

to share, to receive gratefully and graciously indicative of true liberation? A liberated, transformed world is made up of liberated transformed individuals. Imagine if you and I could be part of bringing about that transformation and liberation!

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## Chapter 5

# You, Going Global: Exploring Identity Politics through Expressive Arts in Preparation for Travel

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I was completing the last day of my first 3-day session in Beijing, China, with a deep sigh of relief and satisfaction, when a young male participant approached me and asked for a photo with me. We had a deep and tender moment during a Jungian expressive arts therapy (EXAT) process on the first day, and I thought this was why he requested a photo. After we took the photos and hugged, I turned to see a line of participants standing waiting for me. I did not understand this unusual gesture. This young man told me, "In China we honor our teachers [referring to therapists, trainers and teachers], and if they like you, students want a photo of you to take home with them." This would prove to be the closing ritual for my encounters while working in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau. These photo sessions became a symbol for me of what working globally could mean. On one level, this can symbolize a deep and profound cross-cultural connection: sharing, and honoring the mutual desire for relationship. These photos might also reveal ways in which I may have been unconscious about how I might be perceived by another. Who was I to them, and who were they to me? These questions rekindled my

interest in the concept of identity (Erikson, 1980) and identity politics, this latter term arising out of 1960s consciousness-raising movements and developed philosophically in the 1970s (Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Mohanty, & Moya, 2006; Nicholson, 2008), and have since become important aspects of postmodern training in the field of psychology. Identity defines subjectively *who I am*, whereas identity politics/social identity delves into *who am I to the other*—what characteristics they might ascribe to me (Alcoff & Mendieta, 2003). The exploration of one's own identity structure is an essential part of one's preparation when considering becoming a mental health worker globally.

Expressive arts (EXA) processes are a perfect vehicle to help explore these deeper and complex levels of personal experience and interpersonal as well as cross-cultural interchange. Identity and social issues are revealed not only through words but through images, symbols, and the body. Every person and culture has its own story, literal and symbolic language, metaphor, and myths told through song, poetry, dance, and drama. The EXAs reawaken the language of image, movement, sound, metaphor, drama, and poetic utterances, revealing and expressing what often cannot be put into words. Drawing, painting, sculpture, movement, dance, sand play, and ritual provide access to conscious and unconscious perceptions and projections as well as creativity, resiliency, and self-care. The arts are universal languages of joy and sorrow, found in every culture, and are often easily understood cross-culturally. EXA can advance a universal language of experience that can aid us in exploring our identity as well as the politics of identity and thus ready us for going global (Levine & Levine, 1999).

In this chapter, I share from my personal travels and professional work globally as a means to explore these concepts: identity, ascriptive identity (politics of identity), cultural complex, resiliency, and self-care. These are essential ideas that one needs to investigate in preparing to work internationally, especially in the field of mental health. I offer ideas about how to explore each concept through EXA processes in the hope of promoting more personal, cultural awareness, and readiness to meet the challenges of a cross-cultural experience and additionally, more respectful, deep, international interchanges and cultural understanding.

## PERSONAL SUBJECTIVE IDENTITY

Who am I? How do I understand myself? What is my self-concept? What are the experiences that help me feel a sense of continuity and uniqueness? What are new places and immersion in new cultures often pushes us to see more clearly the deep parts of our self that stay with us, no matter our environment. It can create an opportunity to understand ourselves more clearly and to possibly define aspects of ourselves that remain with us throughout our lives, for example, deep motivations and identifications, creative drives, ideals, and ethics. What are my symbols that help to define me? What universals or archetypes are important to me? One's

self-concept will be challenged in international work. If you understand the challenge, this can help you develop an expanded sense of yourself, which will aid you in your work.

