

## Appendix Eight: My African Birthing

### Accessing Deep Levels of Knowing

In engagement with Scharmer's 'presencing' these two important symbols (Sankofa bird and Maroon), would come under scrutiny, at diverse levels. However, in my valuing of Scharmer's second source of learning – the coming of the future into presence (the becoming present) it is the forming of the thought of being and becoming in my learning, living and working that is the foundational in appreciating a transforming self. It would lead to profound quality change and innovation in the weaver's wisdom, ways of being and becoming, and life and professional practice. It is in this way that a new way opens up, freeing my learning, living and working towards focus on my future highest potential. In this act I set about clearing the loom table as engagement with Scharmer's innovation moves to a deeper level.

I resurfaced my visit to Elmina Castle, which is placed alongside the email exchange that is already on the warp beam. It is with an open mind, open heart and open will that I expose 'I Made the Journey' to Scharmer's second source and cycle of learning, as I discover this signal event anew on the warp beam. Its scrutiny through the heddles, which the harnesses raise and bring each relevantly into play scoping change and seeking to effect transformation. Presencing is integrated with harnesses and alongside the not so secure living contradictions that has been troubling for me over the course of my living theory thesis. However, re-engagement with my journey to Elmina Castle discovers new meaning for my 'African Birthing' as a 'rites of passage event' and a signaling of the challenge of my becoming. However, the shuttle is now stilled, awaiting awakening to be lived in a 'presencing' way of being

and becoming. It is here that I am challenged to rediscover Africa, renew my mission and to tell my African Great Story.

### **Celebrating Beyond My African Birthing**



*Elmina Castle, Ghana.*

'My African Birthing', is the signal event amongst all the signal events in this African 'Great Story', in that it informs on a 'rites of passage' activity contributing to the makings and unmakings in the making of me.

My African Birthing was the culmination of my first visit to Africa. A visit presented as evidence of my fulfilment of a life-long dream that offered the opportunity for the completion of a rites of passage activity and in my own eyes,

because I had made the journey, enabled the affirmation (in a physical sense) of my embrace of an authentic Africaness.

That this act took place in Ghana confirmed immeasurably that country's special place in my heart on account of the historical significance of its name in an African and world context, the important influence of one of its sons, Kwame Nkrumah, in my learning and development and the long accepted sense of connectedness, historically, politically and personally connectedness that I have felt for this part of Africa.

A central feature of the visit was my poem entitled, 'I Made the Journey', which offers insight into my unique and novel way of communicating my values through my storytelling presentational form. The poem tells on my visit to Elmina Castle (the slaving fortress), as part of a study tour of Ghana. It is communicated as if in dialogue with my ancestors and I share how the experience was appreciated as if I was on a pilgrimage. I felt compelled to bare my feet and kneel at the 'Door of No Return' in Elmina Castle to enjoin and commemorate with my ancestors on their demise. In making this commemoration I began the composing of the poem, 'I Made the Journey', in this memory-filled 'sacred' space/place.

However, the poem was not completed in Elmina Castle, nor was I its only author, for it is through dialogue with peers (co-creators) and collaboration on the nature of its content at various stages of its development that it would arrive in the form which I presented at the evaluation symposium at end of the study tour for peers and hosts. The symposium would also be the event for the purposeful

completion of my 'African Birthing' (rites of passage) through my recital of the poem.

My African Birthing and the events that led to its culmination are also sites for inquiry and appreciated as such, I give evidence in my poem, 'I made the Journey' of the African Voice, of how I came to this place.

### **Prelude to 'I Made the Journey'**

When Trevor Sinclair (Manager of Turning Point, Goldsmith College), good friend and co-creator over many years) counseled me to prepare myself for the visit to Elmina Castle. I instinctively knew what he meant. He informed, convincingly, yet without any undue fanfare that the visit would be like my 'birthing'. I took this to mean 'like a rite of passage', my renewing in a soulful sense.

