

# SANKOFA INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING HUB: WRITINGS ON A JOURNEY

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# LIST OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Section 1: Appreciative Leadership	5
Section 2: Art of Hosting	8
Section 3: Action Learning	14
Section 4: Introduction to Black Europe	19
Section 5: Systems Thinking and Systemic Constellations	30

# INTRODUCTION



The Sankofa Intergenerational Learning Hub (hereafter 'Sankofa Project') builds on the success of two other KAl Adult learning projects that The Ubele Initiative (hereafter Ubele) has undertaken since 2016/17 (i.e. **Creating Resilient Communities through Social Leadership' (2016/17)** and **European Summer School: Building Resilient Communities (2018/19)**).

The Sankofa Project sought to extend and further develop on the lessons learnt and to scale-up the offer to BME social leaders through creative and innovative adult learning approaches. The Sankofa Project is first and foremost a social leadership training programme with the aim of creating and developing skilled community leaders and/or social activists delivered through an intergenerational approach to learning and development using non-formal education learning processes.

The training courses took place across two partner countries – Greece and Netherlands - using an intergenerational approach in the selection and learning opportunities provided to participants to develop their skills, commitment and the know-how for life-long learning. These courses sought to provide new frameworks and skills to create social inclusion and active citizenship alongside increasing the employability and competitiveness of those most disadvantaged groups: women, asylum seekers and refugees. These courses opened up access to learning opportunities that would not usually be available to the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community organisations from which the majority of participants were drawn. The project was delivered by a partnership involving The Ubele Initiative (lead partner, UK based), Fractality (based in Athens, Greece) and Untold (based in Amsterdam, Netherlands).

The mobilities (i.e. learning travels) that formed the basis of the Sankofa Intergenerational Learning Hub (SILH) programme took place between February 2019 and September 2019 and involved participants travelling to either Amsterdam or Athens (or both for those who took part on more than one course). The training courses provided new frameworks and skills to create social inclusion and active citizenship in order to increase the employability and competitiveness of the most disadvantaged groups, including asylum-seekers and refugees.

This compilation of 'writings' – in the form of reflective 'blogs' - comprises reflections through the eyes of participants on the course. We believe an approach to understanding the impact of an intervention lay as much in the voices (and words) of those directly implicated as well as objective and external assessment instruments of measure. While these voices (and style of reflections) represent the voices of some of the participants, they do not undermine the wider impact they may have had with those who did not share their thoughts in this manner. They offer some 'impact' statements and insights but by no means the totality of experiences – that train is still moving forwards.



# SECTION 1: APPRECIATIVE LEADERSHIP



While traditional leadership focuses on problems, Appreciative Leadership focuses on the potential, improves organisations and individuals by finding out what is working well and trying to get more out of it. This course sought to get the best out of people who are engaged in a system or a situation. When overwhelmed by negative thinking about mistakes and responsibility, the positive approach of Appreciative Inquiry offers advantages to meet ever increasing demands.

Reflecting upon and applying Appreciative Inquiry tools to real-life cases from participants' everyday work, enables and enhances learners' practice in gaining new insights into the dilemma they are grappling with.

# WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT MENTORSHIP DURING THE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

by Laurentine Insonere Amaliza



I came into the Sankofa Intergenerational Learning Hub's Appreciative Leadership Training in Athens with an open-mind. This was not the first time I participated in a course run by Ubele, so I knew what to expect from the organisation and felt confident that I would learn a lot, would be in a group of like-minded people and enjoy deep meaningful conversations. And I have to say, this training widely exceeded my expectations.

Although it would take about a thirty-page dissertation to share the entirety of what I have learned from this training, both from the exceptional participants and the course itself, one word stayed with me throughout the week: "mentorship".

During the informal opportunities that were present throughout the 6 days of the course, I sought to find out who amongst the participants had been or was a mentor and/or mentee. I asked colleagues expecting them to say that they'd been either a mentor or had been a mentee and for them to tell me how it had been the steppingstone for them becoming the confident, successful and committed people they were.

Their answers surprised me. Contrary to what I thought, mentorship had not been an integral part of their success story and, where it had been, it hadn't always been positive or impactful. After discussing with a group of them, three core messages emerged:

1. Mentoring can be formal or informal, but either way, make sure your mentor is someone who can understand your issues and vision;
2. Choose your mentor by asking the right questions: "how can they help you achieve your goal?" Liking or admiring them is not a good enough reason to choose someone as your mentor;
3. If it doesn't fit, just quit! Don't waste any time. If it's not a match, you don't have to feel obligated to continue.

After a few days of being surrounded by exceptionally driven, humble, passionate and open-minded women and men, I realised that what had truly resonated with me - that was so new to me – was Community. Knowing that however different and inadequate I may have felt at times, I would always belong, because I was present; I was showing up to contribute to society as they all were and that was enough.

When I realised this, I could then open up to receive the lessons from my fellow participants; I would be in a position to receive knowledge, from the youngest to the eldest on the course. As I write, I am still processing some of the learning but what has stayed with me thus far (one month after the course), is that my fellow trainees gifted me with the following take-away gems of wisdom:

*Don't ask for permission.*

*Just do it!*

*Be you, unapologetically.*

*No matter who you are, you have something to contribute.*

I'm very grateful to have been a part of this brilliant group and can't wait to see the amazing projects that come out of this training.

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/2/25/what-i-learned-about-mentorship-during-the-leadership-training-by-laurentine-insonere-amaliza>





# SECTION 2: ART OF HOSTING



This is a highly effective way of harnessing the collective knowledge and self-organizing capacity of groups of any size. It is based on the principle that people give their energy and lend their resources to what matters most to them. The Art of Hosting combines a collection of powerful conversational processes to invite people to step in and take charge of the challenges facing them.

The Art of Hosting, when used as a working practice, enriches and contributes to the advancement of an organisation. It prompts better decision-making, increases efficiency and more effective capacity building and greater ability to quickly respond to opportunities, challenges and changes.

People who experience the Art of Hosting typically say that they walk away feeling more empowered and able to help guide the meetings and conversations they are part of and helps them to move towards more effective and desirable outcomes.

# RIGHT SPACE, RIGHT TIME: REFLECTIONS ON THE ART OF HOSTING

by Rianna Raymond-Williams



As I reflect on the training course I attended with UBELE on the Art of Hosting (AOH) in Athens, Greece, I think back to how unaware and unprepared, but excited I was about taking part in the training course. I didn't do any prior research on the topic, nor had I heard of the concept before the training was announced – both of which were unusual to me - but I applied and weeks later I was accepted to be a participant and with that alone I was keen to engage with an opened mind.

