



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

HEALING THE WATERS

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*Figure 1: Memorial Heads, Kwame Akoto-Bamfo. Nkyinkyim Museum.
<https://nkyinkyimmuseum.org/>*

In this paper I put forward the African and Shamanic belief of the Daoist tradition that ancestors and their memory are real, passed on from generation to generation. This memory includes the traumatic memories of enslavement and post slavery.

This understanding becomes important in the field of trauma and grief healing, as the transmission of ancestral trauma and grief memory from one generation to another is not fully understood. This transmission and our understanding of it has wide implications for those of African descendants who have suffered from ancestral, historical and continuous trauma. And for all who have suffered harm to the body, mind, and spirit resulting from loss of land, home, culture, and torture in its many forms.

I present and examine the images of Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's Memorial Heads installed in water as a visual guide through this discussion. Understanding the transmission of ancestral trauma especially in relation to African descendants is like climbing the Mount Everest of the Trauma field. If this trauma can be understood more fully, recognition that such trauma exists can open the field of trauma to profound exciting ways on how to effectively shift these sort of trauma memories up and out of the memory of the waters of the body. Above all, we give dignity to those who suffer from ancestral traumas of this magnitude by acknowledging that their trauma is real.

African and Daoist Perspective

Before delving into the subject of transmission of ancestral trauma from generation to generation from an African and Shamanistic belief of Daoist tradition, I would like to help readers understand my methodology for delving into this topic in this way. My own trauma experience stemming from feeling strangely disconnected from the land in which I was born, England, from my experience of a series of repetitive dreams of being welcomed to Africa as though Africa was my "real home," and from often feeling the presence of my great, great grandmother during that whole period of my life, led me as a late teen to wonder what is this feeling of disconnection and sadness I feel, and what is this ancestral presence that I can feel but cannot see. The only explanation I ever received was from my mother, born in Jamaica, who would say, "you are a child of the ancestors." Her explanation piqued my imagination and pushed my self-inquiry further.

My interest led me to study African Studies with International Law and Politics at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). My major was in African Spirituality. During my class on African Spirituality, I remember my mind often drifting into a land where there were drums playing and I would be dancing with others in the middle of a circle. Like my dreams it was a repetitive incident. Sometimes I did not know how long I had been daydreaming. Each time it happened, I felt shaken, the experience felt so real. It was through studying books such as John Mbiti's *Introduction to African Religions* (1975) that I began to realize I was having an ancestral experience. Mbiti calls ancestors Living Dead and refers to them as those who had died over just a few generations ago. He posits they are considered part of the family still, and will often show up in dreams, and visions with messages to aid the family or individuals' lives. During the course of this essay, I mostly refer to the

term ancestors, as it is the one that most readers are familiar with and that is still widely used within Africa and African diaspora communities.

It was my further studies in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and my subsequent trauma-focused counseling experience, that made me further realize that the sadness, aloneness, and feeling of not being Home I have felt and continue to feel is part of a common trauma response for those who are part of the African Diaspora, along with other black and brown bodied people who have experienced colonization. In the many experiential conversations I have had with those of the African Diaspora, and other colonized people, there is often a feeling that “something within me is calling me to return Home.” Especially among those who feel bereft of Home. Often, that something calling the individual Home is stated to be ancestors, and Home is often the place of ancestral origin. These conversations about returning Home and the ancestors calling the individual Home have led me even deeper in my journey to understand the generational ancestral trauma that black and brown bodied people carry, how it is communicated to us, who communicates it to us, and where in the body it lives.

After falling sick for almost a year, I was led into the field of acupuncture. Acupuncture made me feel better physically, but it also made me feel better emotionally. I was astonished because this is not an area of acupuncture that is often mentioned in the mainstream research papers on the practice. As if by some strange serendipity, I had a local acupuncture school just fifteen minutes from my home, rooted in Daoist traditional medical practices. The word Daoism meant nothing to me at the time, but as I delved into my studies, I became fascinated by the fact that Daoism is the oldest religious and medical practice in China, renowned for its Shamanistic ancestral and generational trauma healing treatments. The Eight Extraordinary Channels was the channel system treatment that gripped my imagination the most. Here was a channel that was the underground water reservoir of our bodies that held and could release all epigenetic traumas, generational gifts, and one’s destiny. It seemed too good to be true, until my personal clinical practice and application of this Channel treatment bore the claimed functions of this channel out to be true.

