or your 2,500 word essay (guidelines: 500-700 words on personal story, 500-700 words on your philosophy and 1100-1500 words on your actual work. My email address is kate@kate-donohue.com.

Thank you for sharing your voice!