I knew that whatever I would receive on the course would be up to me. Positive or negative, I had the control over what I could take with me or leave. As an emerging leader, I totally believe that I am on a special spiritual, professional and personal journey to greatness. I always find myself in search of the next course or training to help me develop. It's a gift and curse sometimes, because there always seems to be a never-ending list of things I could and should do to gain skills, acquire resources, generate income or reflect on my practice, but somehow, I always seem to find the right tools that work for me.

What helped the process even more was being around leaders who shared my experience of challenges and barriers, despite working on projects that were completely different to mine. Although our interest and specialisms differed, we shared the willingness to find solutions and talk through them, in addition to being open enough to tease out these challenges among a group of strangers, who each provided different perspectives and insights gathered through some of the methodologies of Art of Hosting:

- The Circle Way
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Open Space Technology.

I now know that the Art of Hosting is a participatory leadership style that uses a range of interactive methodologies to develop and strengthen personal practice, dialogue, facilitation and the co-creation. Here are a few of the key methods that stood out to me that I look to incorporate in my practice.

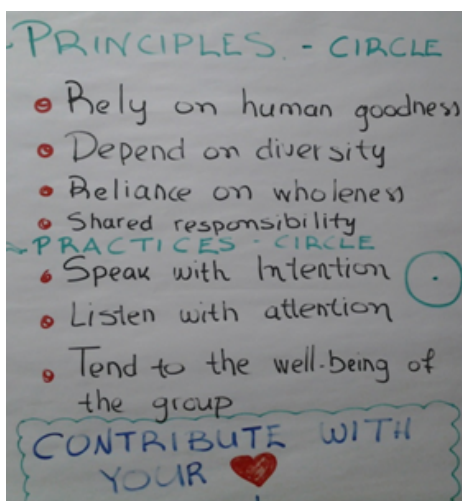
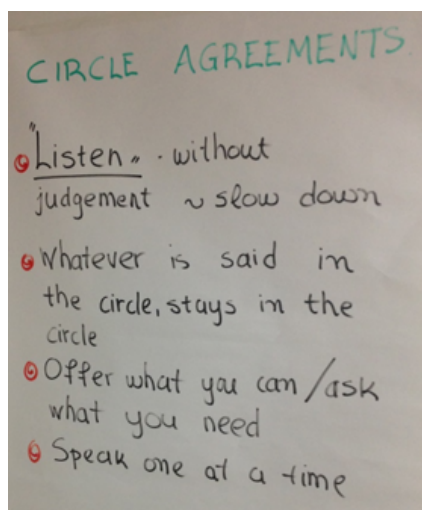


## The Circle Way

The circle is the basic form underlining all forms of participatory process. In every type of organization or group, we meet in circles (even if they are around a boardroom table) to plan activity, handle crisis, and to listen to each other. In the Art of Hosting practice, we begin and end meetings in a circle – it helps the process if participants can “check in” at the beginning about why they are participating, and “check out” at the end by reflecting on what they’ve accomplished. Meeting in a circle can be especially helpful when getting to know each other and the issue at hand, or as a means for deep reflection or consensus making.

We started the first session of the week in a circle where we engaged in an icebreaker as part of our introduction. In this icebreaker, we are asked to say our name to the group followed by an action we associated with our name. This when round in a circle, until the circle was complete, but the catch to this activity was that we had to say the name and action of everyone else before throwing your own addition and name into the mix. Not so easy with a room of nearly 30 people!

Being an early morning start after a whole day of travelling the night before combined with the jetlag, some actions were morning stretches, others were dance routines, but every action and movement helped to make us feel comfortable and familiar as a group. But also have fun. The circle quickly became a space of security for myself - if not all in the group. We each equally participated in the conversation and instantly built a community of movers and shakers whilst introducing ourselves. Building rapport quickly with strangers can be difficult, but The Circle Way really worked well and helped us to engage more positively throughout the week. Every morning we would check into the circle with each other sharing how we felt or were feeling about any activity, expectation or any reflections and check out in the evening with any lasting thoughts or suggestion going forward.



## Appreciative Inquiry

Instead of taking a problem-solving approach, Appreciative Inquiry offers a possibility focus, a move from “what is” to “what could be”. Based on a powerful, affirmative question, people interview each other to uncover experiences that resemble what they want to create. For example, if the challenge is teams not working well together, we might inquire into times when teams have been both collaborative and successful at the same time. Such experiences hold the keys to how we might bring about the future we’re visioning. In the Art of Hosting, we use Appreciative Inquiry to tap into the latent capabilities of the group to create the success they’re seeking.

As part of our introduction to the course we learnt the basics of powerful questions. With every project or business, leaders are usually aiming to solve a problem. But how can we begin to tackle the problem without a clear question?

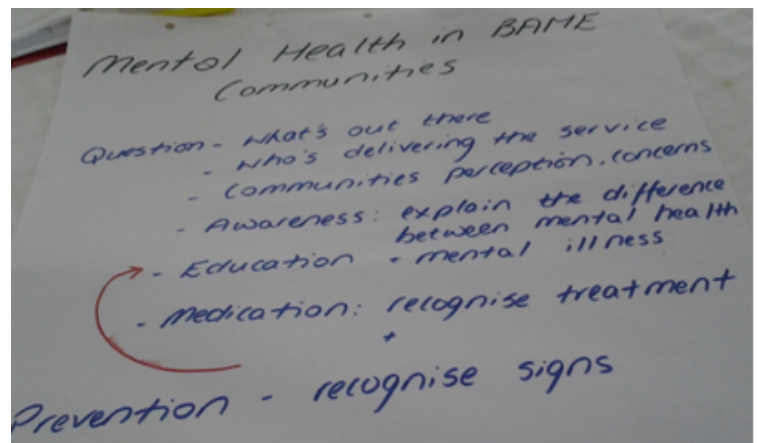
Here, as a group, we began to develop our questioning skills, which in turn would help us strengthen our answers and call to action as leaders. There are always a handful of ways to solve problems and having a varied approach to problems solving enables creativity and fluidity in finding solutions. It recognises that emerging leaders all are different and come to communities and project with a host of different life experiences. So, having a range of questions to develop projects is important and helps to really add meat to the bones of an idea.

