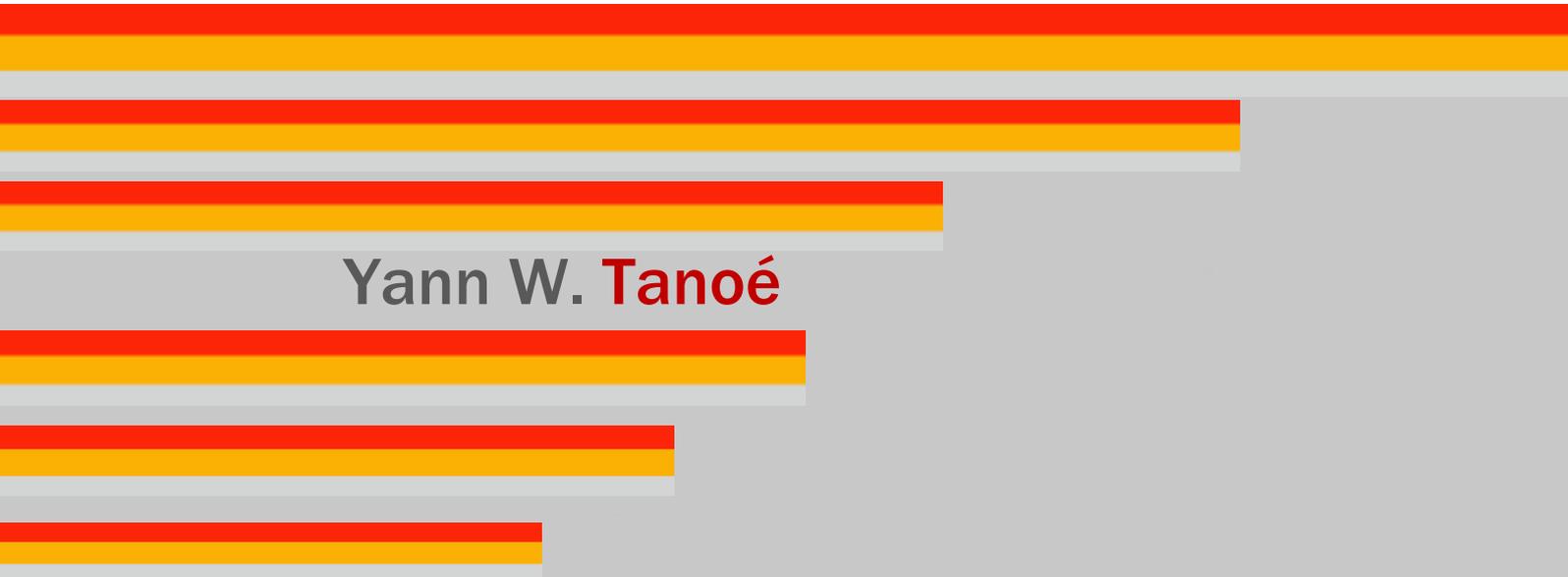


GREY AREAS

JOURNAL

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Yann W. Tanoé

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ABOUT GREY AREAS



YANN W. TANOÉ is an Author, Children's Advocate and Entrepreneur. He is the Founder of SunBird Enterprises, a multi business social enterprise that brings together creative industries and social missions to empower its customers and students, with a lifestyle, better vision of themselves and the world.

This journal reflects the wealth of perspectives that can come together and shape our view of this complex modern world. This journal is much more than a publication, it is a platform created to feature thinkers, innovators, entrepreneurs and individuals who utilise their creativity to build platforms that impact in society and add value in an array of different forms. The idea behind Grey Areas as an intellectual concept is to highlight both subtle and major contradictions found in human reasoning and understanding; it explores what we think we really believe. It demonstrates the grey areas that exist between our core beliefs and our ideas of what is right or wrong.

Where do we obtain our knowledge from? What swings our moral compass in one direction or another? What qualifies us to formulate our thoughts or opinions? I have always been fascinated by the way in which our core beliefs, morals and ideals are constructed and, furthermore, how they evolve. Over the years, I have come to understand that our beliefs are shaped by the core values that we were raised with, influenced by our culture, our social background, the people we admire and both our direct and indirect exposure of the world.

In my opinion there exists three aspects that constitute the makeup of our beliefs: firstly, there is the knowledge that we were socialised into either through our upbringing or background, secondly there is what we decide to hold onto as our core belief based on our own experiences and interactions with the world; and thirdly, there is another part which, to me, is a grey area, an almost controversial area that exists tucked away at the back of our subconscious. A part that has the potential to challenge, to question these core beliefs and almost undo them. This is the part of reasoning which I believe is self-suppressed by many people because it is viewed as a threat to their beliefs and integrity as a rule.