In *Evolution of Consciousness, Rites of Passage, and the Waldorf Curriculum*, Alduino Mazzone (Mazzone n.d.), presents two perspectives on "rites of passage", which suggests understanding the event as developments in human consciousness over long periods and as a relevant approach for gaining spiritual knowledge at any particular point in time. However, Mazzone believes it is more 'fruitful to appreciate consideration of rites of passage in the light of longer-term evolutionary developments and their recapitulation in each individual's biography'. I can concur with Mazzone on this, yet in this study the relevance of the approach for gaining spiritual knowledge is also appreciated.

I also embrace Mazzone counsel in the utilisation of the working definition of rites of passage exemplified in the Encyclopaedia of Religion, provided by anthropologist Mircea Eliade (Eliade n.d.), who writes:

*'Rites of passage are a category of rituals that mark the passage of a person through the life cycle, from one stage to another over time, from one role or social position to another, integrating the human and cultural experiences with biological destiny, birth, reproduction, and death. These ceremonies make the basic distinctions, observed in all groups, between young and old, male and female, living and dead.'*

In this definition inferred is that rites of passage events are relevant to more than just adolescents, because they can occur at all stages of one's life as all have their transitions. Indeed, this is how it has been with my first visit to Africa, where I feel I have been going through a cycle, from one stage to another, in a way that is integrated by my 'being' and 'becoming'. However, I also feel like Groff who has cited Joseph Campbell and Margaret Mead, to support his assertion that the loss of rites of passage in mainstream, Western society has contributed to various social pathologies. I do not feel that this has escaped me, nor do I feel that I have contributed as much as I could in this sphere given my work with young people, in community development and as a consultant.

Malidoma Somé, a Dagara shaman and academic from West Africa, in (Some n.d.) has made the important point that ritual is "the soil" upon which a community's future grows.

"When ritual is absent, the young ones are restless or violent, there are no real elders, and the grown-ups are bewildered."

I value Somé's point fully and though it can be argued that rites of passage are not completely absent from the cultural mainstream with examples of 'graduating from school, getting a driver's license, the first sexual experience, voting for the first time, or even getting drunk'. There are also behaviours, such as, separation from family, initiations and ritualistic activities, special hairdos, clothing, piercing, tattoos and other accoutrements, consciousness-altering drugs, confrontation of fears, danger, and death, and testing of personal limits that are extant amongst young people.

Further, David Lertzman, writing about "Rediscovery," (Lertzman n.d.) a culturally based, outdoor education program highlights the value of experiencing rites of passage through adventure and wilderness activities for young people (both indigenous and non-indigenous). He comments about the importance of rites of passage and notes that:

*'When these times of transition are marked, ritualised, witnessed, and supported, it creates a kind of experiential map of self-development. Without proper rites of passage, people can become disoriented and lose their way in life's journey. It is as if their life map is incomplete'.*

It is in this way that I want my journey to Africa to be appreciated. For before I had made it, I did somehow feel 'incomplete'. The journey would afford on a certain level my completion. However, in Elmina Castle, at the Door of No Return, as I knelt I could not have imagined that I would be invoking the spirits of my Ancestors. I could not have imagined that the space/place (the Door of No Return) would appear as a site for initiation, for communion with or experiencing the nearness of the spirit of my ancestors.

On initiation Steiner (Steiner n.d.) notes that:

*"We have to remember that the Mysteries of ancient times were of such a nature and character that in the Mystery centres an actual meeting with the Gods could take place".*

Elmina Castle presented as my Mystery centre.

Steiner further commented that "the principal of initiation is that, even during life, (a person) can ascend to the spiritual worlds and learn what takes place there."

There was a moment in Elmina castle when as Mazzone notes I felt myself to be a 'microcosmic reflection of the greater macrocosm, and my relationship to the natural world deepened'. That is to say, the Spirit of my Ancestors was actually perceived and felt in my dialogue and lament and I felt myself at one with the whole of my Ancestors – We are one, One are we'.

However, valuing Polanyi, I believe that into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known and that this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of (his/her) knowledge. Therefore, my appreciation of my relationship to my world is of an integration with my world.