For example, if your project's aim is to address mental health, questions to help develop this idea could be: What are you aiming to do? Who could support you on your journey? What does success look like? How will you measure impact? Who exist in this space and what are you doing differently? Why is this important? These questions and more help to create a story and foundation for the leader and help to shape the campaign they intend to deliver. Addressing mental health among people of colour is so broad, but by using appreciative inquiry to ask opened questions helps to build structure and achieve focus.



## Open Space Technology

When we want to harness the power of a group – especially a diverse one with many interests and skills – to meet a present challenge, Open Space Technology (OST) is a useful tool to use. Whenever we need the contribution and innovative genius of everyone – because a competitor has just entered the market, or we need to drastically overhaul our operations, or there is a crisis at the manufacturing plant, or we want to break down the silos within the business, or our community needs to create a strategic plan for its future. OST is convened around a core calling question. The group is made aware of any givens- budget, leadership, etc - and then the space is opened for anyone to pose a session topic. Over the course of the meeting, people are free to choose which session(s) they most want to attend, bringing maximum enthusiasm and commitment for conversation and action. Personal buy-in and committed action can be achieved in a remarkably short time.



After building rapport using the methodologies above, we each had the chance to get feedback on ideas and challenges. Here, those who were interested, could present their project idea or challenge to the group with the aim of talking through the issue amongst the community we had built. For example, “How can we engage adults in sex education?” As a sexual health practitioner, a bulk of my work for the last 8 years has been engaging young people to have healthy conversations about sex and relations, but I feel strongly that if the adults in their lives are not equipped to have and hold these conversations and reinforce messages about healthier and safer sex behaviour it can be problematic. Posing this question to the group allowed me to stimulate discussion and generate ideas on how I could begin tackling this as well as bring others along with me to do the work.

Additionally, topics ranged from health to homelessness, STEM and Storytelling and creativity. The hosts of each topic were asked to sit at a table with their topic on flipchart paper and we as a group were free to gravitate towards the topics we had interests in to share our thoughts and ideas or just take seat and listen to what was being discussed around the topic. Here we could move freely between topics to share and listen with the aim of providing the host with some areas to consider.

This worked well as it gave us as participants the freedom to give our insight on a range of areas or even learn about something we had no prior knowledge about. For hosts, it gave them a chance to sit with their topics and also talk it through with an unbiased audience with the aim of developing it further.

All the above tools helped me to think more about my approach as a leader in addition to challenging myself to develop more participatory methods within my organisation. Through engaging in a week-long programme of participatory learning activities I was able to reflect on my practice as a leader and identify and focus on key themes to help me overcome some of the hurdles I currently face in my business (i.e. [www.shinealoud.co.uk](http://www.shinealoud.co.uk)).

(Explanations of the methodologies have been taken from the following website - <https://www.artofhosting.org/what-is-aoh/methods/>)

# THE MAGICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE ART OF HOSTING ATHENS, APRIL 2019

by Yvonne Witter



How do I create meaningful change whilst hosting myself and others? That was the central question to the weeks' training.

The accommodation was in a great location, the training space was clean and adequate, and the hotel staff kept the group fed and watered throughout the entire day; constantly refilling peeled fresh fruits, cakes, water, tea and coffee, which I thought was impressive. There were ample chairs, and the tables when we needed them, were covered with clean white table-cloth. Mostly we sat in a circle and the importance of that was explained at the outset. So, no barriers to communication and an equitable space, where everyone was visible.

My own experience was educative, an opportunity to be immersed in the passions and aspirations of others. To experience the way in which these creative processes enable people to see their potential for change and to have the opportunity to contribute to discussions and exchange ideas and create new ideas was amazing in its entirety. I am really pleased that I had attended because I believe that there is much to share in an intergenerational setting but the opportunity is not always present and if it is, there are boundaries and conventions of being an elder or being a young person, we are not often seated at the same side of a table and hardly ever sharing a circle. Experiencing the process felt like all hindrances were removed and people were just allowed to be giving and nurturing in a safe space.



# SECTION 3: ACTION LEARNING



Founded in the 1950s, Action Learning is a proven method in the world of professional development. It's all about transformation for both the individual and the organisation, and has earned a well-respected place on many management, leadership and professional development programmes.

Action Learning brings small groups of people together in a supportive context, helping them to grow personally and professionally and to develop their organisation and business strategic processes. One of the many reasons for the success of Action Learning is that it tackles real issues faced by people.





“THE REAL VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY CONSISTS NOT IN SEEKING NEW LANDSCAPES BUT HAVING NEW EYES.”

## ACTION LEARNING REFLECTIONS

by Amran

For me, 2019 has been all about personal growth and development. Going on this course on ‘Action Learning’ was one of the biggest steps I’ve taken to follow this goal through. Action Learning is a continuous process of learning and reflection that occurs alongside the support of a group of people working with real problems to get things done. Ubele, the amazing organization, hosted this trip in partnership with Erasmus+ (Sankofa Intergenerational Learning Hub), bringing together 20 of us in a supportive space, helping us to grow, learn and develop professionally and personally – in the heart of Athens, Greece.

Sankofa, an Akan term that means “To go back and get it”.

You might be thinking, “what does that have to do with this trip or travel at all?” It has everything to do with it. The past illuminates the present, the search for knowledge is a life-long process.

I didn’t have any pre-set expectations – I’d never travelled internationally for a learning course, but regardless, the outcome would be up to me and my openness to learn. The day after Eid-ul-Fitr, I found myself in Gatwick, looking for people that I had never met before, with the only prior communication being through email and a WhatsApp group. I remember telling my mum about this and her being quite sceptical, but I think if I hadn’t travelled alone before she would have probably stopped me from going.

I spent the four-hour flight to Greece conversing with new people, of different ages, which set the tone for this ‘intergenerational learning hub’. We eventually arrived in Athens and the first thought on everyone’s mind was food. This was our first group dinner, and it certainly was great to get to know everyone, and to mingle! I’m sure this restaurant had never seen this many people of such varying backgrounds, and it was quite funny to see that because it was quite late, we literally took over the whole restaurant...

By the time we had dinner and were ready to hit the sack, we made our way back to the hotel to mentally prepare ourselves for an intense few days.

What was quite refreshing was how nice our hotel was, considering that this trip was pretty much covered by Erasmus+, I wasn’t expecting it at all (shows to you that you shouldn’t have pre-assumptions). Luckily, the course itself would be held in one of the conference rooms located within the hotel, reducing the need to travel to another venue.