It seems as though a large number of us are afraid to even consider questioning our own beliefs or venture on to the uncharted territory of 'counter arguments'. However, ask yourself the question, do you make your beliefs or do your beliefs make you? If you can make yourself believe in something, can you equally convince yourself that this very belief is untrue? I believe this to be an extremely worthwhile intellectual exercise to question and challenge our core beliefs from time to time, to explore and even embrace different points of views. This, in my opinion, can enable us to cultivate and feel more empathy towards the others that we disagree or quarrel with about different issues.

My further rhetoric through conceptualizing 'Grey Areas' are, how true are we to our beliefs? To what extent are we committed to them? Is every belief that we hold flawless? Do we really have enough integrity and conviction to stand up for and even give our lives for the 'purity' of our beliefs? Or do our core beliefs have unexplored corners, corners that we cannot quite reconcile or explain? Do we have the strength to question our belief and to perhaps realise that they may not be as flawless as we think.

I hope that the following subjects and themes approached in this Journal not only challenge, but also add value to the way in which you view your human experience.

Yann W. Tanoé



ARTICLES



ENTREPRENEUR'S TIP



The road to entrepreneurship is paved with great challenges, challenges that will stretch you to your limit, your mental health will be tested, your inner resources will feel exhausted, your life will feel like an open platform, but the beauty about all this is to never, ever, ever forget to pause and smell the roses. Never forget to celebrate every day of success, great or small. You've earned it! Now go and get the world.

Author Art Podcast



Expression is key to intellectual development! It was only natural that I set up my first Podcast channel platform on Soundcloud. I am majorly excited. Follow me as my special guests and I discuss an array of subjects and topics from trending topics arts and literature.

Channel name: Yann W. Tanoé Podcast (AuthorArt).

The I am Happy Project News



I am super excited to be launching the I am Happy Project in a new community this April, the sous prefecture of Kpouebo in Toumodi (Ivory Coast) has enthusiastically accepted the I am Happy Project in its main Primary School. There will be much more in store, more children to meet, more grades to increase and more dreams to make true! We love what we do. Tune in this summer.

New Author

As a publisher, I am extremely blessed to work with some brilliant artists. Writers who meet our publishing house's mission. We welcome Energy Therapist Natasha Price as our new Author. Expect her Self Help book and insight into personal energy practice this Autumn.





FOCUS ON ART

With Art Historian/ Critic
Antoinette Hewitt BA



The Potato Eaters
Vincent Van Gogh
1885

82 cm × 114 cm (32.3 in × 44.9 in)
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Vincent Van Gogh was born in 1853, in the Brabant village of Zundert in the Netherlands. A Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, he is perhaps, most famous for

bright colours and obvious brushstrokes. Colour was used in a symbolic and significant way. He used colour to show mood, atmosphere and meaning.

However, in his painting, 'The Potato Eaters', he doesn't use the bright reds, blues and greens we usually associate with Van Gogh; instead, we see him using a dull palette of browns and rich, earthy colours. We may think the colours are insignificant here, but these tones are there for a reason. They are just as significant as his use of more vibrant colours.

Van Gogh wanted to paint the realities of life into his artwork, truthfulness to his pictures. Is this picture truthful? Would the home be this dark and dank? Would these people really have looked like this? What is he trying to tell us here?

The people would have been hard working and, probably, poor. Their home would have been a humble one with little or no possessions. We can see their lack of material goods and how they lived.

They would have been manual workers, people who worked hard with their hands. These farmers or farm labourers would have tilled the earth, gathering their harvest of potatoes. The dark colours resemble the dirt and dust of the earth and the potatoes they are now eating. The meagre light further adds to the starkness. However, this light emphasises the people, bringing them to the attention of the viewer and making them the focal point of the painting.

In the centre of the painting is a plate of potatoes; steam is rising from them. We can almost smell the aroma of the food.

The figures have bulbous noses and tuberous faces, giving them 'potato-like' qualities. The people become living representations of their lives. When we look at the composition of the painting no one is interacting with each other. The woman to the left is looking at the man to her side and the man on the right is handing a potato to another. However, even though these small gestures do not bring a closeness to the ensemble, there is an overall solidarity in the piece. The people have worked together, are eating together and probably live together. They do not have many possessions but they have each other and that seems to be good enough for them.

The figures are arranged around a circular table. This gives a unity to a composition and often has the effect of drawing the viewer into the space and

becoming part of the artwork themselves. However, Van Gogh has added a further figure, standing in front of the table. She blocks the viewer from entering the space and we are cut off from the people. Instead of being part of the action, we merely become the audience watching on.