I felt an ancestral connection to Daoism because of its many unspoken connections to the African spiritual systems, such as that of the Yoruba. Familiar with the Yoruba divination system of Ifa, I became inquisitive about the Daoist I Ching’s uncanny similarity to it. The I Ching is the basis of the Chinese medical system and meridians. My many findings of the similarities between Daoism and African spiritual systems is best suited for another paper, but it is worth stating that I have often wondered if these seeming connections between Daoism and African spiritual systems means that I have the ancestral lived wisdom of both that rise and lived half submerged within the waters of my Eight Extraordinary Channels. As my husband put forward,

We make the mistake to disregard our progenitors. What they learned and what they practiced is in your DNA. When we talk of epigenetics we usually focus on the trauma, but there is a very useful part of epigenetics is the passing down of traditions and wisdom of the past. As a result, you are a living breathing evolving prodigy, of all I have been giving epigenetically, intellectually, and experientially.

The Ancestor in the Water

Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, multi-media sculptor, offered his artwork of African heads rising out of land and water as part of his African Project to honor the memory of enslaved Africans who suffered the horrors of slavery. The heads are installed on land in Ada Foah, a major slave market in the early nineteenth century that Kwame Akoto-Bamfo himself transformed into a museum. The idea of sculpting heads emerges from his Akan tradition of Ghana, where sculptured heads are made of the dead. The heads are known as Memorial Heads, *Nsodie*, carved upon the death of an individual as a form of commemorating their spirits, and becoming an object in which the spirit of the deceased may be invoked by their ancestors. The tradition of sculpting these heads began in the late-sixteenth century. These sculpted portraits were traditionally made of royalty.

The heads in the lake emerge ghost-like from shimmering water, each at a different level of submersion. The heads look in all directions with various expressions of astonishment, shock, and sadness. The central figure, with bandage wrapped around face, is emerging up out of the water while also looking into it with an expression of deep misery. In my eyes, the bandage speaks to the concept of woundedness and harm. When I see his eyes looking towards the waters, I wonder if he is seeking a way for the water to release him, but his sad expression speaks of a knowing that he is trapped.

I see Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's final cause to be that we really notice these figures, feel their pain, and then rescue them from the waters. When I look at the Memorial Heads, it appears they need our help, they need our honoring. By carving these heads as Memorial Heads, a form preserved for deceased royalty, the figures in the water, all in various states of degeneration, sorrow, and exasperation, call upon us to recognize them beyond their surface appearance toward the dignified people they are. The male figure in the middle has ascended out of the waters more than the others, and despite his wounded, dejected state, I see a person who appears to hold his body strong to denote "I am not this dejection, but I am dignity." Even though he has dignity, he is still trapped by the water, and the figures in the water appear to need the viewers' help to be released.

In the Akan tradition, the Memorial Heads are buried in a sacred area within the cemetery known as *Asensie*. At specific times of the year, the *Asensie* was the center of prayer and libation, ensuring the support of the ancestors. It is as though, if the viewer looking on at the Memorial Heads in their sacred cemetery of water indulges in some form of rescue, the figures will come out of the waters and fulfill a different role from that of captured Africans trapped within the water. Now they will perform the role of blessing those who pulled them out of those waters through their rescue efforts made through witnessing, acts of honoring, and in the case of these Memorial Heads physically pulling them out of the waters.

In the African tradition, ancestors retain a role in human affairs. They are tied to the welfare of the living and are part of the Kin group which is seen as comprised of the living and dead. They can bring good fortune and also misfortune to the living. Ezenweke's article (2008) reveals when the deceased die they are asked not to bring problems to those living relatives. They interact with the

living through dreams, visions, animals and other media. They live in a place that is unknown to the living. The ancestors can become angry when their instructions are not carried out, bestowing calamity on their descendants, and ancestors cannot be ancestors until their descendants do the proper honoring. If the proper honoring is not done, it is said they wander as ghosts (Ezenweke 2008, n.p.).