The very next morning, the 36-hour course on Action Learning began! Our local host and co-facilitator firstly introduced himself, his team and we had a chance to introduce ourselves to everyone in the circle. This was a great icebreaker as we were able to get to know everyone a bit more and start with a sense of familiarity.

The facilitators placed a sunflower potted plant in the middle of the circle where we were all seated. Some asked what purpose it serves and some just observed, but gradually, we were enlightened to the purpose of this plant and why it is symbolic.

The sunflower is heliotropic, meaning that it displays a form of phototropism. Whereby the sunflower grows in the direction of the sun and in essence can track the sun. In this context, we were informed it was with regards to appreciative enquiry and serves as a metaphor for people and their cultures turning to face what energizes and enlivens them.

The process of action learning is to learn about ourselves and about the issues that we face. This was done through several steps and using different tools to understand action learning. We began by visualizing the process through a 'Fishbowl' activity, whereby within the inner circle, an action learning set occurred and the facilitators explained and assigned each role to several volunteers. These roles included a presenter, coach, enabler(s) whilst in the outer circle, we were all observers/harvesters.



Although we had very long days, luckily we had an hour and a half lunch break and we found a really nice authentic Greek restaurant a few minutes away from our hotel. The views were absolutely stunning, and the amazing weather was definitely a plus!. We ended up eating at this restaurant for the majority of our lunch breaks (all of them if I recall)!

The days followed included re-enacting our own action learning sets, and everyone was able to experience each role at least once – allowing us to address our own questions whilst being able to learn and interact with others.

Our local host in Athens was great and took us out to some great places to eat in the evenings. This included a very nice rooftop terrace restaurant, where we were all able to talk and connect in a relaxed manner.

The views at sunset were absolutely spectacular, and a few of us decided to hit the town and explore the flea market and what Athens has to offer. I loved being able to walk and explore so freely, with people who I once considered strangers. Friendships were indeed formed!

With long hours of learning, we were lucky enough that the sun did not set too early in Greece, allowing us to visit the town and taking late night walks quite frequently. Through posting on social media, I gathered that most people thought I was off on holiday again (it's funny actually since I had not been anywhere since last August prior to this learning course). What we as a group did was to make the most of our time being abroad and exploring when we could after our class during the day.

Towards the half-way point of the course, we started exploring different ways of mastering the Art of Questioning, and one of the activities became my favourite part of the trip. It's called 'Wicked Questions'- which practically is the ability to only ask questions with questions, giving no room for statements.

This was much harder than we anticipated, but my group worked together to create a nurturing environment, allowing us to develop questions that had heavy meanings and to find answers beneath questions. To make the seemingly impossible, possible. This activity truly helped us to develop the art of questioning and also to ask ourselves questions that really matter and to adopt the practice of strategic thinking.

The last activity we did in the classroom was something called a 'Pro-Action Cafe', to initiate action-orientated conversations. The questions varied from 'fake-news' to how to support unlearning through action learning. This was a very interesting session, as we were able to move from one table which symbolised a question to another – allowing us to ask questions but also see what was missing.



Although I had a very small appetite after fasting for Ramadan, I made way for a veggie lifestyle for pretty much most of my time in Athens – partly due to the lack of halal options and the fact that we were quite a large group, but that was a given. On the second to last night in Athens, we decided to hit the town again and find a place that I could go all out in.

I didn't think I'd ever be this excited to have chicken again, until that very evening. It certainly was worth the wait – and my peers who I grew very close to by that point could tell what I had been craving!

Although it was very filling, we had a walk around the town in search of ice cream, and we were not disappointed! Probably had the best mango ice cream ever.

I always enjoy using public transport when I visit a new place, which was a struggle since the last night walks were so nice. But on this night, we were way too full to walk for over 30 minutes back to our hotel, so we tried the metro! It's always interesting to see the 'metro' systems in different countries, it was surprisingly busy for a Sunday night.

On the last day, our local host made it a mission to take us to Marathon and explore some of Greece's history. It was great having someone know the ins and outs of the country, making it even more engaging for the group. Before hitting the museum, we stopped at Lake Marathon, leaving us completely speechless. It was also a great pit-stop for group photos!

On our way to the beach (who could come to Greece and not attempt to go), we also stopped by the Archeological Museum of Marathon.

Our last stop before our time in Greece ended was, of course, the beach in NeaMakri, East Attica. This was a much-deserved trip after many hours of learning – and also a change of scenery from our time in the city. We finally were able to relax and enjoy ourselves freely – and Monday was the perfect day to do so, as the beach was practically empty (and we were a large group)!

Our day at the beach concluded our time in Greece, we ended on a great note, although tears were close to being shed – particularly when we did one final activity. Each person was given a small piece of paper with the name of a group member and we were asked to write something that you truly appreciate about this person and read it out them.



One of the biggest things that stood out to me about this process was being around people from different 'generations. Everyone in the room at some point had been faced with challenges, many of which we could all identify with even though we all came from different backgrounds. But the most important thing was that we were all open to learn from each other and to express ourselves to be able to find solutions to some of our biggest questions. We broke down barriers that people had set up for themselves, even the most introverted person broke through in order to come to common ground. There is power in vulnerability – and I truly experienced this in the most transformative way. Don't ever let yourself get in your own way.

And that pretty much concludes the trip. Strangers certainly turned into friends. Here's to many more trips together in the future!

I end this post with a poem that our facilitator read out to us about Sankofa and the meaning behind this word.



## SANKOFA

That bird is wise.  
Look.

Its' beak back turned picks for the present  
what is best from ancient eyes  
Then steps forward, on ahead  
To meet the future undeterred

Source 1: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/6/20/action-learning-the-real-voyage-of-discovery-consists-not-in-seeking-new-landscapes-but-having-new-eyes> [16/07/19]

Source 2: <https://theworldofamran.wordpress.com/2019/06/15/the-real-voyage-of-discovery-consists-not-in-seeking-new-landscapes-but-having-new-eyes/> [16/07/19]



# SECTION 4: INTRODUCTION TO BLACK EUROPE



This programme, first introduced in 2017 alongside the Systems Thinking programme, piloted an approach which sought to explore the colonial past of Netherlands, that shares a similar historical relationship with a colonial past as Britain.

Participants on the Black Europe programme were introduced to insights from local activists in Amsterdam alongside key speakers from the UK. From these perspectives participants would be able to gain insights that should enable them to better understand their own development and challenges, acquiring new knowledge, practical tools for exploring vex and contentious issues with the young people, adult learners and communities they work with and live in. The course included visits to places of historical and social significance to Black Europeans and to African Diaspora communities in Amsterdam in particular. It introduces embodiment techniques and processes as an alternative means of exploration and self-expression.