Their clothing, the lighting, the sparseness of the room all give a sombre atmosphere to this piece. Van Gogh wanted the viewer to feel the tiredness and strain of the work these people had done. He wanted us to see the poverty, the dirt, the reality of these people's lives. The dull, drab colours speak of the dull, drab, monotonous lives these people live. We see that Van Gogh was trying to tell us something about the working classes here. They may be lacking in material possessions but they are humble, hardworking and are a united band of people.

Van Gogh thought that this was his best work. A more honest depiction of the workers than if they had been dressed in their finery or Sunday best because this is their everyday life; this is their reality and truth.

Van Gogh said of the work: "You see, I really have wanted to make it so that people get the idea that these folk, who are eating their potatoes by the light of their little lamp, have tilled the earth themselves with these hands they are putting in the dish, and so it speaks of manual labour and — that they have thus honestly earned their food. I wanted it to give the idea of a wholly different way of life from ours — civilized people. So I certainly don't want everyone just to admire it or approve of it without knowing why."

[http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let497/
letter.html](http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let497/letter.html)

Antoinette Hewitt.

FOCUS ON ENERGY

With Author and Energy Therapist
Natasha Price

MINDFULNESS



Mindfulness seems to be the buzz word at the moment, with so many mindfulness courses and workshops being available. So what is mindfulness? Well it's something that we can all do, and do on a regular basis. It's about being fully present in the moment, being aware of where we are and what we are doing, without being overwhelmed by our thoughts and surroundings. Of course a lot of the time our minds can be stuck in the past, maybe obsessing about a past event and reliving it with regret or guilt which can weigh heavily on us.

Alternatively we are worrying about the future and what is going to happen to us, or our families, or how a certain situation is going to pan out. Rarely are we completely in the moment, focusing on the here and now. It is so easy for our minds to become engaged with our thoughts, which then run away with us into some huge scenario, which has never happened but which becomes all consuming. Usually it is about the worst

case scenario and a representation of our worst fears. This can cause more stress and anxiety and so the circle continues. It can be very difficult to get out of this way of being. Firstly, you need to recognise that your thoughts are taking hold of you, and then secondly actively breaking that cycle by stopping those thoughts and refusing to engage with them. It is a case of retraining your mind.

To be mindful is to be concentrating only on this moment, which when we are doing a task such as writing or drawing or anything we love can actually be quite easy. Do you ever have that experience when you are so engrossed in a project that you don't realise that 2 hours have passed? That is mindfulness. For those 2 hours your mind was focused on creating and you were completely in the moment, so much so that time seemed to lose its meaning. Meditation is a form of mindfulness, especially flowing meditation, which if you struggle with meditation is a great way to start. Flowing meditation can be walking, gardening, or those creative tasks mentioned before. Any activity that allows you to gain a high level of attention and focus, and for you to flow with the moment.

Actively being aware of your surroundings in the here and now is also about being aware of what is happening around you. For example noticing the sky and cloud formations every day. During this really cold spell I have been awed by the beautiful powder blue and baby pink skies. They have been truly beautiful. Taking the time to notice our surroundings in this way is mindfulness. Make a point of looking at the clouds or the way a particular view changes every

day. Make that a task that you do every morning. Practise and become engaged in mindful observation.

*Find Natasha on Facebook: Dandelions
Therapies - Instagram: @dandeliontherapies*

Mindfulness to me is also about being fully aware of our emotions at all times. Understanding the emotion that is coming to the surface, looking at why that is, and working at resolving and releasing it. When we become lost in our own emotions, and do not understand that they need to be constantly released in order for our energy system to be at its optimum, then it can be overwhelming and stressful. We can be confused as to why those emotions are coming up, when in fact they can be from events that happened many years ago. When we suffer a traumatic event we can put our emotions in a box, close the lid and put it somewhere in our body. Those emotions will eventually leak out, maybe many years later, and can eventually cause physical symptoms to arise. It is so important to be constantly cleaning out our energy on a daily basis.

We can become so riddled with old emotions, thoughts and beliefs that we struggle to function. Mindfulness helps us to start unravelling those emotions, and to find a peaceful and healthy way of being. It can help stress and anxiety to be reduced greatly, it can increase your ability to concentrate and to take on tasks in a logical and effective way, and generally to increase wellbeing. Being mindful is something that we all have the ability to do. We do not need to relearn the task, it is already within us, but we do need to actively start adding this process to our everyday lives.