The viewers of the Memorial Heads are most frequently African diaspora descendants who descended from the figures in the water. Kwame Akoto-Bamfo modeled the Memorial Heads on the faces of Africans across Ghana and the African Diaspora. On viewing, honoring, and allowing our tears to fall into the waters where these Memorial Heads are installed, members of the African Diaspora help to end generational curses, pain, and negative familial issues that pass on from generation to generation. Many members of the African Diaspora from the Caribbean, United States, and Brazil, speak of family curses they have; many believe these curses come from generational trauma. I even ponder upon the one my own family members say they have. Does the curse come from not pulling the figures in the picture out of the waters and, by distinction, willfully or unconsciously neglecting them?

Viewer or Participant of Ancestral Trauma: What Water Teaches Us

The Memorial Heads remind me that I am not a viewer of the pain of the ancestral figures in the water, but a participant. This understanding is embodied within John Mbiti's declaration,

In traditional Africa, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. Whatever happens to the individual is believed to happen to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual [...] The individual can only say: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (Mbiti 1990, 101)

But this understanding is also memorialized in the African belief in water. In the Yoruba tradition, water is the most powerful medicine. It heals various conditions from infertility, lack of money, and emotional ails. If you pray into water and drink the water it will heal you. I look at the figure emerging out of the water with eyes cast towards it and reframe them not as a sign of defeat but as a sign of reverence to the power the water has to save him.

In Yoruba tradition, water is anthropomorphized as the Goddess Osun. Her characteristics and appellations include magnetism, birther of life, healer of nation, basis of all life form, healer of all, changer from solid to liquid to ethereal form. In an article from 2023 in *Nature*, Harrellson et al. reveals that there is no material more mysterious and unusual than water: "the character of many biological materials is actually created by the water that permeates these materials. Water gives rise to a solid and goes on to define the properties of that solid, all the while maintaining its liquid characteristics" (Harrellson et al. 2023, 500).

Ozgur Sahin, on whose research the paper is based, is clear: "When we take a walk in the woods, we think of the trees and plants around us as typical solids. This research shows that we should really think of those trees and plants as towers of water holding sugars and proteins in place. It's really water's world" (see Harrellson et al. 2023, 504).

The water the Memorial Heads rise and sink within is the same water that forms them, and holds their prayers, hopes, sorrows, pain, and memories.

The medium of water that the spirit of the Memorial Heads, stand, drown, and rise within are shared within my own body, as one of their descendants. I am like the tree that is not a tree but a water tower. I am the Memorial Heads, the figurines in the Water. I am like the characters standing under the pool of the exhibit in The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan. The exhibit called Swimming Pool, created by Argentine artist Leandro Erlich, has been one of the museum's permanent exhibitions since 2004. The pool is not a pool filled with water. It is a mere optical illusion, achieved by layering two transparent sheets of glass at the top of the pool, and filling the space in between with about 4 inches of water. The audience can go under the pool, and, to those viewing from above, those below become mysteriously part of the water, no longer audience, but participant, figures *of* the water.

The figure of the enslaved African male staring deep into the waters speaks to me of a knowing of this fact.

In Classical Chinese Medicine, the water is, likewise, not just water; it is Mother. Like the Yoruba Goddess Osun, water is the great healer of all that ails. Water is our universal medium, all things are suspended within it and made of it.

Ancestral Memory and the Waters of the Eight Extraordinary Channels

In Daoism our body is made up of waterways known as the meridians. Most people are familiar with these waterways or have at least heard of meridians. However, most have not heard of the Eight Extraordinary Channels, which are the deepest water reservoirs of the body. They are also the oldest channels. There are Eight of these Channels and all of them hold epigenetic material, which in Daoism is monumental, connecting us to our sense of true identity and life lessons. The waterways originate from the Kidneys and form a matrix through the body consciousness. They contain within them unresolved ancestral and lineage pain. Every eight to seven years unresolved events of our lives are stored and surface from within these channels. The Eight Extraordinary Channels are also called Ancestral Channels which underscores their importance in terms of lineage and ancestral trauma healing.

The First Ancestry of the Eight Extraordinary Channels consist of the Chong Mai, Du Mai, and Ren Mai, and connect us to our life's Blue Print, and helps us to answer the existential questions of Who Am I? Why Am I here? Do I have a purpose? How is the "Who Am I" lovable and worthy of nourishment? In the view of Daoism, the Memorial Heads whose identities are submerged, half

and fully covered by the events of the transatlantic Slave Trade, can, by the miracle of water, have those questions answered by the waters they are trapped within. The same waters hold fast to and produce their identities: Who am I? How am I to unfold in the afterlife? How do I become remembered by my ancestors? How do I bestow my blessings onto them?