POEMS & REFLECTIONS  
ON INTRODUCTION TO BLACK EUROPE

AT HOME

by Alton Winter-Brown

At home, I was Alton, The son of the local singer.  
The baby of the family, who was always known to some as the quiet one.  
I was a bossy kid as my mama would always say.  
“Alton was always telling someone what to do”  
I was the little guy with the spirit of an old man.  
Known to my school friends as granddaddy.  
The class clown everyone wanted in their groups.  
The sharply dressed kid covering up all the damage and hurt with nice clothes.  
Hiding who I was and what really happened.  
With age, came experience and change.  
A change I saw coming but did my best to avoid.  
It’s funny how change can make you feel more lost than you were before.  
Overall a positive change that somehow made me feel less accepted, connected, so on and soon...  
My experience in the Netherlands has made me look deeper.  
Helped me see that it’s all okay.  
We are all different in many ways but in many ways the same.  
Connected!  
We all have a path, a path that is our own.  
My way may not be the way that others take or want, and that’s ok.  
My actions may not be the same as yours, and that’s okay.  
I’m still out in the sun of the local singer.  
I’m still bossy as my mama would say, only now an adult.  
Still have the spirit of an old man, and people still call me granddaddy.  
No longer the quiet one.  
Usually won’t shut up.  
And still the one people want in their group, because I tend to do all the work.  
The struggles I’ve been through will always be there.  
They are struggles that will never be forgotten.  
But in the end, this journey has been my make-up.  
The make-up of me.  
This journey has shaped me in every way.  
It’s good to remember every reaction comes with a story.  
And this is mine.  
That’s why my home experience will always be there.  
Because home is where the heart is.

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/7/22/poems-amp-reflections-on-introduction-to-black-europe>

POEMS & REFLECTIONS  
ON INTRODUCTION TO BLACK EUROPE

# INTRODUCTION TO BLACK EUROPE

by Peggy Warren

It was intergenerational  
A group of community activists who  
Are racial  
Exploring methods of liberation from the dominant Caucasians.  
We heard from the forerunners  
We saw the archives  
We pounded the streets to see the remnants of oppression with our own eyes.  
We sat in seats in a building that Black riches funded, in meeting rooms where black bodies could not have attended.  
We walked the streets looking up to see ancestral features peering down from on high.  
We listened till fatigued  
We laughed, were angry and some of us cried as we tried to make sense of the equality black peoples through centuries and to this day are denied.  
We explored cuisine together we sang together we questioned and did some reliving together. We weaved in and out of each other's conversations and with each weave there were deeper connections. An introduction to Black Europe that's what the visionaries called the course,  
It was a trajectory, will be a life-long memory of camaraderie, of investment, of equipping and inspiring of creativity and making sense, not a journey but a journeying.  
It was a time to be submerged fully then to rise resolutely with the knowledge that each one of us are as candles.  
From here we'll be dispersed to our assigned spaces to agitate, interrogate, advocate and engage in the struggle; to be lights of liberation in the dark corners of oppression.

So, thanks to those who dared...to the dreamers and doers:  
Ubele, Untold, Yvonne, Michael, Jerry, Aminata, Michael M, Cecil, Benji, Aisha, Otmar

Thank you. We salute you; we will honour you through enlightening and supporting the liberations of ourselves and others.

To my comrades of Introduction to Africa 2019, it was amazing doing life with you this week. May the courage of our ancestors be with us and guide us.

No longer strangers.

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/7/22/poems-amp-reflections-on-introduction-to-black-europe>

POEMS & REFLECTIONS  
ON INTRODUCTION TO BLACK EUROPE

# HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS...

by Vivienne Isebor

At home I was born as Adaobi; first daughter of a prince but couldn't convince my dad's ex-wife. I was born into a game of chess in a maze, lost in the Diaspora, a British Nigerian but Nigerian first. Had visions at birth of being lost in a hole that I couldn't get out, but what a beautiful feeling, to breathe in, breathe out.

I close my eyes in London and land in The Gambia hearing "what's your nice name?" and Wallof, arguing about who made jollof and laughing with sisters it felt like I always had.

Feeling home in the sand between my feet, within my soul. How home can be a feeling more than anything.

After my return, I was changed, saw community as my call. I found love in our difference. Home became a journey of connecting roads built apart by colonialism's hate.

The ties they stole but home meant rebuilding

Seeing past what I believe and setting overseas to see that Europe is a home for people who look like me. Whether it be Dutch or German, right across the Indies to Haiti how solidarity holds our dreams for Afrofuturism.

Home is something I believe, and as I sit and breathe in, breathe out.

Ihunanya.

Home is where the heart is.

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/7/22/poems-amp-reflections-on-introduction-to-black-europe>

POEMS & REFLECTIONS  
ON INTRODUCTION TO BLACK EUROPE

# HOME

by Barbara Ojei Agwaziam

At home I belonged  
I was protected from the harsh truth  
of being black in 90s Spain  
where a dash of black was enough to be othered,  
so, with my buckets of melanin  
I was in a league of my own  
And don't say it.

I know what you are thinking  
"but you are not even that black"  
I never claim the darkest struggle  
I simply seek to express my own.

I'm thankful for the haven that was my house  
the Nigerian Embassy in Barcelona  
with weekend parties where I would  
see all the other Nigerian kids  
and fill my belly with Supermalt  
and lick the Okro off my fingers  
whilst answering *odinma*  
to all my aunts and uncles  
asking me *kedu*?

But Monday morning the bubble would burst  
as I returned to a school full of white kids  
who sought to remind me of all the ways I was not like them,  
but every word ricocheted off my thick black skin  
because my mum says I'm great  
and that's all that matters  
because home is where the heart is.

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/7/22/poems-amp-reflections-on-introduction-to-black-europe>

# RACISM, RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

by Rianna Raymond-Williams



I attended the Introduction to Black Europe a year ago with UBELE and Untold Empowerment. Here I had one of the best Erasmus+ exchange experiences of my life. So much so, that I decided to come back a second time around to take part in the immersive, inspiring and nourishing learning experience, but also play a hand in helping UBELE as an organisation evaluate the project.

As a social entrepreneur and Erasmus+ coordinator, I know the importance of monitoring and evaluation to help improve performance and achieve results. Playing a dual role on this programme helped me to see all the things that worked well for me and other participants, but also some areas that may need improvement to ensure quality long-term.