Natasha Price

**BEAT
IT
BOX**

Fighting Teenager Cancer Together

Lisa Corbett is the Founder of Beat it Box, a UK registered charity, created to support and bring positivity into the lives of teenagers battling cancer. Lisa tells us more about the inspiration and the life changing experience that led her to set up the charity.



The things that inspire me in life are my children and Helping others. When I was younger, people would say to me "Lisa, you cannot save the world". And indeed, as I got older, I realised that although I could not save the world nor in fact save anyone, I could at least help. I began working with young adults with special needs 21 years ago and have loved every single day. Youngsters are our future and it is this unknown future that inspires me to have a positive impact on their life.

Over the last 10 years, I have been involved in a lot of fundraising projects. I have raised money for a young girl with brain damage for whom we bought a special swing from America for, St Francis hospice where my aunt was cared for who sadly passed away, the local children hospice to buy the latest gaming technology for their playroom so sibling could play whilst mum and dad cared for their dying child. We raised funds for a 9 year old girl who had a very rare heart condition, we raised the money to send her and her family to Euro Disney with a friend son's who was diagnosed with Battens disease (a rare genetic condition) in May 2016.

On the 15th October 2016, I organised a charity night where we raised £2000 to send him and his family to Disney. The very next day my own son, Charlie then, aged 14 complained of his jaw hurting. As it was on a Sunday, I called the NHS Helpline who advised to take him to the GP the next day. After visiting the GP, a blood test for arthritis was suggested.

Just over 24 hours after the blood test – our world was turned upside down. We were told by a doctor that our son had blood cancer.

The next morning we were transferred to University College Hospital in London to the teenage cancer ward where further tests were carried out. Charlie was diagnosed with Leukemia. We spent 10 days in hospital where he received intensive treatment. From this day forward our lives would never be the same again. Our normal for the next 3 years and a half would be Charlie having chemotherapy tablets every day, intravenous chemo every 4 weeks, antibiotics twice a week, 5 days of steroids every month and spinal chemo every 3 months. It was a lot to take in.

It was a few months after this experience that I decided to set up my Charity. Why the name ‘Beat it Box?’ people ask me. We set up a Facebook page and asked everyone to come up with a suggestion that involved my son’s name. People suggested Charlie’s Box, Charlie’s Army, Charlie’s gift... Charlie however didn’t want his name included the charity. He felt that this battle was not about him but rather about every teenager battling cancer. He wanted every teenager diagnosed with cancer to know that they could “beat it”. It was then that a friend came up with ‘Beat It Box’, and the following hashtag #togetherwefightteenagecancer.

We set up the charity to support teenagers like my son. Being a teenager is hard enough without adding cancer into the equation. You become isolated, your image changes (hair loss and weight loss or gain), you miss out on school, you can no longer go out with friends, cannot go to clubs, you stop playing sports...your world has stopped whilst everyone else’ is just carrying on. It is can be a terrifying time.

We wanted teenagers to know that someone cares. It was important that the box came from Charlie. When the young people receive our box, there is a personal message from Charlie to them that reads: “Hi my name is Charlie and on the 20th of Oct 2016 just aged 14 yrs old, I too was diagnosed with cancer, Leukemia. My friends and family knew that we wanted to help other teens like you. Here is a box of useful items that helped me on my journey. Wishing you all the best. Charlie.”

So far, in the past 12 months we have sent 60 boxes. We have reached 60 teenagers from one hospital, in just one ward. There are approximately 1500 teenagers a year diagnosed with various cancers in the UK. Although we only send boxes to children being treated in London and the surrounding counties, our aim is to reach all teenagers across the UK. Furthermore there are 3000 children from birth to 13 diagnosed every year. Our aim is to eventually reach every child in every family, and let them know that they are not alone. To let them know that people care, that we care that cancer is awful but that together we can unite and fight.

We have received some lovely feedback from recipients of our boxes, our CNS cancer nurses and the social worker at the CLIC charity sergeant who send us the referrals. (Please see our website www.beatitbox.co.uk to see what some of our recipients had to say.)

I'm inspired everyday by the strength shown by these teenagers. At the beginning when the referrals came in, I would cry knowing that another teenager was about to begin the fight of their life. Luckily I have a lovely, supportive group of people around me to keep me grounded. I have learnt that I cannot save these kids, I cannot save my own son but I can stay strong and give them the tools to support their mental health.

I have seen my son close to death, screaming in pain and looking to God asking to take him now. No mother should watch their child endure such pain but what kept him strong was knowing that I was strong. If he became scared he would say "Are you worried mum?" I'd say "No, you will be fine." I lied, I was terrified but he needed my strength. He knew that if I was fine then he too would be fine. Our job is to teach our children to outperform us, to fight for what they want. Charlie wanted to live, so together we fought for that, and will continue to fight. That's our message to all teenagers battling with cancer: Fight, stay strong for together we can beat it.