The Second Ancestry of the Eight Extraordinary Channels stores Heart Pains of our current and past experiences, which would include those experiences that go as far back as hundreds of years of enslavement. They consist of the Wei Mai vessels. The Third Ancestry breaks the chains of not being able to move forward. These channels are known as Qiao Miao, The Heal or Stepping Vessels.

Kwame Akoto-Bamfo had some of the Memorial Heads installed at Cape Coast Castle, a notorious slave dungeon complex. I did not see them, but I walked through the grounds, dragged myself through Slave Dungeons and participated in an ancestral release ceremony where an almighty scream, cry, and a world of grief flew out of my body, spun open its head and flew out of the room. The invisible presence of my ancestors was there, I could feel it and them. The Western trauma field has no explanation or even recognition of the lived ancestral grief and trauma that exist in my body as an African descendant. The beauty of Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's installments gives visual representation to that which is hidden deep in the underground reservoir water world of the Eight Extraordinary Channels, and that which is inside and lives within me, which is colossal, but unrecognized in the therapy room or world in which I exist.

In Shamanic worldviews and Daoist philosophy alike, trauma is understood as the Soul scattering. It is not just my soul, but the soul of those who live within me. The waters of the Eight Extraordinary Channel absorb these scattered pieces until the time comes to effectively deal with them. Epigenetic trauma continues to pass from original person to descendants. It continues until it is resolved. In Daoism, this emotional spiritual material can leak to the surface when current events in life trigger it or, in African traditions, when the dead are no longer happy at it being ignored. Because of the African tradition of ancestralization of the Living Dead, it is important to have this type of trauma acknowledged and effectively helped. When the dead within do not become ancestralized they become the Gui, ghost, that haunt the deceased. Kwame Akoto-Bamfo Memorial Head emerging out of the water with eyes cast downward, and slightly covered by a dirtied cloth, in my eyes, recognizes that the enslavement process is scattering his soul and yet wills the scattered pieces to be absorbed by the waters, which will then become the medium through which those pieces become the substrate of libation and through which his descendants will restore him. His peace may come from the African knowing his voice as it calls for attention in dreams, and through life events that will travel through the waters and catch their attention. Sound moves at a faster speed in water (1500 meters/sec) than in air (about 340 meters/sec). His voice will be heard.

Time, Space, Waters, and Memory

In Daoist tradition, the Eight Extraordinary Channels are the weavers of events that we have passed on from past to present. The Second Ancestry of the Eight Extraordinary Channels comprises the Wei Mai Channels. The character of Wei—偉—has two parts. For the purpose of this discussion, it

is the left side I would like to mention. It is a thread of silk, reminiscent of a net, a network, and the ability to link or bind something. The character Wei also means “tie, to hold fast; to attach with a rope, or to hold in a great net. The great net has a very firm and solid main string, which attaches all the smaller parts of the net” (Larre et al. 2015 [1996], 187). I believe that this net is the stream of ancestral consciousness that exists in/as the waters and holds ancestor and descendant memory together. The net that binds, in regard to the Eight Extraordinary Wei Mai channels, is also the trauma that has passed on from generation to generation.

In Daoism, the Wei symbolize and actualize time as a continuous stream-like thread of consciousness. This continuous thread of space, time, and consciousness is recognized within African society as Hantu.

The African (Bantu) speak of Han-Ntu, which is the concept of space-time. They use this expression to mean that space and time come together; they merge to form one mass of time and space fused into a single continuum. The Bantu concept of space-time, as one entity, has been around for a millennium, even before its discovery in the Western world. (Lokanga 2021, 8)

In “The Concept of Space and Time: An African Perspective,” Ediho Lokanga posits that “Africans have a holistic, whole, conceptual view of space and time and believe that we are all interconnected, an idea which is similar to the holographic universe theory.” This view of space and time may “connect our sense of wholeness” (5). In Bantu,