Just as I experienced a year ago in 2018, I met a wide range of people doing amazing community work, many of whom shared the same interests in arts, youth development, health and wellness and African history as myself, but most importantly people who like me, were keen to do work that directly benefited and positively impacted people from the African Diaspora.

Over a period of 7 days, me and the other participants engaged in a structured learning programme consisting of talks, presentations, study visit and interactive activities to begin to understand how colonialism and imperialism negatively impacted the African Diaspora globally, in addition to looking at the tool, initiatives and community groups that have emerged and continued to preserve heritage and customs, build community cohesion and encourage racial esteem.

Here's a recap of our 7-day trip in The Netherlands:



## DAY 1

On arrival in Amsterdam, we came together as a group in our hotel meeting space, where we were asked to think about a question that we would ask ourselves as part of the course, to help frame the work that we do individually in line with the course activities.

For this activity, my question was the following:

*What does reproductive justice mean for the Afro-Caribbean community, and how can we bring this to life?*

Reproductive justice is "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities," according to SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, the first organisation founded to build a reproductive justice movement.

As a sexual health practitioner and researcher, I am aware of the negative sexual and reproductive health disparities that exist across the BAME communities, in addition to how much we are underrepresented in data regarding sexual health behaviour, attitudes and access to services. As a result, I work to address these issues in the community using interactive tools such as film, peer led training and resources in the form of posters, magazines and leaflets to start these conversations. I am currently developing my own qualitative survey to help understand the sexual health behaviour and attitudes of our communities with the aim of this data being shared to program and policy makers. After conducting the research, I am keen to use a range of art forms such as digital media, theatre and dance to communicate these messages to our community and wider audience so that we can begin to advocate for reproductive justice more effectively.

## DAY 2

Here we engaged in a drumming workshop delivered by a local musician and his son. During the workshop, we had the opportunity to participate in playing a range of sequences on the Djembe as a collective. This was also an opportunity for us to speak about the importance of the Djembe drum in African tradition which was used for communication - particularly in a time when enslaved Africans were forbidden to speak to one another - but also to see how the Djembe drum was used to enhance spiritual practices of faith and worship in uniting the community in playing and singing together. This was followed by a presentation by Jerry Afriye, a poet and human rights activist spearheading the Kick Out Swarte Piet Campaign in The Netherlands. The campaign aims to stop the racist and discriminatory yearly festival Sinterklaas in which some white people in The Netherlands parade around town as a blackface character Swarte Piet (Black Pete) with large gold earrings and exaggerated lips.

In 2015, the United Nations Committee urged the Netherlands to get rid of Black Pete in a report published on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which highlighted that Black Pete is directly connected to Dutch slavery history "the character of Black Pete is sometimes portrayed in a manner that reflects negative stereotypes of people of African descent and is experienced by many people of African descent as a vestige of slavery."

Despite Jerry and colleagues holding peaceful protests in recent years, they have faced on-going backlash from white supremacists resulting in harm, threats, and arrests. Hearing Jerry's presentation reminded me of just how much work still needs to be done to address racism and discrimination on a wider scale, globally, but particularly in Europe where this offensive festival still takes place.



### DAY 3

Here we took a trip to the Black Archives in Amsterdam, similar to the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, London, the space provides historical documentation and artefacts from African scholars and intellectuals, that have often been overlooked. As one of the only black owned building in Amsterdam, the Black Archives provides a space for exploration and understanding of past and present events. Some of the collections that currently exist are from Waldo Heilbron, Glenn Willemsen and the Otto and Hermine Huiswoud.

It was great to speak with the staff at the archives to hear about all the amazing artefacts that have been preserved and collected over the years. Although the archive is still being developed, the staff are keen to allow tours and visits to create awareness of the space and the opportunities for exploration that it offers.

Following the tour of the Black Archives, we went down to the Tropen Museum. Here we engaged in a tour of their permanent exhibition *Afterlives of Slavery*. It was great to see that the city has acknowledged the role they played in Slavery and the impact it had on African communities, but also important for the exhibition to be accessible all year round to a wide range of people living in and visiting The Netherlands.

Our personal tour guide Ashaki Leito - a long-time friend of Untold, specialises in African History tours - could provide a breakdown of the events and correct some of the factual inconsistencies to the museum to give us a clearer picture of the past. As a person visiting the exhibition for a second time it was disheartening to hear about the past atrocities, but nourishing to hear about the activism and resistance that existed, even in the past. It also encouraged me to think about how important it is that we are engaged in the work that is produced about our community, which is often not informed by the experiences or knowledge of people from African descent. We each play a part in sharing our history and making sure that it is factually accurate and representative, which can only be done through our own engagement.

In the evening, some of us went down to see the performance put on by Swazoom, which is the local Youth Services for the south-east community in The Bijmer, Amsterdam. SWAZOOM, was established as a broad welfare organization in 2004 for children, young people, their parents and other residents with a focus on leisure activities for children. The performance was a talent show in which young people took part in a range of stage performances that consisted of physical theatre, dance and rap. It was inspiring to see how talented the young people were and also how similar the youth culture in The Bijmer was to inner-city London – the only thing that was different was the language.

## DAY 4

In the morning we visited the OBA Bijlmerplein, in the centre of the Bijlmer community. Here we were invited to have a tour of the collections on youth, the Surinamese Community and Antillean community collection. We saw a wide range of historical artefacts and documents that retold the history of Africans in the TheBilmjer and Netherlands. The OBA is a cultural institution that aims to promote free movement of information in Amsterdam society. The space acts as community hub for residents to read, work and study.

In the afternoon, we engaged in a Black History Tour of the city which was deliver by a Sister Benji, also a long-time friend of Untold. She specialises in walking tours of the city and could provide us all with detailed account of events and historical building and monuments across the city which still have evidence of the Dutch involvement in colonialism and imperialism.

Throughout the tour what rung true to me was the infamous quote about things “being hidden in plain sight”. All the historical evidence of events of the past is undeniable and has been left for us to find, we just have to be conscious and interested enough to seek the information and knowledge. The experience made me think more about my life in London and how much information is visible in the city and streets that I live.

After the city tour, we visited the Slavery Monument in Oosterpark, which commemorates the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands in 1863. The monument was unveiled on 1st July 2002. Every year since, a celebration called Ketikoti, has been held in remembrance, which translate to ‘broken chains’ in Sranantongo(one of the creole languages spoken in Surinam).This work by the Surinamese artist Erwin de Vries represents the past, present and future. The thin figures chained to one another represent the slave past. A figure walks beneath an arch, breaking through the wall of resistance: the present. And in front, big, strong and glorious: the future. Freedom!