Lisa Corbett

**Find Beat it box on Instagram: @beatitbox
And on Facebook: Beat it Box**

REHABILITATION

*With Author, Activist and Publisher
Yann W. Tanoé*



We all have a specific part to play in our communities and in the ecosystems in which we exist. Do we know what our responsibility is? What it entails? Do we take our own, personal responsibility for the state of our world?



I'm interested to ask... when you hear the word 'rehab', what comes to mind? How do we conceive this term?- Over the past decades the colloquial term "rehab" has been used in society to depict a place of 'exile' for people who suffer with addictions, a sanctuary that will nurse them back to sanity. I could share many examples of celebrities from the entertainment industry that have had this term associated to their name and image. However this time, I'd like to consider this term in its rightful context.

The definition of the term rehabilitation states, 'putting something back in its rightful place', an interesting definition that makes it applicable to each one of us personally. I believe that we are all in need of a 'rehab'. We all need to be

restored back in our rightful place in society to understand what our roles are in relation to our true moral obligations and duties. We live in a society that does very little to encourage personal introspection and reflection, a society where the concept of personal accountability is almost absent.

A society that promotes finger pointing towards others. The, 'it's not my fault', syndrome, where we are always comfortable to blame 'others' for what is not going right. But the real question is- What are WE doing on a personal level? Are we really rising up to our moral obligations? Are we standing up for what is correct, for morality, for positive values? I believe it all begins there, with each individual and how he/she views their place in society; as part of its successes, as part of its adjustments, as part of its failures, but above all as part of its improvement and solutions.

There is a very popular saying which states "If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem." Where do we stand in relation to this saying?

I believe that each human, from time to time, needs a consciousness rehab, a reality check which will generate a restoration of ourselves; a rehabilitation towards a better position to operate much needed changes in the right direction for our societies.

Yann W. Tanoé

A CUP OF POETRY

D-EMPRESS DIANNE
REGISFORD



Beauty Imperfect

*Embodied notions signal routeways
Journeys sailing far ahead
Poppy red fields streak razor-sharp lines
Through outmoded social constructs and
imprisoned minds*

*Embodied soul expressions
Oft mistaken for carnal tonality
The trickster incites the road to banality*

*Those who sit reflexive
Curtail primal nodes
Prefer to sit reflexive
Excavating text, long worn narratives
Shredding drapes veiling clouded memory*

*Shedding skin now emerging
Forlorn signals ebb
Lone beacons in the mist
With one eye open
Seize the mystery of imperfection
Seeming impossibility*

*Embodied, Pulsating
Mystically woven offerings bounce swiftly
Over the horizon*

*In that still moment
Truth unfurls her exquisite tempo
Dual fidelity conflicting
at once inviting
Beguiling?
Beauty, this eye beholds....*

*Grasping, third eye leading
Tune in, descend deep
For it is beauteous Indeed*

*The utterance of bold conviction
Of trusting, heady convulsion
The surge of knowing
The sense of belonging*

*Self-mirrored to self
Now bodily connected
light woven paths to truth
The imperfect beauty of those who dare to
encounter*

*For in all it's supposed perfection
Love - a silver lining glints ebullient
sunrays of Light woven truth
Submerged momentarily now return
Laser beams criss-cross chaos*

*But the heart leaves no stone unturned
For if this is to be manifest
It is to inhabit the coupling of truth,
courage and destiny
She rests; Beauty imperfect*

*D-Empress 2 March 2013
Anthology: 1000'Raindrops*

*Find D-Empress on Instagram:
@dempressevoke*

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FOCUS ON FAITH



Daniela De Armas is a musician/ artist and director of the London Lucumi choir. Daniela is also a Priestess in the Lucumi or Santeria faith, an Afro-Cuban religion of West African origins. A belief system brought over to Cuba by Africans (Yoruba people of Nigeria) via the Transatlantic Slave Trade. I caught up with Daniela to enlighten us about this fascinating belief system that has beaten the odds and the survived the ages.

YT - Tell us a little bit about yourself (occupation / title / where you are from, hobbies, interests, inspirations)

My name is Daniela De Armas. I am a musician and I have worked as a musician and teacher of music in different capacities over the last 30 years. I don't have much time for hobbies, but I like to spend time in the country side, by the sea or travelling. I love art, theatre, cinema and live music and yoga and just spending time with my granddaughter and with my family.

YT - To someone who doesn't know

what Lucumi/Santeria is about, share 3 facts about it.