[the concept of] space and time is [channeled] through the knowledge of consciousness. They [the Bantu] insist on the paramount role of consciousness as the source of everything, the fundamental entity. During sleep, our sleeping consciousness can move freely in a spaceless and timeless universe. There is, in a sense, no such thing as space or time, and we live in a spaceless and timeless universe. (8)

The Western concept of time and space has colonized all areas of our existence including the trauma field. To share Ediho Lokanga’s research again, the Western concept of time and space is where the “past is the past, and the present is the present.” Time and space are “linear and sequential,” and consciousness has no fundamental recognizable place. This differs from the African Knowledge System of time and space where, “The past, present, and future are intertwined” and “under certain conditions, the past enters the present and future,” and “consciousness is fundamental” (7).

The two varying views of time, space, and consciousness have a profound impact on how we recognize ancestral trauma which passes from one generation to another, especially in the case of the monumental ancestral pain of African descendants. Which time we choose colors the solutions we offer or don’t offer to shift and release the pain, and even determines whether we give dignity to it or don’t. The time we choose further affects how we view the concept that the pain we see and sense is in any way, shape, or form connected to that of the individual’s ancestors and lineage of suffering. The white and even black therapist trained in the Western therapeutic paradigm will

often tend to mislabel their African-descended client's condition within a framework that pathologizes the client and strips them of dignity, not to mention prevents them from healing. That paradigm gives wrong labels such as schizo-affective, bi-polar, ADHD, anxiety disorder, and more. Followed by wrong solutions.

Therefore, we need a radical shift in how we deal therapeutically with the trauma of African descendants who occupy the pinnacle of the epigenetic trauma mountain that has grown higher and wider over four hundred years of enslavement and continuous racialized traumatization. Our new approach will then help descendants of Native Americans and others who have suffered from epigenetic ancestral trauma. The trauma memories are not in broken brains, but in the memories of our body's waters, which Dr. Jennifer Muller, author of *De-Colonize Therapy*, refers to as "amniotic memory" in reference to water as memory keeper. Her full statement is worth sharing: "I believe our bodies and amniotic memories know memories way before us, [they] are just like purging, and sick." These ancient African and Shamanistic beliefs are echoed in the words of Credo Mutwa, South African Zulu Wisdom Keeper. When I interviewed him years ago, I asked how we are to heal the ails of the world. He responded, "when there is a deep issue, that seems insurmountable in the community, we go to the waters, and we call on the water mother who lies on a bed of water, and we pray to her for healing. She answers our prayers. She is the only one who can answer them in dire times. She is the only one who can solve the issue."

Rescue from Within the Waters

Somatic Experiencing is a mode of therapy first conceptualized by Peter Levine in the 1970s and that is now considered a leading-edge therapy in the field of trauma and healing PTSD. Somatic Experiencing focuses on how traumatic symptoms and emotions express themselves in the body. It views the key to healing traumatic symptoms as existing within our physiology. Peter Levine developed Somatic Experiencing from his observation on how animals in the wild recover from the traumatic experience of being attacked by a predator. When an animal like an impala is attacked by a cheetah, it tends to fall into a state of altered consciousness, as though it is dead. It is a state known as "immobility" and "freezing."

Peter Levine puts forward three primary responses that occurs when a mammal is attacked: fight, flight, and freeze. He posits that of all the responses the immobility response is the most important in uncovering what he calls "the mystery of human trauma." The Impala's state of immobility is a survival strategy. If a Cheetah drags the Impala to its den as food for later, the Impala can awaken from its immobilized state, and escape. Out of danger it will shake, release the trauma, and regain full control of its bodily functions. In the state of immobility, no pain is felt, which means if the Cheetah decides to eat it, it will not feel the pain of teeth sinking into flesh and being torn to pieces (1997, 33).

The ability to become immobilized during a traumatic event, as proposed by Peter Levine, is the key to avoiding the dire effects of trauma. Both animals and humans use the involuntary immobilization response when faced with a threat that feels overwhelming or inescapable. The

Instinctual aspects of the brain and the nervous system beget this immobilization. The key to healing trauma for humans in Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing model is to mimic the impala and other animals as they shake through and out of the immobilization state.

For the Impala and other animals facing danger the instinct to become immobilized is natural as is the shake through their trauma. However, Peter Levine concludes that this is not so for humans whose brains override their natural, instinctual impulse. We may freeze in fear but fail to move to the other stage of resolving the freeze by moving and shaking it off.