One way to recognize who you are can be to see clearly where you came from and what shaped you as you grew. Family is our first social community that helps to form our identity and gives us meaningful symbols. Looking at our life story and the things that stand out for us may give us words to describe ourselves and to understand the lens through which we see our world. This EXA process, suggested next, will aid you in understanding your own life story and symbolic landscape. I am suggesting a visual arts process as this art form offers reflective distance in which we "get the picture" and can also reveal unconscious material more readily. The old saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" will become evident with this process (Hiscox & Calish, 1998). You can either do it alone with drawing supplies and paper or with a friend, having him or her record your process as well as witness it.

### Personal Terrain Exercise

1. Secure three pieces of tracing paper so they can be layered later, and gather drawing supplies, such as pastels, crayons, colored pencils, or magic markers.
2. On the first piece, draw the terrain of your childhood. The concept of terrain is one you will interpret yourself. Some examples of how one can interpret this are an actual place or special spot, the emotional terrain, or a timeline of events. See where your imagination takes you. For example, a young supervisee who was thinking of working internationally did this process with me. He created a landscape of events from his childhood along a horizontal timeline.
3. Notice what is in your terrain. What stories does this tell about your childhood? What was important? What wounded you? What gave you strength? What fed your creativity and personal growth? Write in a stream of consciousness style, for example, words, phrases, images, memories, reverie, or associations.
4. Put this aside. Take the next piece of tracing paper and draw the terrain of your adolescence. If you created your first terrain horizontally, create this drawing horizontally or vice versa if your first terrain was vertical. Do not feel limited to explore it in the same manner as the first; your childhood may have been a literal timeline of events, and this may be an abstract drawing of colors or energy. My young supervisee created a flow of color that had different energies and space on the page that reflected his emotions during adolescence. Just follow your own intuition on how this needs to reflect your adolescence for you. After you draw this explore it in writing.

5. Draw the terrain of your adult life now. Again choose the best way to represent this. My supervisee chose one symbol of a thriving tree to represent his adult terrain. Explore again in writing.
6. Place all the drawings in chronological order and let them tell you a story about your development. Write or speak this story as it comes to you.
7. Now play with these pieces of tracing paper. Place the childhood terrain on the bottom, then place the adolescent terrain on top. Take a moment and see what new picture this makes for you in revealing what has lasted, what shines through from the past and what changed. Continue placing the papers in different relationships to each other and see what comes up for you.

This whole process will give you a deeper sense of your identity, what shaped it in your family, peer groups, and throughout your development. You can start to see how different aspects of your culture helped define you. Aspects of culture can include gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, educational level, disabilities, immigration status, sexual orientation, occupation, religion/spiritual practice, and political affiliation to name a few. We explore this more later in the chapter.

### Archetypes and Identity

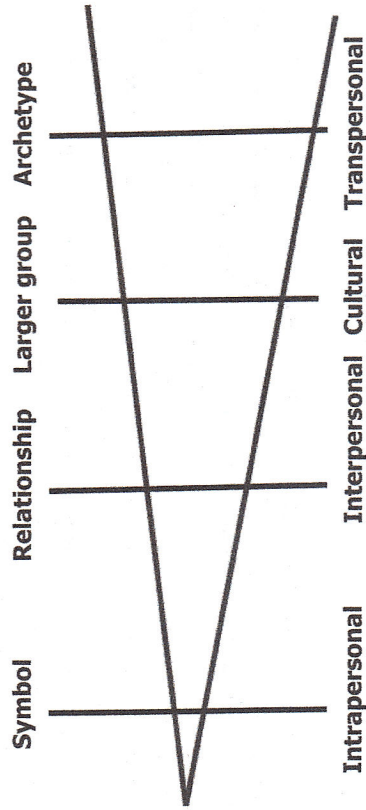
According to Jung (1954), as we develop, we have a self-regulatory function toward growth. We are dealing with the tension of opposites that promote growth, and we possess incredible resiliency that he thought was fuel for our creativity and imagination. So in your drawings, you may see what strengths were cultivated in you, what you were allowed to show the outer world, called the *persona*, what you were not allowed to reveal to yourself or the outer world, called the *shadow*, and how your resiliency created change, as mentioned previously, the compensatory function. You may also see some deeper longing or essence that helps define your core identity, called the self. Jung also believed that we are aided by the universals in everyone, called *archetypes*. They are like a DNA coding that recognizes these universals in us, others, and other cultures. In terms of cross-cultural understanding, archetypes can be helpful, knowing that at the core we all share birth, initiation, union/partnership/marriage, generativity, creativity, death, and trickster energies to name a few.