It's a way of life that can be traced back to the Yoruba People of Nigeria but this particular way of practising has its roots in Cuba. The main goal is to try and live a life which is as close as possible to what your destiny had mapped out for you when you were born. We spend our lives trying to do the best we can with the path that has been designated to us.

We use tools of divination to find out whether we're on the right path and in alignment with our destiny, and we have various ways of doing work to help us when we go out of alignment.

YT - Tell us about the three most common misunderstandings about the spiritual path?

1. That we practise witchcraft. This is not part of our practise. We do various works which help us align with our destiny.

2. That we worship multiple Gods. We worship one God, the Orishas are not Gods but energies that mediate between us and Gods.

3. That our tradition is similar to Wicca or any other new age practise. This is not a new age practise, this is an Old Tradition that has been practised for thousands of years. There is nothing new age about our practise.

YT - Is Lucumi a more of a spiritual path, a religion or a faith?

I always say this is a way of life. Or all of the above!

YT - What are the similarity between Christianity and Lucumi/Santeria?

I don't know enough about Christianity to tell you, but there are universal truths

that unite all faiths, and we do believe in one God.

YT - How important are music and dance in Lucumi?

All our prayers are sung, we sing Oriki (our Prayers) in all our ceremonies and whilst communicating with God, ancestors, and the Orishas which are deities that communicate between us and humankind. Dancing features a lot! We have public ceremonies where drums are played and there is singing and dancing and everyone is invited.



Photography- Reynaldo Trombetta

YT - Tell us a little about your musical passion and your choir?

I am a third generation (as far as I know) musician. Music is a big part of my life. I was brought up in a house which housed rehearsals and played all sorts of music. My grandfather was a musician, singer, violin player and also a Choir director! My father a singer/ songwriter. I have been a musician almost all my adult life, I trained as a classical musician as a young child. I love all music. I started the Choir (London Lucumi Choir) since it blended my love of the Music of our tradition with my love of arranging vocals. Singing in a choir is great for all involved. Health benefits galore!

YT - Where has your choir taken you thus far (key places/ events)?

We have performed on big stages, Barbican Main Stage, for example, to small venues. Every time we perform is an honour and a pleasure. Here is a time line:

<https://londonlucumichoir.com/2015/06/30/choir-time-line/>



YT - How has the choir created opportunities to help you to raise awareness about the spiritual path?

My motivation is not to educate or raise awareness. I am not interested really in educating via the Choir. The Choir is open to all and is a vehicle for people to sing together and to feel better about themselves. Not everyone walks the path or is interested in going beyond the Choir although I am sure it has some physical and spiritual benefits to being in it. I give minimal information at gigs and in choir rehearsals. This is not an evangelical path and I don't preach to anyone, I don't believe the path is for everyone and we believe that everyone has free will and free choice. I use my personal Blog to write about the religion, so that people who are searching will have some resources and good information since there is a lot of misinformation. If people are interested in having a deeper understanding regarding the way of life

that I follow, then I am available for questions in a different capacity.

YT - What would you say enabled Lucumi/ santeria to survive slavery till today?

I would say that it has the ability to be flexible and to adapt to change. That has been important. I also think it was meant to survive. It has survived Slavery, persecution, communism and so many attempts to eradicate it. Although it has been marginalised in the past, I have no doubt that the fact that along the way, those that were not from African backgrounds, in Cuba, found solutions within divination and this is also why it has survived. It is a very practical path.

YT - Have you seen a shift in the way in which the world perceives the religion over the past 10 years?

For good and bad. In Cuba it is probably the most practised religion and it is legal and open and that is good. However, it has become almost a thriving business now. Necessity has meant that people are getting initiated when they don't need to, for money. There has been a commercialisation of the tradition which is sad. There also has been a lot of appropriation and people being quite curious without being respectful. Still, the same myths exist and there is still bad publicity surrounding this path also. I live in a bubble though! I don't know how much the whole world really has shifted! Difficult to reach an unbiased conclusion.



Photography Boricuas in the UK Organisation

YT - In your opinion, what role will Lucumi/santeria play in the rehabilitation of the African identity worldwide? Do you think it has started on that mission? If so why?

There are many, many branches of the Orisha religion all around the world, but there are also other African based traditions and paths. This one is not the only one. I don't think that Lucumi on its own will be pivotal. I do think there is an interest in finding out more about African Traditional Religion and spiritual practises. I think the reason why it is integral to African Identity in that it is a different way of experiencing the world and communicating with the world which makes it so much more than a religion. It is cultural and it is a mindset. Such things a reverence for ancestors, nature, the elders, is fundamental in all African Traditional Religions. A good film that looks at this, is <http://ancestralvoices.co.uk/films-books/ancestral-voices-2/>

YT - Where would you direct anyone who may be interested in learning more about Lucumi/Santeria? What advice would you give?