Important for me in this is that my soul has been awakened through self-discovery as I realise self as part of the universe in its widest constituency. 'We are one - One are We'

As I continue I am thinking I should have been more mindful of Trevor's cautioning, for he had been deliberate in creating the moment to offer his advice on the night before our visit to Elmina Castle.

Elmina Castle, the name comes from the Arabic 'el mina' meaning the harbour, was the first European slave-trading post in all of sub-saharan Africa. Located on the western coast of present-day Ghana, it was originally built to protect the gold trade. It was a much smaller fortress than the castle we see today, which covers around 10 times the area of the first one.



Elmina, like other West African slave fortresses, ensured that located at the upper levels were the best accommodation for the Europeans. The slave dungeons at the lower level were cramped and filthy, each cell often housing as many as 200 people at a time, without enough space to even lie down on the floor of the dungeon.

Outbreaks of malaria and yellow fever were common and the stench of cells where slaves were forced to defecate, sometimes bleed to death, sleep, and live for months in, some say, still fills the air.

If any of the slaves resisted or fought back, they were punished by being placed in a tiny cell without light and food and were starved to death. In the castle there are also staircases that lead directly from the Governor 's chambers to the women's dungeons below, facilitating easy access for the rape of African women.

In the centre of the castle is the first Roman Catholic Church in West Africa.

At the seaboard side of the castle is the 'Door of No Return', the portal through which slaves boarded the ships that would take them on the treacherous journey across the Atlantic known as the 'Middle Passage'.

Describing the journey through the 'Door of No Return' a CNN I-Report, 'Elmina Castle a Site of Pilgrimage for African-Americans' (January 6, 2010), (I-Report 2010) provides the following imagery:

*'The sharks circled below as the prisoners of Elmina Castle walked across a small wooden plank to their new home for three months, a slave ship. After four centuries of people falling, the water below their feet had become a breeding ground. The future slaves, often with shackled feet, had just as much a chance of tripping and being eaten by a shark as dying on the ship'.*

The CNN I-Report further states:

*'Around 12 million Africans walked out the same 1-foot wide and 5 feet tall door in Elmina, which they called "the door of no return", to the ship and never saw their homes again.*

*For the next few months, they were jammed into small compartments with no sunlight, no toilets, and very little ventilation. Only one out of three of these people survived the trip across the Atlantic. For the four million that survived, they faced a life of slavery in a new world'.*

Elmina Castle however, has become a site of pilgrimage, commemoration and completion of a soulful life journey. The CNN I-Report gives evidence of this when it informs, on Walter Rucker, a professor at Ohio State University saying of Elmina Castle:

"This is a site of pilgrimage... because of what happened here...we see it as sacred ground."

The report also shows Leslie Alexander, another professor at OSU, saying coming to Ghana was a "spiritual homecoming." Alexander advocates that "African-Americans, in particular, should have the experience of visiting [Elmina] dungeons," for this is a "site to commemorate their ancestors."

Further, the CNN I-Report has Garin Flowers, a student from the University of South Florida, informing that the most powerful experience in Ghana was visiting Elmina Castle. He states that: "Walking through the same path that possibly my ancestors went through immediately touched me. It sort of felt like the end to a long story and a piece of me has put the issue of the slavery to rest."

I feel that the foregoing statements on the notions of pilgrimage, commemoration and completion was the nature of what Trevor was trying to convey to me in his

cautionary counsel to prepare for my 'personal birthing'. However, together with the frames for pilgrimage, commemoration and completion of a life journey, I also now explain my 'personal birthing' as a completion of a rites of passage activity that is framed around notions of my first visit to Africa as a pilgrimage, my connectedness with Ghana as symbolic, the experience at Elmina as being spiritual, the poem, 'I Made the Journey' being appreciated as the signal enjoining, commemorative and communicative act and the symposium where I made the recital as the site of ceremony, celebration and affirmation of my 'African Berthing'.