The work of Jung can be helpful in delving into one's personal identity formation through an EXA lens. Jung proposed that if people really want to understand themselves, they must look at what symbols, images, values, and ideas are important to them. This will be our next layer of investigation. Images can also reveal other layers of identity formation that we discuss in later sections of this chapter. Starting with your own memories, feelings, and reverie about your childhood, you can begin to uncover the budding aspects of your self-concept. Remembering

favorite childhood stories, fairytales, or TV or movie heroes can give us a glimpse of what was compelling to us. Take a moment and write down your favorite childhood story, song, character in a TV show, book, or movie. For example, my revelry would reveal that *The Little Match Stick Girl* by Hans Christian Andersen was my favorite childhood story; Mary Magdalene, my favorite saint; and in adolescence, folk and rock music and poetry helped me survive. Social issues fueled me, and Frida Kahlo was my favorite artist. As a young adult, Margaret Mead was my idol, and cultural travel became my passion. Additionally, I would consider how travel that focused on culture changed my internal terrain. All these images made a tapestry that revealed my essence and values and would eventually help me understand myself as I traveled and worked in other countries. Record yours, because we will use these later.

Over the years in EXA, I developed a paradigm on the potentials of an image. This refers to the multitude of meanings one image can hold. The paradigm is outlined in Figure 5.1 and allows us to understand how our images can not only inform us of personal meaning and give rise to reflection but can reveal meaning in terms of our relationships, small-group affiliations that compose our culture, and connect us to universal archetypes. Another EXA process can help you understand the connections between self and culture through images used in this paradigm.

Figure 5.1.  
Potentials of an image.



The potential of an image to illuminate our experience in the intra-psychic, interpersonal, and transpersonal realms.

## Archetypal Images Exercise

1. Select an image from your reveries or from your drawings. For example, another supervisee who was exploring working internationally picked *Zorro* from her childhood revelry of favorite TV shows.
2. Following the graphic, ask what this image or symbol means to you personally. She longed for adventure and also deeply longed to be a hero and rescuer herself.
3. Moving along the graphic, ask yourself what this symbol might reveal to you about how you are in relationships. She longed to fall in love with a hero, and on some level, she wanted a sensual, dashing knight to rescue her.
4. Explore what this image might open you to in terms of your culture. She had to grapple with internalized stereotypes of men and women that changed over time. She became the rescuer and followed this passion into the mental health field.
5. In your image, there may also be some cross-cultural associations. She also had a longing for cultures other than the one she experienced growing up, particularly the Spanish culture that seemed more romantic and sensual to her.
6. Moving toward the last part of the graphic, what can it reveal to you about universal or archetypal meaning?

## Cultural Complexes

Singer and Kimbles (2004) espoused the concept of a “cultural complex,” an understanding that culture is an integral aspect of how we experience the world and informs our internal world and complexes—these emotional issues in our lives. Class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual practices, and physical differences can create cultural complexes. As you look at your drawings, notice if there is any wounding that relates more closely to a cultural affiliation you have. In my supervisee’s associations to *Zorro*, she realized she would need to grapple with the wounding she experienced about being a woman. She was raised in a working-class home in which women’s roles were still more traditional. Kimble’s cultural idea allows us to explore culturally determined issues (Jones, 2006) as well as intergenerational trauma (Levine & Levine, 2011; Rogers, 2011).