There is not one answer! It would depend. I would say do some research first. Read some books. But also first steps first, make sure you pay attention to your ancestors. If this is for you, your

ancestors will guide you and show you the way. This blog post may help!
<https://oshunschild.com/2016/01/27/i-am-interested-in-following-the-path-of-orisha-what-do-i-do-about-it/>

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ENTREPRENEURS & INNOVATION



Elvina Quaison has worked in African Development for over 10 years exploring ideas of identity and progression which have been long life passions. Elvina has worked in the area of personal development, developing such initiatives both in the UK and in Ghana. I caught up with Elvina to chat about SESA, her newest venture.

YT – Hello Elvina, tell us a little bit about yourself,

I am a British Ghanaian woman who has a long term fascination with identity and how it impacts on the shape and outcome of our lives. This has influenced my jobs, hobbies – writing, events organising

(professional and personal), poetry, friends, travel and choosing to live in Ghana for nearly four years.

YT - Summarise SESA in 3 words and why?

Support – The organisation is a support mechanism at its core.

Education – The aim of SESA is to provide learning opportunities through our events, links, activities and information we provide to download.

Empowering – Through all we do and the connections we make with our SESA community at the end we aim for people to have moved into a more positive and productive space in achieving their goals and so feel empowered to do and achieve more of what they want.

YT - What was your ‘why’ in creating this organisation?

SESA, at its core, is a life coach and support for people. This came from my own desire to have the assistance of a life coach, business coach, mentor, expert and so on can give you to help you shape your life into the one you want. I have done a great deal of work on myself and found myself informally helping others through being the various forms of coach mentioned and directing them to people I knew and trusted would be able to help. I had recognised that I knew a lot of people who had knowledge that would benefit others. I wanted to find a mechanism to harness and share this knowledge, SESA came out of this desire.

YT - For those who are not aware, please explain the symbolism behind the term 'SESA'.

SESA or SESA wu Suban comes from Africa, particularly Ghana in the form of the Adinkra symbols. These are a series of symbols each with a proverb attached to help people live 'good' lives. Sesa wu Suban means 'Life Transformation' and that spoke to me as be it a motivational speaker or a spiritual belief the message of needing to change or be transformed to be a new person is key. The common message is you need to let go of the person you have been to embrace transformation into the person and life you would like to be yours. It is not easy and rarely quick but often worth the effort.

YT - Does SESA (the organisation) have a spiritual dimension to it?

Yes it does. I have referred to the African symbolism that gave the organisation its name and heart if you like. The name of our webinars is called The Ark and this came to me when praying and meditating on what should I be doing, was I on the right path? The Ark just popped into my head and the message that I needed to make things simple, use the resources readily available to me (webinar platform) and just move forward. The Ark is the point in the bible's Old Testament where that which was to be saved and needed to start a new world was gathered into The Ark and made up the new world after the storm. This is often how many of us feel.

We want and need to change our world and need help to let go of what isn't helping and gather together that which will provide us with the new world we really want for ourselves. This is the motivation and driver for The Ark. Having said this you don't have to be Christian to get something out of these webinars they are practical sessions on dealing with the elements of life we are all dealing with and no matter what faith you follow or none at all we all benefit from practical worthwhile life lessons and assistance.

YT - In your opinion, how important is spirituality to personal development?

I feel all personal development has a spiritual dimension even if the person going through the development doesn't perceive it as such, spirituality is so much more than religion and that is the distinction people often don't make. For the inner strength of mind and transformation needed generally calls for a level of discipline, belief and faith to enable change and growth to happen. In that belief is where I see the spiritual support.

YT - SESA is defined as 'change your spirit' - to you, what does the concept of 'change' mean to you?

I use the term transformation a great deal when I talk about change and also I use the analogy of a journey (as have many). I say all of this because I see change as a shift, a movement from where you are to where you want to be and then where you

are supposed to be. A baby step or a gargantuan leap all lead to a change, a transformation as in the 'doing' you are automatically changed and become a new person who now recognises their potential and ability – you are transformed.

YT - (Following that answer) Why was it important to you to utilise a traditional African symbol to illustrate the concept of your organisation?

I was drawn to the symbol, it spoke to me and what it is I want to provide for people. The proverbs or lessons of the Adinkra have always interested me and so it was important to use the symbol because in its simplicity it encapsulated all I wanted to do for people and provide them, to bring about a more fulfilled individual resulting in a happier life.