Indeed, it was great to be in Africa and by placing my bared feet on African soil had completed the fulfillment of a lifetime dream of traveling to the 'real' motherland. I had long convinced myself that I could not be complete until this journey had been made. Therefore, it was a life commitment that I considered would advance my Africaness from the status of dynamic 'being' to dynamic 'becoming'

I was also pleased to be in Ghana and though it was not 'Ancient' Ghana of folklore and myth, there were sufficient connections that informed on exhilarating experiences.

What inspires greater feeling of emotion than sight of the legendary 'Golden Stool', those drums beating heralding the Asantehene's arrival and the Asante in celebration

Further, it was great to be in the homeland of Kwame Nkrumah, who I claim is one of the great influences in my learning and development.

Kwame Akatoku, (21 September 1909 - 27 April 1972) was an influential 20th century advocate of Pan-Africanism and the leader of Ghana and its predecessor state, the Gold Coast, from 1952 to 1966.

Nkrumah was also an international symbol of freedom as the leader of the first black African country to shake off the chains of colonial rule. He is remembered as midnight struck on March 5, 1957 and the Gold Coast became Ghana, for the following declaration:

*'We are going to see that we create our own African personality and identity. We again rededicate ourselves in the struggle to emancipate other countries in Africa; for our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.'*

Additionally, the visit to Elmina Castle (the slaving fortress), as part of a study tour of Ghana, had its own special meaning for me, which was not apparent at first. I recalled being in the dungeon at Elmina Castle unprepared. I had been forewarned that my experience at Elmina would make great self-impact. However, I was not ready and possibly could never have been.

However, I remember that as I sought to make sure that with each step I covered the ground on which my ancestors walked, the purpose of journeying to Elmina Castle began surfacing. I felt as if I was compelled to ensure that no part of the ground was missed in my making connection. One time, two times, three times and more I traversed each cell, staying longest in those cells of overt defiance where African men and women died and those where African women were compromised.

One time, two times, three times I walked in the space/place where the Door of No return was positioned and felt nothing but hurt and disappointment. I then

returned alone, bared my feet and knelt as if at the end of a pilgrimage to consort and dialogue with my ancestors at the 'Door of No Return' in Elmina Castle.

This time the spiritual impact would be substantive, as a compelling extant energy would enjoin me with my ancestors. I had called them. I said, ancestral spirits hear my voice and asked them how things were on their side. In commemoration I expressed my sorrow for their past demise and further inquired as to why did this happen, what must be done to make things right and what must I do to make great impact and free them, free myself?

As I conversed I wrote, and the poem, 'I made the Journey' began to be shaped as if making its own form. However, the poem that I began at the door of No return in Elmina Castle was not completed in that memory-filled 'sacred' space/ place, nor was I its only author, for it is through dialogue with peers (co-creators) and collaboration on the nature of its content at various stages of its development that it would arrive in the form which I presented at the evaluation symposium at end of the study tour for peers and hosts. In composing this poem I felt at each stage that I had to share what I had written with different colleagues who had travelled with me from Turning Point (Goldsmith University). We dialogued and I made changes where I felt changes were necessary.

The symposium would also be the event for the purposeful completion of my 'African Birthing' (rites of passage) and its first public airing. The treasured gathering would include the members of our group and our Ghanaian hosts. It proved to be a most powerful and moving experience for the whole gathering. There was hardly a dry eye in the place and as I completed two of my colleagues hugged me so tightly that I knew the power of the poem's words – the power of the story – the power, in that moment, of the storyteller.

The poem also offers insight into my unique and novel way of communicating my values through my storytelling presentational form. The poem is also evidence of an enjoining, commemorative and communicative act, which seeks to give meaning to my life commitment to pilgrimage to Africa, explain my experience at the 'Door of No Return' in Elmina Castle and celebrate my African

Birthing. It is presented as a dialogue, lament and celebration of my African ancestors, a personal 'freeing' moment (appreciative moment and event and site of inquiry) and inspirational act affirming communal survival and resilience.