## Autoethnography Exercise

After you have collected your images from your reverie, created reflective visual maps of your terrains at different times of your life, and investigated your images personally, interpersonally, culturally, and archetypally, you have the ingredients for another EXA process, storytelling through autoethnography (Ellis, 2004;

Maréchal, 2010). Starting with your images and family stories, take this opportunity to investigate how your family expresses its culture in the way rituals are conducted: holidays, births, initiations, coupling, child rearing, illnesses, and death. Telling your story this way will help you connect your personal autobiography to the cultural, social, and political.

1. Write the story of your life. You can start with “There once was a boy/girl” . . . or “Once upon a time . . .” This can help you get started and create the story of your life in a more mythopoetic style.
2. You may wish to create stories that include observations about influence, wounding/complexes and resiliency that were reflected in your:
  - A. ethnic background
  - B. socioeconomic class
  - C. religious/spiritual influence
  - D. political background
  - E. relationship to immigration of the family
  - F. gender politics
  - G. differences in sexual orientation
  - H. independence/interdependence
  - I. education
3. Interlace your story with music, books, plays, characters, or dance that may aid in expressing what you want to communicate about important images that informed your life story.

Writing this will help you explore our next section on the politics of identity: what might be ascribed to you as an identity and what you might ascribe in turn to others.

## POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Travel opened my eyes to a wider level of identity than what is ascribed to us due to country of origin, class, skin color, and gender. All of these aspects of identity are unearned and often give us certain immunities and advantages, known as privilege. We may be unconscious of these advantages, taking them for granted. Privilege is an unearned right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed by a specific group. This can often be enacted when we “go global.” Travel forces you to look at your values, customs, country, and self through a different lens. Others, in turn, will be using their culturally-based ideas and impressions in their attempt to see you. Some preparation is important so you will not be naive to what might be ascribed and projected on to you and what you might be projecting on to others.

Here we begin our journey into another form of identity, the politics of identity. I describe some aspects of this realm and also suggest some ways you can explore these ideas through EXA.

## Citizenship Privilege

First and foremost while traveling, our citizenship defines us. I am clearly identifiable as a Caucasian from the United States. What might this mean to people from a different country? What comes to mind initially is privilege and protection. I remember once on a flight from London to Accra, I sat next to a man from Liberia, who had been an expatriot for the past 10 years. I knew about the coup and the difficult changes in Liberia but found I was quite naive about the toll of war. When I asked if he would ever go back to Liberia, the young man turned to me and said, "My entire family was killed in one day. I have no reason to go back." My heart sank as I realized how deeply different my American life was from life in Africa, where coups and economic winds blow extreme, and one's life is far more vulnerable. My life experience had been very much protected from ravages of war and radical social programs. White privilege or the protection of living in a major world power are potent ascriptions that would come to shape my expectations about life.

As we travel and share our work, we need to remain acutely aware of this political identity and privilege we each carry, stemming largely from one's country of origin. As a mental health worker who will be working with people who do not have these advantages, you will hear many stories that shock and overwhelm you. Listening and delving into these stories, one's defenses are scattered, accompanied by visceral experiences for which we have no words (Lerner, 1998). I felt nausea many times upon hearing the unthinkable. One must also grapple with how to remain present while working with others. Expressive arts processes can help with the feelings that are aroused of compassion, empathy, sympathy, guilt, and anger, and these feelings find expression that can transform them into proactive ideas and approaches, and deepen our empathy and understanding.