In Western therapeutic language, trauma is the distressing response or group of responses to stressful events that exist outside of our normal human experience. For Levine, this definition is vague. What is outside of the range of the usual human experience? (1997, 24).¹ Levine declares that we don't need a definition of trauma; rather, we need an "experiential sense of how it feels." Traumatic symptoms are caused by frozen residues of energy that remain trapped in the nervous system and that have not been resolved or discharged. Unlike us, animals tend to discharge all their trapped energy, and therefore do not develop traumatic symptoms from life threatening events. We need to regain this ability (1997, 20).

When we go back to Kwame Akoto-Bamfo Memorial Heads in the water in various states of submersion, I postulate if at the original time of experiencing the traumatic event of being enslaved they had been able to move through the energy trapped in their nervous system, they would be free and there would be no trauma. However, we can see those Memorial Heads are trapped in the waters. They can not move through their experience. Cape Coast Slave Castle guide shared, "the men's punishment dungeon was designed with no windows, and two double doors that closed. The enslaved men who were sent there were being punished for resisting their enslavement. They were put there as a warning to any other men trying to escape or resist. Once the door closed, they received no food or air. The door was opened three days later, and all the men would be dead." The extra fortified design of the Cape Coast Slave Castle, is symbolic of the structures of the enslavement process, designed so very few could escape. The lucky few threw themselves into the ocean when the slave ships crossed the Atlantic. Their freedom was in the waters.

For those who were trapped, where does the monumental pain, sorrow, disbelief, and disgust go? As stated earlier, in Daoism it goes into the water reservoirs of the body, the Eight Extraordinary Channels, and is passed on from generation to generation. The Eight Extraordinary Channels stores unresolved trauma memory until the right time and the space is available to make it safely accessible to be released. The storing of trauma in this way allowed the enslaved African trapped in their circumstances to function.

The epistemology of the Eight Extraordinary Channels first appears in the oldest two medical books of Classical Chinese medicine (also referred to as Daoism), the *Su Wen* and *Ling Shu* of the Han Dynasty, 202 BC. This way of knowing, its theory, clinical practice, wisdom, practical application, and effectiveness, has been well documented through several dynasties, including the Han, Yuan dynasty of 1196 AD, the Ming Dynasty of 1368, and then on into current times.

As in Somatic Experiencing, there is a shaking that occurs with this healing to help release the generational trauma experience. But it is not the shaking of the body; it is the shaking and vibrating of the needle. The Daoist practitioner with the intention of implementing the Eight Extraordinary treatment determines the treatment strategy through discussion with the client, clinical intake, and pulse taking. The presence of the vibrating pulse is a strong indicator that the Eight Extraordinary Channels would be appropriate for use and also points toward and which channel is most ideal to treat. When the vibrating pulse is not present, the client's story may still indicate the appropriateness of treating the Eight Extraordinary Channels.

Once the Eight Extraordinary Channel has been indicated, the practitioner will typically use the opening and closing points of the chosen channel, which act as gate openers to the Channel and allow for the release of unresolved generational trauma. (Further points along the Channel may be utilized.) When the treatment begins, the client lies on the bed, and the practitioner begins the insertion of the needles. The needle technique is to vibrate the needle, to send a message to the body that the Eight Extraordinary treatment has begun, to match the energetic rhythm of the deep underwater reservoirs of the body, and to let the body know it is safe and can release damaging traumatic generational material. The treatment is administered over a period of three months, once per week, though one week of each month passes over the treatment. Daoist acupuncture students are trained to also know how to administer these treatments with no needles and, instead, to use the energetics of healing items such as essential oils and medicinal stones.