What this meant for me was that my Africaness was as real as it could be, not ever previously placing my bared feet on Africa's soil. However, now I had been privileged to do so, and indeed after the visit to Elmina Castle, the appreciation of my Africaness as 'being' would no longer provide me sustenance.

My African Birthing and the events that led to its culmination are also sites for inquiry and are appreciated as such, for I give evidence of the African Voice in 'I made the Journey', I inform on the nature of my transforming self (complete, incomplete and wholesome) and show how I am improving communication of my way of 'being' and 'becoming' in ways that are authentic, African and, at the same time, understandable to non-Africans, to academics and to the widest community positively contributing to the Great Work.

It was also an event that gave completion to the powerful thought I had embraced in me being African, and at the same time gave cues of how I would come to appreciate Africaness as 'becoming'. These events seemed to be conspiring to tell me that the appreciation of Africaness as 'being', though critical, though important, for my purposeful living I needed something beyond such an appreciation. It is in this process of inquiry into Africaness as 'being' that the notion of Africaness as 'becoming' emerged. For me, Africaness as 'being' presents as static and one-dimensional. Africaness as 'becoming' is perceived as in motion and dynamic.

Therefore, the poem giving evidence of my pilgrimage to Africa, completion of a life commitment, dialogue with my ancestors, my African 'birthing' and completion of my rites of passage, was also a poem that heralded my transforming from appreciation of Africaness as 'being' to one of Africaness as 'becoming' and 'renewing'.

I certainly hope that the frames of pilgrimage, commemoration and completion are communicated in the poem, together with the affirmation of my transforming self, for since that time of the visit, I have appreciated a qualitatively different sense of self, values, attitude and community. I had walked upright before. Now I know why such a gait is important. I have a compulsion to be dignified.

There was also a spiritual or some other dimension to the poem, which I had no understanding, but it was a direction that I followed. Each stanza had 20 lines and comprised of 120 words. The significance of this inspires curiosity, but I make no pronouncements, other than to say that when I returned to England I looked up the symbolical significance of the number 20<sup>84</sup> and the number 120<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> 20: Symbolism

- Represent the God solar for the Mayas.
- Represent "the fundamental differentiation which creates in the world two relatively antagonistic poles, and particularly the opposition: spirit-matter", according to R. Allendy.
- J. Boehme calls this number "the Devil", that is to say the material world opposed to the spiritual world.
- The number 20 is considered as ominous for saint Jerome because it indicates the universal fight, but it also represents the source of all energy of the world.
- This number is represented in Hebrew by the letter caph, in form of opened hand, to seize and hold. The eleventh mystery of the Tarot, which corresponds to this letter, and consequently with this number, is "the Force" which expresses energy, the activity, the work, according to R. Allendy.
- Number associated to the resurrection or to the reincarnation, according to Creusot.

<sup>85</sup> 120: Symbolism

- Represent the power and the glory of the Christ-King.
- Essentially, this number is associated to one of the Forces of cosmic Trinity. According to the sacred geometry of Esseniens, it is the place of the cosmic geometry of the Without-Name, to the third of His force of creation:  $360 \text{ degrees} / 3 = 120$ .

(See Appendix).

I also shared the poem with my CARPP tutorial group, at the University of Bath and was surprised by its impact on my peers. In fact, the poem arrived in the session before I had through email, because I was running late. One of the members in order to get a better understanding of what the poem was about looked up some background information (see Appendix) on Elmina Castle and shared it with colleagues in the group. The information when presented proved a powerful experience. I shared with the tutor group some of the background on how the poem came to be written. I then recited "I made the Journey". Here, I give further analysis to the poem.