The monument is powerful; it was great to see so many people in the park for the festival which shows that the history is not forgotten.

## DAY 5

On this day Michael McMillian, lecturer, playwright and author of *The Front Room: Migrant Aesthetics in the Home*, a presentation and workshop. Here he spoke to us about his installation *The West Indian Front Room*, previously featured at the Geffrye Musuem in East London in 2005 – 2006 which represented his vision of the traditional ‘West Indian’ front room, drawn from memories of his parents’ and relatives’ homes in the 1960s and 1970s. As someone who knew Michael’s work it was such a pleasure to meet him and talk in depth about how he used art to retell his lived experience, like many other activist.

After the presentation, we each had the opportunity to divide into groups and use a range of pictures, words or physical theatre to express our own experience as part of the trip. Although we were only given a short space of time to create a present it was powerful to witness the creative nature of our group, which encouraged us all to think about how we could each develop they wok we produced to create a showcase in the future, to document and archive our experience as participants of the course.

This was followed by a presentation delivered by two local activists in The Netherlands Andre Reeder and Roy Wijkwho spoke to us about their journeys in activism over the years. Through listening to the presentation, we were able to see that much of the issues faced by the Black Community in the Netherlands, is no different to the issues Black communities faced and continue to face in London such as deprivation, police brutality, issues with social housing and ongoing issues of racism and oppression.





Lastly, we were given a presentation about Organising and Leadership in the African Community by scholar, UK activist and community organiser Cecil Gutzmore. As an elder in the community it was insightful to hear about all the past and present organisations and movements that have been created to unite Africans in the fight against oppression, but also motivating to think about what role I as an individual play in the grand scheme of a movement. Here we were all invited to think about how we could organise more successfully to achieve more, but also work more effectively as a collective with a united aim.

## DAY 6

The morning started with a short session delivered by Aminato Cairo who lectures in Inclusion and Diversity at The Hague in Amsterdam. To start the session we used a range of sound and movement as icebreakers which acted as an induction to the session, much of which was rooted in ancestral practices of African Communities to build and strengthen bonds in the community. In the session we looked at understanding the context of certain behaviour and thoughts, that may be oppressive or racist. That's not to excuse the behaviour, but by understanding the context of behaviours and thoughts, we can help ourselves in forming better reactions to situations that may be harmful or hurtful.

Here we were asked to think about how we can communicate messages of joy and pain succinctly using 1 – 3 word sound bites in pairs, in addition to thinking more collectively about power and control in relationship to race, class, gender or ability.

This was then followed by a session about journeys facilitated by Michael Hamilton in which we played out the roles of interviewee, questioner and observer in groups in an attempt to understand the makings of an activist, motivations for attending the course, reflections on the course so far and intentions moving forward. We heard stories of change and triumph from Yvonne Field about how her campaign to enrol in a grammar school acted as the catalyst for her life long career in activism, in addition to hearing other antidotes from speakers about elders who enabled them to develop the tools and skills to challenge oppression in their own ways.





## DAY 7

On the last day of the exchange we took part in evaluation in which we each were given someone's names in our group randomly on a piece of paper and were asked to write some words about them in relation to what we'd learnt about them through the week, how they've inspired or motivated us or any comments or words of advice. It was a great experience to witness so much love and support, but also to be a part of an amazing group of change makers who all contributed to an amazing emotional, education and enriching week as part of the Introduction to Black Europe program delivered by UBELE and Untold.

Throughout the week course, we as a group began to unravel the unspoken truths about the Dutch involvement in the slave trade, alongside the role other European powers such as Britain, Spain, Portugal and France played in enslaving Africans and the continued impact of oppression in modern times. But also the inspiring and motivating acts and initiatives of resistance and resilience that were and have continued to develop in the face of oppression among the Black in the community, in Europe, but globally.

Unfortunately, across the globe, the narrative about African diaspora is often negative and evokes connotations of disadvantage, struggle, poverty, lacking in education, resources and opportunities, however the small community of people I shared the same space with over the duration of 7 days were a testament to how false these ideas are as we emulated a community rich in ideas, experience, knowledge and resources each with our own plan to help shape and change the perception of our communities.

Overall, the course provided a space for exploration of African culture and traditions, understanding of activism in the face of oppressions and awareness of existing structural, political and economic issues that continue to displace Africans in the Diaspora.

Since travelling with Erasmus+ to over 10 different European countries over the last 18 months I have found that I am often 1 of or the only person from the Black Community. This highlights a need for Erasmus to do more to make their programs more accessible to African and Caribbean people across the continent, which I feel UBELE is trailblazing the way with.

I'm thankful to the friends that I have acquired throughout the week who made the learning experience such an amazing one. Moving forward, I would like to see courses like this feature as a permanent part of educational syllabus, that is not only aimed at the black community but everyone! African history is world history and without understanding the past we are unable to move forward.

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/7/31/racism-resistance-and-resilience-introduction-to-black-europe-by-rianna-raymond-williams>

# SECTION 5: SYSTEMS THINKING & SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS



This offered new frameworks to help emerging leaders understand and manage complexity, to navigate a world of interconnectedness and constant change. The training explored the fundamental principles of Systems Thinking, builds an understanding of the benefits of a shift from a mechanistic to a systemic approach and creates an opportunity to work with the practical applications of systemic principles to solve multidimensional problems.

A Systemic Constellation is a facilitated process that reveals hidden dynamics and resources that can bring resolution to internal issues within any relational system:personal, professional or organisational.

# MY 5 KEY TAKE AWAYS FROM SANKOFA'S SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS PROGRAMME IN ATHENS, GREECE

by Stuart Taylor



Travelling to Athens in Greece with Ubele Initiative this September was an attractive and exciting prospect to me for three main reasons.

Firstly, I'd spent a week under Ubele's auspices travelling in July with a larger group of thirty diverse emerging and established leaders from the UK's African diaspora activist and creative communities. Then we were meeting with counterpart activist organisations from The Netherlands Black communities, based in Amsterdam. We were introduced to the campaigns, difficulties, victories and ongoing resistance our Brothers and Sisters there are engaged in, as they challenge the shadow of racism, prejudice and social-economic inequity cast by The Netherlands colonial / modernist past-present. They're involved in positively addressing these social dynamics and advocating for and championing the richness of contemporary Black cultures in The Netherlands. That trip was intense, insightful, illuminating and inspiring.