## Class Privilege

One of the most elusive aspects of privilege today is class privilege because it cuts across race, ethnicity, gender, education, and country. It includes social and economic influence and the strength and power to affect changes in one's culture. As a United States citizen, you will be perceived as rich and upper class and also as a person whose government has greatly influenced others' lives. This may in some ways be disorienting to you if you do not identify as upper class or rich yourself. It may call for you to experience yourself and your identity differently. In my work with clients and students, I also know that class privilege can activate the call for social justice. Guilt and defensiveness can arise, but transforming this into curiosity and openness to learn about the experiences of others can aid us in confronting classism. A group called "Class Acts" from the Center for Learning and Leading from Spirit developed a program to explore the invisibility of upper-class privilege (Women's Theological Center, 2010). They published a list of pitfalls that members of the upper class may commit that can create class discrimination. This list is eye

opening and can be a tool in exploring your class, ethnicity, and country privilege. Using this tool can sensitize you to your own advantages and assumptions that can unconsciously travel with you to another country, or can be ascribed to you by others. Find this tool online at [http://www.thewtc.org/Invisibility\\_of\\_Class\\_Privilege.pdf](http://www.thewtc.org/Invisibility_of_Class_Privilege.pdf).

## GENDER AND EXPECTATIONS OF ROLES

Sexual politics (Millett, 2000) are evident in every country and are delineated differently according to the country you visit. The expectations that come from gender roles can be some of the most deeply challenging and difficult to negotiate aspects of personal identity as you travel. What does it mean to be a man, what does it mean to be a woman, in this culture you are visiting? How does this interact or conflict with how you see yourself or your gender in your home culture?

If you are a woman traveling alone in developing countries, you will already be challenging gender roles. There may be insinuations or assumptions made about your values or behavior by virtue of the fact that you are choosing to travel without a male companion or are traveling for your work. Many women travelers have talked about being asked repeatedly why they weren't married or why they were not home with their children. In many developing countries, woman dress modestly compared with Western fashions, and it is essential to adhere to local standards for a woman when working internationally. Researching attire before leaving will help you with this.

For women working internationally, the rules for us and for other women can be daunting. I was often times asked to sit with men of the family to converse. In Ghana, a partially Muslim country, I stayed with Muslim hosts for a few days in their home. The women and children ate early and did not invite me. I wondered when or if I would eat. Once the father arrived home much later, there were two settings for the dinner, clearly a special status for me. I often wondered how his wife felt about this gesture. As a male, you may be given many privileges like this, and it can be unnerving. Men will need to cleverly negotiate these gender roles and honor your host, yet still stay true to your values without insulting your host.

Sexual politics for a Westernized male may be difficult to navigate. In the United States, gender politics have changed greatly. Many men in the mental health field are well aware and supportive of the changes in gender roles. Traditional roles for each gender may not have changed in the country you visit. As a modern male, you may feel uncomfortable with the role you may be given in that society and the treatment of women you are exposed to.

## Gender Exploration Exercise

1. Gather several magazines, newspapers, or other paper media. Begin to collect images from them that represent your gender as it is seen in your

culture. Pick images that make you feel good and images that may offend you.

2. Create a collage with these images. Allow yourself to place images related to the shadow side of your gender in relation to images of the strengths of your gender.

3. Notice how you feel looking at this collage. Take some time to journal about what you see in the collage and what you wish was different.
4. If possible gather some media from a country you are considering visiting. If you can't get any visual images you may find a story or book from which you can draw your own images of characters and events. How is your gender represented in that culture? Create a collage of images and write about your response to them.

### NOVELTY AND BEING DIFFERENT

The role of the "other" and standing out as different will be intensified for you when working internationally: You may rarely see another person from your own country and may endure being noticed, watched, and interacted with in ways that may feel challenging or even overwhelming. If you are not from a minority culture where you live, this may be your first experience of being the other for extended periods of time and standing out for your difference.