In many ways this poem was my renewing, my departure from an Africaness as 'being' to an Africaness transformed as that of 'being and becoming'. There are many moments in the poem that I can evidence as presenting closure of a 'way of being' for me and at the same time one of becoming. They include the phrases:

I made the journey  
To the door of "no return" in Elmina Castle  
To complete my personal "birthing"

'With you, I'll turn my back on that door of no return  
Walking away... knowing the cycle is now complete'

'Some urge ...I should forgive  
Forgive those who perpetrated such an inhumanity  
On their fellow women and men...  
Forgive ... higher authorities will make that call'

'With the journey to Elmina now complete  
Reflecting I know there are many  
Who have made their footprints large  
I owe them a great deal ...for laying the foundations'

These phrases inform on (1) the completion of my personal birthing and (2) my personal contribution to the communal completion of the unfinished cycle of slavery symbolised in the notion of the 'Door of No Return', evidenced in – 'with you... walking away... the cycle is complete. (3) They also inform on my attempt to not get caught up in notions of forgiveness and embroiled with feelings of guilt or no guilt – when I say 'higher authorities will make that call'. (I like Eden's guiltless recognition here). (4) Further, they show how I want to demonstrate that I now know the nature of my influence – and recognise it is now up to me to design my future – I owe a great deal ... for laying the foundations'.

However, there are also phrases heralding the notion of Africaness as 'becoming' in the poem and they include the following:

... understand  
 Why your life's journeys have brought you here  
 Know who you are ... who you are not  
 ...  
 Search out your footprints  
 Respecting those of others  
 Tell the story ...inform

Uncertainty of treatment, location and length of journey that could be of concern is accepted in the knowledge that Elmina was not the beginning. Africa's greatest had long been established. The uncertainty are in the following lines:

'Unbounded or chained I may never know  
 And questions of how they came to be in this place  
 Or from which lands they came  
 Or how far they had journeyed - near or far  
 May well remain unanswered - I cannot be precise.

Africa's greatest is contained in the following:

I call on the ancestral spirits that flourished  
 In those great kingdoms of Nubia, Egypt, Ethiopia  
 Of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Zimbabwe ... others  
 To say I know Elmina ...

... was not the beginning

My challenge is for inner peace:

Yet, I know your calling is not to avenge,  
But to regain inner peace  
That unified sense of being  
Which offers us a release

It is also to show love:

Yet there is no hatred in my heart ...  
Love is its foundation ...  
Akwaaba ...I welcome strangers again,

Further it is for my becoming:

In which belief in an inner spirituality ...  
Respect for others ...  
Honesty and a sense of responsibility  
Self-reliance and respect for hard work  
Resourcefulness, belief in education  
Resilience, courage and integrity  
Informed an identity – of the African in me

Additionally, it is for being one with community:

Know ... That my ancestors are with me  
I am with them  
But more than that spiritually  
We are one  
One are we  
Blossoming in a wholesome unity

These phrases inform on how I had to become curious (search out your footprints) and as Judi Marshall says, 'live life as inquiry' (Judi Marshall). They also give evidence of the circumstance of living with uncertainty (I cannot be precise) and the important affirmation for me that the experiences at Elmina 'was not the beginning' of 'who I am'. Further, the phrases self-pose the challenge of becoming at peace with self, becoming loving, becoming the qualities that you represent (its embodiment) and the appreciation of self "blossoming as a wholesome unity" (with the ancestors in me, and I with the ancestors spiritually).

For me this encouraged further inquiries into who I am (Who is Self) and my purpose for being in the world (What is my Work) focused on tapping the collective, the rediscovery of the African Voice and search for the future wanting to emerge as I deepened engagement with Scharmer's innovation as I enacted profound change in my own learning, living and working. These are the foci of the Weaves. I would find love threads in engaging with family through collaborating with my son, Kamau Phillips focused on "What Manner of Man is my Father?" I would rediscover Africa valuing Okri through embrace of seeing Africa through the eyes of a lover and appreciate Charles embodied Ubuntu as my living Ubuntu. Further I would embrace the Great Work of Berry as my Great Passion and aligning with African Voice create a new vision from the generation of new personal and universal objectives. It is this new vision that I would see live and crystalise as my valuing social living pedagogy in Turning Point and prototype and evolve in relationship with my father and family, in working with black boys in Mandiani and undergird my performing as emergent consultant in Berkshire Consultancy Limited.