Secondly, in my professional life here in London, I am (amongst other things) a Systemic Constellations Consultant / Facilitator. The prospect of spending a week, immersed in an experiential dive into the process work-based realm of Systemic Constellations, focussing on possible futures for Ubele Initiative itself, alongside exploring current and emergent dynamics within some of the organisations and projects of the smaller group of (18) colleagues from across the UK assembled in Athens was a rich learning opportunity.

Thirdly, there's always something unique that emerges in being away from home with such a dynamic group of passionate change makers. Athens proved to be a wonderful environment in which to participate in this creative, mysterious, potent and radically inclusive approach to bottoming-out the hidden dynamics at play within organisational systems. Our two Greek facilitators Markos and Chrysalu, skilfully led the process of wrangling our headstrong group, sharing their deep knowledge of Systemic Constellations and guiding us in the process of leaning-into and exploring our lived experience of our organisational settings. They effectively challenged us to dream, envision and sense possible desirable futures at personal and organisational levels. Together they demonstrated palpable expertise, real warmth and passion for the work. I was simultaneously exhausted, energised, surprised, delighted and inspired over the course of the week. There was plenty of laughter and some tears too, even when the going got tough – as it inevitably does when working at depth with psychological and emotional dynamics in organisational settings, everyone 'showed-up' in terms of their commitment, engagement, presence and willingness to embrace this -for most present- novel way of working.



So, my main takeaways from this week of exploring the efficacy and flexibility of systemic constellations as an approach to better understanding your own organisational setting, catalysing practical insights that lead to action and stimulating creative breakthrough in terms of system wide design, product, service and communications innovations are as follows:

1. Try it! Systemic Constellations really works
2. Be courageous and ready to show up in 5D – constellations work is transparent and really does show reality-as-it-is in your system
3. Be ready for surprise, laughter, tears and to have your assumptions stirred, challenged and reframed
4. Be prepared for genuine emotional movement. Your relational world really does become more sharply drawn and the respective intergenerational entanglements and alliances you're part of, are laid bare alongside the 'hidden' resources you have at your disposal
5. Change is possible and achievable when you're prepared to be open to the mysterious dynamics and wisdom of the Knowing field

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/9/23/my-5-key-take-aways-from-sankofas-systemic-constellations-programme-in-athens-greece-by-stuart-taylor>





# SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS: CREATING OUR 'KNOWING FIELDS'

by Ornette D Clennon



The most important thing that I took away from my Systemic Constellations time in Athens with Ubele and Fractality, was the power of building a 'knowing field'. In systemic constellations, the creation of a 'knowing field' enables all the participants in the space to (somehow) get on to the same (psychic) page and share a deep understanding and connection with each other by examining and 'feeling' latent family/ancestral dynamics. This idea of examining family (and ancestral) dynamics rather reminded me of a variety of Continental African ancestral worship. But what was interesting to me, was how this spiritual element of the 'knowing field' resonated very strongly with Robbie Shilliam's book, *Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*, where he identifies the cosmologies of Europe, Africa and Oceania, as represented by their spirit totems, Hermes, Legba and Tāne/Māui (respectively), who come together in a spiritual 'hinterland' away from the "fixing gaze of Britannica" (p. 23). In this hinterland, which is in essence a 'knowing field' these totems or ancestors walk in unity of purpose (where there is no hierarchical dominance), giving their children direction and guidance (if we choose to listen!).

It was the creation of these hinterlands or 'knowing fields' that enabled us to powerfully embody the representations of people and their issues in the safe space of the workshop. For me, this process was so strong that these hinterlands or 'knowing fields' over-spilled into our non-workshop interactions, where I found that I was able to connect to other individuals who became my friends, in ways that I had not anticipated. I felt that representing an individual or their issues in a 'knowing field' was a kind of emotional and intellectual gift of sacrifice, that we momentarily gave to one another, as we bore each other's psychic burdens in that space. This special form of sharing created a strong bond between us that I believe, enabled me to bring my whole-self (or as near enough as I could) to the group.

I also observed that this process worked on a group level, where, through the 'knowing field', a strong sense of its inner whole-self emerged in and outside of the workshop space. This, for me was very significant because for many people from the African diaspora working in majority-white environments, there are very few opportunities to bring one's whole-self to bear in building relationships with colleagues. I felt that systemic constellations enabled us to walk in our ancestral hinterlands, via our 'knowing fields' that deeply connected us, re-awakened our inner (ancestral) sensibilities and rejuvenated us in the power of who we gloriously are.

Then...we were ready to co-envision and co-plan Ubele's exciting future!

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2019/9/23/systemic-constellations-creating-our-knowing-fields-by-ornette-d-clennon>

# SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS – STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN

by Yansie Rolston

What do you do when you are unsure of your destiny?  
unsure of the journey you will traverse to get there.  
What do you do when you are worried about fitting in?  
concerned about dynamics, politics, the opposing views that you may face?  
The heart says “Turn up, go with the flow”.  
The mind says “but what if...but what if...”  
That is what happens when you are stepping into the unknown  
Planning for the future starts with focusing on the present  
But what do you do when nerves step in, heartbeat quickens, and throat gets dry?  
Some say “focus on your breathing”, others say “ignore your fears”  
We are in Greece, Athens to be precise,  
Sunshine beaming, warmth radiating and challenges unfolding  
The place is comfortable, the space welcoming, the energy in the circle invigorating  
But the fear of stepping into the unknown looms large  
Some embrace the experience and take to it immediately  
Others take time to observe, to rationalise, to question the details.  
Collectively we constellate issues, some personal some organisational.  
In the circle these challenges were placed:  
How to negotiate the transition, how to share, when to pass the baton  
How to deal with unconscious bias, prejudice and racism when your employer acts with disgrace;  
Family relationships are so complex, but what to do when they are vex;  
Organisational aspirations mean that it needs to grow, but where are the roots to be planted, who will  
nourish the soil, who will nurture the saplings, who will decide when the branches need pruning?  
Dreams are shared, differences observed, similarities acknowledged.  
We walk, we explore, we talk, we cry  
We laugh, we disagree, we shop, we eat  
And though we were stepping into the unknown  
We felt the fear but did it anyway.

Source: <https://www.ubele.org/blog/2020/1/9/systemic-constellations-stepping-into-the-unknown-by-yansie-rolston>