While traveling as a psychotherapist, I seldom ventured into regular tourist places and would be living and working in residential areas among the local people, where I was frequently stared at, especially by children. Accepting I was a novelty, especially with my red hair, I would perfect a friendly greeting that would cause the children to erupt in laughter and bring a smile to their parents as well. At times being the novelty wherever I went became uncomfortable for me. In China, in 1985, many would stare at or, conversely, avoid me. During that trip, people whom I did not know would ask to take a picture with me, yet never ask my name or where I was from. This felt extremely different from the lovely workshop closing rituals during my trip in 2011, where we had developed deeply personal connections. It can be difficult to feel you are being asked to stand as a representative of the other or as a novelty. As we travel, we should also be aware of placing others in this situation. Ask yourself: who am I engaging with as I take photos, why am I drawn to photograph this person? Is there a connection between us? How can I help us both be comfortable? You will learn a lot about yourself from your time in the "other's" shoes and spotlight. You may want to make sure you have downtime during the day so that you can be in a place where you feel you are not being watched, where you can just relax.

I experienced many epiphanies, challenges, and tender moments during my stay in the village of Kopeyia, Ghana, where I was the only White person living in the village. As my stay progressed, I nearly forgot my own skin color or

differentness. One of my favorite stories occurred while attending a funeral, one of the most important Ghanaian rituals. My hosts located a funeral in the next village for me to attend. Kojo, James, and I walked through the fields near Kopeyia, along many paths, for 45 minutes, until we came upon a small village, with no less than 500 people in attendance for the funeral. People were dancing, drumming, and paying respects to the person whose body was sitting in a chair right there with us. I felt transported into another way of being with shared grief and rapture as I danced in honor of this deceased woman. When I saw a Kopeyian woman I had previously met, she recognized and embraced me. I was so moved by her recognition of me that when I found Kojo and James again, I told them how surprised I was that she had recognized me. They just looked at each other and started laughing. At that moment, I realized what I had said. They laughed because I was the only White person at the funeral; of course she would recognize me! I had become lost in the interconnectedness of our shared humanity. However, my hosts were always keenly aware of this as they protected me and guided my stay. These paradoxical experiences of connection and difference are an integral aspect of working globally. We all have to grapple with this as we navigate our encounters.

### SEEING YOURSELF EXERCISE

1. Find three photos of yourself at different times in your life.
2. Take one photo and write what you see from the perspective of a stranger. How would they describe this photo and the person in it?
3. Next write from the perspective of the photographer. What were they trying to capture? What did they see?
4. Now write from your perspective when the photo was being taken. What were you feeling? Who were you, and what was it like to be seen, or not seen?
5. Do this same thing with the other photos. What can you learn from these differing perspectives?

### CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE

Language shapes identity, beliefs, and levels of consciousness and experience (Ahearn, 2011). This created in me a strong interest in learning not only languages but also the psychological aspects of language in the psyche. This aided me in my travels and in preparation for international work. I was now learning ways of communicating that would allow me to understand experiences that might be unfamiliar to my own cultural background. Some familiarity with linguistic anthropology and the language of the culture is an essential tool in "going global."

The arts tend to provide incredible universal languages to allow you to learn about a culture and to communicate in that culture (Knull, Levine, & Levine, 2005;

Levine & Levine, 2011). The myths, stories, music, dance, and poetry of that culture can be tremendous cultural teachers. Because your language skills might be limited, consider using the arts as means of communicating in your work. As part of my preparation, I had my materials translated into local languages in China. These translations created pictogram paintings of my approach, which also helped me understand how my ideas might be received in their language.

In a training I was conducting in Beijing, we experienced how cultural meaning ascribed to words has an impact. Following an afternoon of structured movement and dance, I suggested the participants express the emotions they were feeling at that time through their bodies. Almost every Chinese participant sat down while the Caucasian participants moved in accord with their emotions. Another area of confusion came while inviting them to explore the *opposite* movement, again they stopped moving. After a short break, I asked them what had happened. Chinese therapists are trained on cognitive-behavioral and psychoanalytic models of emotional expression, and when emotions are invited, they tend to think and privilege their minds first (Foxing, 1999; Higgins & Zheng, 2002; Larson, 2009; Wang, 2008). I asked about the word *opposite* and learned it was an emotionally charged word. In exploring this, I asked if *different* would be better, and all agreed. I never fully understood the triggering aspect of *opposite* but wondered if it had anything to do with political oppression and the residue of the Cultural Revolution and the impact of a one-party authoritarian political system on people's soma and psyche (Fallows, 2011). After this powerful encounter, I turned on some music at the break and the entire group began to move to the music. I looked on in amazement, recognizing that something had shifted for both participants and myself. These revelations changed me and aspects of my work, as well as the participants, who expressed more freedom in their bodies as a result of addressing our communication barriers.