YT - You mainly reach your audience via webinar, why the choice of webinar?

*My choice of webinar is part of my journey of growth. I had my mind set on doing a series of physical events but knew that with peoples priorities and schedules, venue and other costs, publicising and all the other things that are needed to put together a really good event it was a challenge and it was delaying my next step forward. Then one day I was reading Rick Warren's *A Purpose Driven Life* and I was praying on how to move forward and it came to me a webinar series called *The Ark*. The message I received that day was use what you have access too.*

The webinar is perfect to begin with as it is accessible, economical to organise and recordable. In time physical events will happen but for now webinars are the medium of choice.

YT - 'SESA gives you the tools' (from your web bio) what empowering tools do you make available to your listeners and how?

Speakers will be able to provide books, handouts, exercises and services that our SESA community can tap into and benefit from. As we grow this will extend to book lists, one to one sessions and other support tools that are requested or required.

YT - Which type of audience do you believe SESA will appeal to the most?

While I believe the audience for SESA should be everyone as we can all benefit from reflection, reminding and rejuvenating various areas of our lives (finance, relationships, goals, etc.). I do think SESA would particularly benefit people going through cross road moments – asking themselves questions like is this what I want to do? How can I improve my finances? How can I bring my dreams to life? SESA would definitely appeal and more importantly help you find answers and take steps to bring about the change you want.

YT - What are your favourite subjects that will be featured?

My favourites, simply because they are what I would find helpful with my own development, are finance, health and wellbeing and the rest are still being developed. I am happy to receive suggestions.

YT - Why is the development of personal growth initiatives key in this day in age?

There are a great deal of frustrated and lost people in our world. We don't really get taught soft skills, guidance on how to get to know, understand and like ourselves for who we are. This results in people looking for guidance in the wrong places – media (traditional and social), comparing ourselves to those who seem to have 'got it' and this is not healthy or helpful. SESA helps people discover that the answers to who, what, how and all those other questions about what we are is within us if we learn how to listen and see without judgement and with an open heart.

YT - How have you monitored and taken care of your own personal growth?

I write a journal everyday (as much as possible) and I take time to pray and meditate. Over the years I have also learnt to observe myself and my emotions honestly. This doesn't mean I can manage them as well as I would like but it does mean I can see where more work is needed and can reflect on what triggers certain feelings and behaviour. I also have a close circle of friends who I can speak too and who are supportively

honest with me also, which helps me seek improvement, or equally, recognise my successes – many of us don't take time to do this.

YT - In your opinion, do you believe that there are enough personal development initiatives available for Africans of the diaspora?

I can only speak from my time in Ghana and having worked with the African diaspora representing many countries on the continent and I would say there is not enough being done but the sector is growing. I do feel the sector needs to be monitored to make sure people are helping and not inadvertently hurting those seeking assistance. It is also about people being open to participating meaningfully in personal development work on themselves. I would like to see and continue to contribute to more being done for young people.

Effective personal development will help young people shape an attitude and outlook that will benefit their growth and progression which in turn will benefit the community and country within which they live.

YT - Do you believe that Africans of the diaspora need personal development initiatives that cater to their specific needs?

There are universal areas that all personal development would be able to respond to. However there are specific areas that have a particular impact on the diaspora due to a historical emotional

legacy of slavery, colonialism (Colonial mentality), tribalism, sexism, poverty, cultural and religious restrictions and expectations among other areas all have a lasting effect on how people view themselves, their ability and their worth. These areas need to be looked at for Africans and Africans in the diaspora.

YT - (Does or will) SESA's influence extend to the African continent?

SESA was conceived and started in Ghana and so yes the plan is to connect with Ghana and other countries on the continent.

YT - If so, how do you think such a personal growth initiative benefit the young African professional?

A Personal growth initiative would assist young professionals by responding to people's underlying inhibiting factors – low self-esteem, self-worth, poor self-identity and more can open people up to greater positive belief in what they can accomplish and contribute to society. Also the hope would be to develop a strong sense of community so people move comfortably to working with and supporting each other as they won't fear they will 'lose' by another 'winning' as there would be the understanding that we can all win together.

YT - Where can we find you on social media? When do your webinars take place? Etc...

Our webinars are bi-monthly with the next taking place on Wednesday 28th March 2018 at 7pm to 8.30pm. Visit our

*website www.sesa4life.com to keep up to date. You can also follow us on Twitter *sesa4life* Instagram *sesa4life* and Facebook *sesa4life*. Thank you.*

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For feedback and reviews, feel free to email us at:

sunbirdjournalpublishing@gmail.com