I witnessed the effective application and results of the Eight Extraordinary Channel treatments for those of African and African descent suffering from generational trauma when I organized a free pilot program, *Acupuncture for Diverse Moms and Children*, as an acupuncture student intern at the Daoist Traditions College Student Acupuncture Clinic. The program consisted of up to ten women, with one African woman, eight African-American moms, and one Asian-American mom. Eight women reported they were suffering from generational trauma with various levels of physical, emotional and life suffering. I asked each client to fill in a survey after each treatment. After the first treatment, ninety percent of the women reported a fifty percent improvement in physical and emotional conditions. By the second treatment the percentage of improvement had increased to seventy percent. Most of the women only received some Eight Extraordinary treatments as their sessions were not as long as others. In the clinic room, I witnessed the reduction of many women's generational psycho-physical-emotional trauma symptoms such as stomach pains, neck stiffness, back aches, insomnia, depression, negative thought patterns and behaviors. It was common during and after treatment to hear the women say, "I feel like a load has been lifted of me;" "I feel lighter;" "I feel more hopeful;" "my heart feels at ease;" "I feel ready to live more fully."

Centuries of usage up to current times has revealed the Eight Extraordinary Channel treatments to be successful at releasing the generational trauma material, including that of the African diaspora and other BIPOC people, and those who have suffered from various forms of colonial oppression.

I posit that Somatic Experiencing cannot effectively help release generational trauma, such as the juggernaut of Diaspora generational trauma, which is contained within the waters of the body. By the very definition of Somatic Experiencing, it helps the individual move through and complete a nervous system response of real or perceived threat. In terms of the Africa Diaspora, Somatic Experiencing can help regulate the nerves that jangle, jar, freeze, and spin from the ongoing racial experiencing. It can even help with the jangling of nerves from generational trauma, but it cannot heal generational trauma. This is also true for the cognitive based therapies such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), which believe trauma is connected to how we store information in the brain. These therapies have merit, but they cannot heal the Memorial Heads who find themselves trapped in the waters. Water is what traps them, but in the true tradition of the African and Daoist belief system, water is what can liberate them.

Peter Levine himself set himself apart from therapists that only viewed trauma as psychological. His more than twenty-five years of work taught him that trauma is also physiological and led him to state, “until we understand that traumatic symptoms are physiological as well as psychological, we will be woefully inadequate in our attempts to heal them” (1997, 32). I would like to repeat the same sentence by adding, “until we understand that generational trauma symptoms are in the waters, as well as physiological, and psychological, we will be woefully inadequate in our attempts to heal them.” Peter Levine also states that unresolved trauma can keep us in an “ever tightening circle of dangerous re-enactment, victimization, and unwise exposure to the danger. We become perpetual victims or therapy clients.” He feels the “solution to the problem lies in increasing our knowledge about how to heal trauma” (32). Agreed. In this discussion I share an expanded paradigm on how to heal trauma, one that has been passed on through the generations. I am hoping that the male Memorial Head half sinking and half rising in the water knows I have heard his voice, and secret message uttered low beneath his breath, that his healing is in the waters.

Ritual and Ancestral Healing

As I gaze some more upon the image of the male Memorial Head sinking and rising out of the waters, with eyes looking downward, I know through the ritual enactment in the male slave dungeon of Cape Coast that he and those other ancestors half sinking and emerging out of the waters with him could see me and the other three people present for the ceremony. We have already established the African world view on space and time as being interconnected with the presence of consciousness.

Our ceremonial guide, Odi Okaka Oquosa—an Indigenous artist, philosopher, and social worker—placed a finely carved wooden boat in the middle of the male dungeon floor. In the boat sat a carefully crafted female figure steering the boat. He called her, “lady of the light.” He revealed that she was steering those Africans who had been captured and enslaved across the waters and back to safety. She was their rescuer, liberator, and guide. Next to the boat he placed an implement of chained stones. The stones were medium sized with holes in the middle, they were bound together by metal links that looked like the chains made of solid iron with a simple twist lock that had been

used to restrain the feet or ankles of slaves. Placed by the boat and chained stones was a calabash, otherwise known as a gourd in America, filled with water. The water represented that which holds our memory and was a medium of our messages.

The air was deathly silent as Oquosa spent time to arrange everything in the right order and direction. Once everything was ready, he explained that when we participate in the ceremony, we are acknowledging our ancestors who were carried across the North Atlantic Ocean through the transatlantic slave trade. One by one we would each come forward to the center and offer a prayer into the water and cut the chain for at least two of the bound stones. We would each hold onto our released stones and cut chains until we had all finished, and then we would put everything into the ocean, representing the liberation of our enslaved ancestors and Self. The lady of the boat will guide the whole process. The final touch would be the vibration of drumming, which would penetrate air, earth, and the waters of the Eight Extraordinary Channels.