Be observant of body language as people speak. It can inform you of the emotional atmosphere of a language. In Peru, this became surprisingly apparent. When the translator spoke in straightforward English, his body would be still and straight, but speaking in Peruvian Spanish, his body gestured more, almost dancing with the flair of the Spanish words.

### Feeling the Language Exercise

1. While watching a movie or TV show from a country you plan to visit, allow yourself to move in the ways you observe on screen. What is similar to the way you move your body by what you see on the screen and what is different? Notice the way people speak—the patterns and rhythms of their language. Even if you don't speak the language begin to make sounds that mirror the patterns and rhythms of their speaking. Notice the energy in your body and imagine that each energy is a different color.
2. Allow this energy and color to flow from your body onto drawing paper.

3. After completing this expressive drawing of how this movement felt, view the drawing as a whole and write in a stream-of-consciousness style about the experience. Read what you have written and observe what felt sense you now have of the way your body feels moving in the style of that culture.

With a male supervisee, we explored the body through this process. We played a soap opera from Mexico, a country he hoped to work in soon. He talked in English first in the speed he noticed. Then he talked in Spanish as rapidly as he witnessed. Then he added the body and facial gestures. He was uncomfortable with this at first. After a few attempts, he began to feel the language and how it is so dramatically expressed through one's body. He was incredible to witness. My supervisee changed from a nonanimated speaker into a speaker who spoke very clearly with his voice and body.

### Explorative Poetry Exercise

1. Listen to an original or translated story, myth, or fairytale from the country you are about to visit. Write down words or images or emotions that touched or resonated in you. Pick three to five of the most important images and play with them in the way suggested.
2. Write each imagistic word on a separate piece of paper. For example, I picked maze, birth, and curve.
3. Play with each word and expand on them by adding sensory adjectives. For example, if you picked maze give this word sound, color, movement, taste, smell, or temperature. "The hot stuffy brown maze smelled of the earth." You do not need to use all the senses, but try at least two.
4. Then give the word emotion or action. "The hot stuffy brown earth smelling maze surrendered to the sky."
5. Repeat this process with the other words you picked.

Then play with the flow of these three lines, putting them in any order that feels right. You can add or change the words. For example, with this process one could create a poem or a new story. Or from the short fleshing-out of the words, a longer story might emerge. This may help you enter the language in a fuller way, similar to the cultural brokering concept. I loved this imaginal journey with its associations with another language. I felt opened in incredible ways. It showed me how much I want to walk away from this opportunity for social justice, direction, and self-understanding.

### CULTURE CLASHES AND SELF-CARE

A new cultural context can present many new experiences, but it may also inspire a feeling of culture clash, in which a surrender and acceptance need to

take place. You can prepare as best you consciously can for the cultural context of your host country and the unexpected shift in time, place, language, and custom that accompanies this new context. Do not underestimate the effects of exhaustion from travel and jet lag, eating new foods, and missing people back home can have on your sense of vulnerability. Plan for self care in a mindful way.

My most salient culture clash happened in Kopeyia, the little village in Ghana in which I lived and studied. One day, while studying dance, I had a personal meltdown. I was dancing alone in front of four young men—the dance teacher and three drummers. I was trying so hard to learn the call-and-response between dance and the drum. I was also shifting on so many levels to adapt to small village life. After class, I felt as if I was having a small crisis. I surrendered to my tears and then experienced a clearing. I really felt something shift, and I had an epiphany. I remembered that the Gahu, the dance I was learning, is danced in a group. It is a community dance. So I asked if in some classes, I could dance with others. Emmanuel, my dance teacher, said, “No problem, we will have the children of the village dance with you.” Once this occurred, I began to dance in a different way than I ever experienced in the United States. Be sure to allow yourself to experience the clash, not deny it; unpack it emotionally and then resource what you need, and ask your host to help you secure it as best you can.

Self-care is important while grappling with cultural shifts and clashes. If possible, stay connected to family and friends with access to the Internet and Skype-like calls. In Beijing, I dreamed, after talking to my family on the phone, that I went home for an evening and returned in time to work, a reflection of my longing to be with my loved ones. Consider keeping a journal or a blog and stay connected to a local expatriate community to talk about your experiences and gain some perspective. Being a strong advocate of the arts, music, dance, and drama, I urge you to use the arts to express and process your experience. I always keep a drawing and writing pad close by and had my favorite comfort music and books on my portable music device and, as a good Jungian, recorded my dreams, as they often speak volumes.

I have discovered for myself that surrender is not an easy process, but once you surrender to your experience, you are changed forever. Try to remain nondefensive, delve into the issues, and expand your way of seeing and experiencing.

### Staying Grounded Exercise

1. Before travel, take a moment to sit quietly and remember a time that you felt safe, grounded, and secure. Allow yourself to focus on this feeling, having a body sensation of how it feels.
2. Create a drawing that represents to you how it feels to be grounded and secure. Take this with you as you travel and look at it when you need to tap into that feeling. Use the drawing as a focus point for your mind, helping you to relax and bring your body into a more grounded state.

### Using Music as a Comfort Exercise

1. Singing familiar and/or loved songs can help with moods and clearing one's mind. Music can aid us in reconnecting to our strengths. Also, it can help us have that good cry that might be needed, another way of clearing to help with the shift we are going through. Before traveling, create a playlist of songs that help you to feel strong and loved, that connect you to home and who you are. Use this music to invite a sense of strength in you when you need it. Sing along out loud if you can. Share it with your new friends if it feels appropriate.

2. Be sure to use your body and movement to explore your unnamed emotions. A process of moving with or without music (e.g., moving your body tensions and then finding opposite movements) can help metabolize experiences. Bring a playlist of music to dance to, some upbeat and driving, some slow and heart opening. When you feel full of emotions and like you need a release, find a place to dance alone or with others. Movement can transform what is transported by our neurotransmitters and help change moods, and allow space for epiphanies.

### CONCLUSION

Going global has been one of my most powerful life experiences. It is life changing, fun, and generative, as well as challenging. Remember, though you may have much to offer when working globally, you will many times feel lost, vulnerable, confused, and homesick. All of this is natural. I hope my experiences will help you prepare and accept the tides of this type of experience. It will serve to make you a global citizen. This can have untold benefits not only for you and those you encounter but also for broader cultural understanding.

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## Chapter 6

# International Disaster Psychology: Considerations for Training

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The alleviation of human suffering and the promotion of mental health are common goals of mental health practitioners. Mental health training helps us to identify signs, symptoms, and contributors to psychological distress; understand this in the context of broader family and cultural systems; self-reflectively engage clients in a process of culturally sensitive mental health treatment to promote healthy and adaptive functioning and development; and evaluate our success at doing so.

Our background training in multicultural psychology and models of psychotherapy, life-span development, diagnosis and psychopathology, community psychology, systems theory, trauma evaluation and treatment, crisis intervention, research and program evaluation, and clinical treatment and interviewing skills serves us well as foundational competencies important to our identity and functioning as mental health professionals. Work in international disaster and emergency response, however, requires additional knowledge about the application of these skills to the particulars of disaster situations (both natural disasters and human-made ones) domestically and internationally.