As we each went forward to do our prayer, a different bodily experience occurred. I cried, my husband stared numbly into the air and played the drums, our ceremonial guide started to quietly shake. Whatever occurred, we directed our prayers and release into the waters. In that moment the chains connecting the stones felt like the heavy iron chains that connected enslaved African to enslaved African, and the boat seemed like a big ship, and the lady rowing the boat appeared to be a true savior. Afterwards, we each reported we felt the presence of the ancestors, something released from our body, and a feeling of deep peace settled upon us.

Were our ceremonial experiences fantasy or imagination? Julian Scot puts forward,

Fantasy, no; imagination, yes. For imagination is the capacity to symbolize and to connect with what the symbol (image) represents – its Being. The sun in this world represents another sun in the invisible world: God or the Great Spirit.” He further reminds us, “A ritual or ceremony is a re-enactment of the creation of the world, an opportunity to connect with the creative forces of the origins and so to begin again, to regenerate oneself and to emerge renewed. An example of this is the rite of baptism, which is to be immersed in the primordial waters, to suffer the Deluge and to re-emerge on the primordial mound of a new creation. (Scott 2020, n.p.)

And what of the ritual objects used? Again, Scott helps us to understand that in ceremony, “ritual, material elements play an important part. They are the vehicles through which the invisible can become manifest and the consciousness can ascend to a more exalted state than its usual mundane condition” (Ibid.).

Our ceremonial host finished the ceremony by guiding us to the ocean that had carried the many boats of the transatlantic slave trade across its broken body and became the water burial site for thousands of unnamed ancestors who believed that throwing themselves into the water was their final liberation. Such was the case of the seventy enslaved Igbo people of Nigeria who walked into the marshy waters of Dunbar Creek and committed mass suicide. Locals say those marshy waters are haunted by the souls of those who died in them (Momodu 2016, n.p.).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I posit that ancestral lineage harm, trauma, and grief is real. It is passed on from generation to generation through the memory of water. Until the pain is resolved it continues haunting its descendants and doing harm. The pain is connected to the ancestors, who in African tradition are seen as members of the family who bless but can also cause disturbances in the mind, body, and spirit if unhappy. Acknowledging this African and Daoist concept of trauma can help us understand more fully how to heal the elephant standing on top of the highest mountain of trauma and in our deepest waterways, thereby allowing a transformation and expansion of how the therapy fields deal with the trauma of those whose ancestors faced enslavement and colonization. I believe that the Daoist Eight Extraordinary Channel treatments can play a fundamental role in the epigenetic trauma healing field, as they have the ability to release generational and ancestral trauma material from the waters which harbors it.

Notes

¹ The Somatic Experiencing website describes the modality in this way: "Somatic Experiencing (SE™) aims to resolve symptoms of stress, shock, and trauma that accumulate in our bodies. When we are stuck in patterns of fight, flight, or freeze, SE helps us release, recover, and become more resilient. [...] The SE approach releases traumatic shock, which is key to transforming PTSD and the wounds of emotional and early developmental attachment trauma. It offers a framework to assess where a person is 'stuck' in the fight, flight or freeze responses and provides clinical tools to resolve these fixated physiological states" (Somatic Experiencing International).

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Biography

Dr. Omileye Achikeobi-Lewis is a former graduate student of London University School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) where she studied African Studies and International Politics. At SOAS she fell in love with studying ancient healing practices. She deepened her studies of trauma healing as a student of Winthrop University Counseling and Development program, and eventually began to hone her knowledge of how to shift ancestral trauma while studying Classical Chinese Medicine as a doctorate student at The Daoist Traditions College of Chinese Medical Arts. She has spent many years of her life following what she now calls the Black Trauma Trail, and an intensive year in Ghana understanding what she calls the Mount Everest of ancestral trauma caused by the transatlantic Slave Trade. She is the author and illustrator of *My Heart Flies Open* published by North Atlantic Books, distributed by Penguin Random House, and is currently working on her next book, *The Stories in the Blood: Alchemy of Healing the Ancestral Trauma Body*. Dr. Omileye has a deep belief that the ecology of our Earth and Waters is affected by the lineage wounds we carry collectively. When we heal, the waters and Earth heals too.

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