

# AKADi

Inspiring insights from our communities



## Kai Lutterodt in Brazil

OPERA SINGER **P.34**

TV STAR **P.16**

ASPERGER **P.50**

Tracing her Afro-Brazilian roots to  
Ghana  
**P. 24**





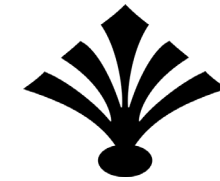
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the maiden edition of the AKADi Magazine. Akadi means light in the Ghanaian language Ewe and this publication aims to shine a light on the transformative actions and inspiring experiences of Ghanaians on home soil and those in the Diaspora.

In this edition, we hear from individuals who are challenging and disrupting stereotypes about Africa and what it means to be African through their personal stories. You will read about a Ghanaian tenor who is reshaping the way we view opera music.

There is an article about one British-Ghanaian entrepreneur who, before the age of 30, had seized on gaps in the entertainments'

MisBeee  
**WRITES**



markets and established successful businesses.

We learn more about one actor with royal connections, who became a household name in Black British comedy, and explore language endangerment and its impact on Ghanaian diaspora communities.

This magazine touches on topics of identity and belonging, looks into mental health and well-being. It also explores Ghana's rich cultural history through the eyes of one woman who can trace part of her Ghanaian ancestry back five generations to Brazil.

I am a journalist and blogger, and the stories featured here represent a snapshot of the articles I regularly write on my website  
[www.msbwrites.co.uk](http://www.msbwrites.co.uk).

# Hello

These narratives – our narratives, which I hope you will read and enjoy – need to be told and owned by us. Only through ownership can we decolonise perceptions of a vast continent and varied people, and bring more balance to the often-accepted 'single story' on Africa.

That is the aim of AKADi.

Abena Serwaa

Editor-in-Chief

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# ***ENTREPRENEUR BEATS ODDS TO CREATE TICKETING WEBSITE***

*Around two percent of all venture capital funding goes to women and just a fraction of a percent goes to people of colour. Despite these dire statistics, Louise Broni-Mensah, Founder and CEO of **Shoobs**, defies the trend and proves how positive thinking and determination are the keys to success.*



**I**n her early 20s, Louise Broni-Mensah became the first Black female entrepreneur to secure capital from a seed fund provider in Silicon Valley to grow her fledgling business *Shoobs* (pronounced *Shubz*).

The provider was Y Combinator – a company known for supporting such names as online renting service Airbnb. Three years later (in 2017) and thanks to the funding and expertise she received, Louise's online ticketing and discovery platform began changing the way party-goers buy and engage with urban events across the UK.

### **PASSION PROJECT**

Louise took the traditional route

to entering the business world. She holds a Mathematical Economics BSc from Birmingham University, worked in banking and finance, and had her own property all by her early 20s. But music was never far from her thoughts.

At university, she worked for Sony music part-time, managing all their marketing on campus, and worked for Relentless Records – the label responsible for launching UK garage, grime and hip hop group [So Solid Crew](#).

These side hustles gave her the hands-on experience in events management and promotion, and valuable insights into the

**“THE GREAT THING ABOUT THE FINANCIAL CRASH AND ANY SORT OF DOWN TIME IN THE ECONOMY IS THAT IT SPURS ENTREPRENEURSHIP.”**

*Tech entrepreneur Louise Broni-Mensah, Founder and CEO of Shoobs.*

*Image credit: Louise Broni-Mensah*



business of the music industry. "I realised how difficult it was for events organisers, particularly those in urban music, to promote shows. Most were using offline methods such as handing out flyers, advertising on pirate radio stations and selling paper tickets face to face. It was a really 'old school' way of targeting business and I couldn't understand why anyone would want to stand in the cold when they could book it from their home or from their phone, which is why I came up with *Shoobs*."

### **RAVING COMMUNITY**

*Shoobs* – slang for house party/rave – allows people with a love for urban music to look for events and network within an online community.

Louise was still working full-time in the financial sector, when she established *Shoobs* in 2010 on her own. She felt that the economic downturn was the boost she needed to commit to *Shoobs* full-time.

She secured funding from the Bright Ideas Trust owned by Tim Campbell – the first winner of the UK TV programme *Apprentice* – and used that to finance the first version of her online platform. Within 18 months, she was making a living.

"I'm just a big believer in aiming high so I asked myself: 'where people go when they want to make it big?' and correlated that to Silicon Valley.

I took myself off there and applied to the Y Combinator programme."

Being accepted on to Y Combinator's 2014 programme gave Louise her next boost.

"I didn't want to go to Y Combinator with just an idea so I made sure that I already had traction with my business. I showed them that I had a good number of platform users – it was tens of thousands – and evidence to show that the platform was growing. They were excited because, I guess, the business was tackling a market that had not been tackled before."

For Louise, the appeal of getting a place on the 'business

bootcamp' was not just about securing funding. "It's about the expertise and networks you gain to grow your business. Y Combinator has some of the top companies in the world in their network and I now have access to them and that's the kind of contacts that money can't buy."

### **ROLE MODEL**

Coming from a supportive family of driven individuals (her brother Edwin is the founder of charity GiveMeTap), Louise is comfortable being a trailblazer and role model for the young, women and Black women in particular.

According to financial data from *PitchBook* published in [Fortune](#), all-women teams received \$1.9 billion (2.2%) of the \$85 billion



total invested by venture capitalists in 2017. Comparatively, 79% goes to all-men teams. Less than one percent of venture capitalist funding goes to people of colour.

## **FUTURE**

Louise has not ruled out plans to internationalise her business to African markets. Urban music is such a fluid term, which means it incorporates a range of sounds, including Afrobeats, she said.

For now, she is keen to make a national impact and become a household name. "There are certain brands that even if you don't use them, people know of them so I would love for Shoobs to be one as well."

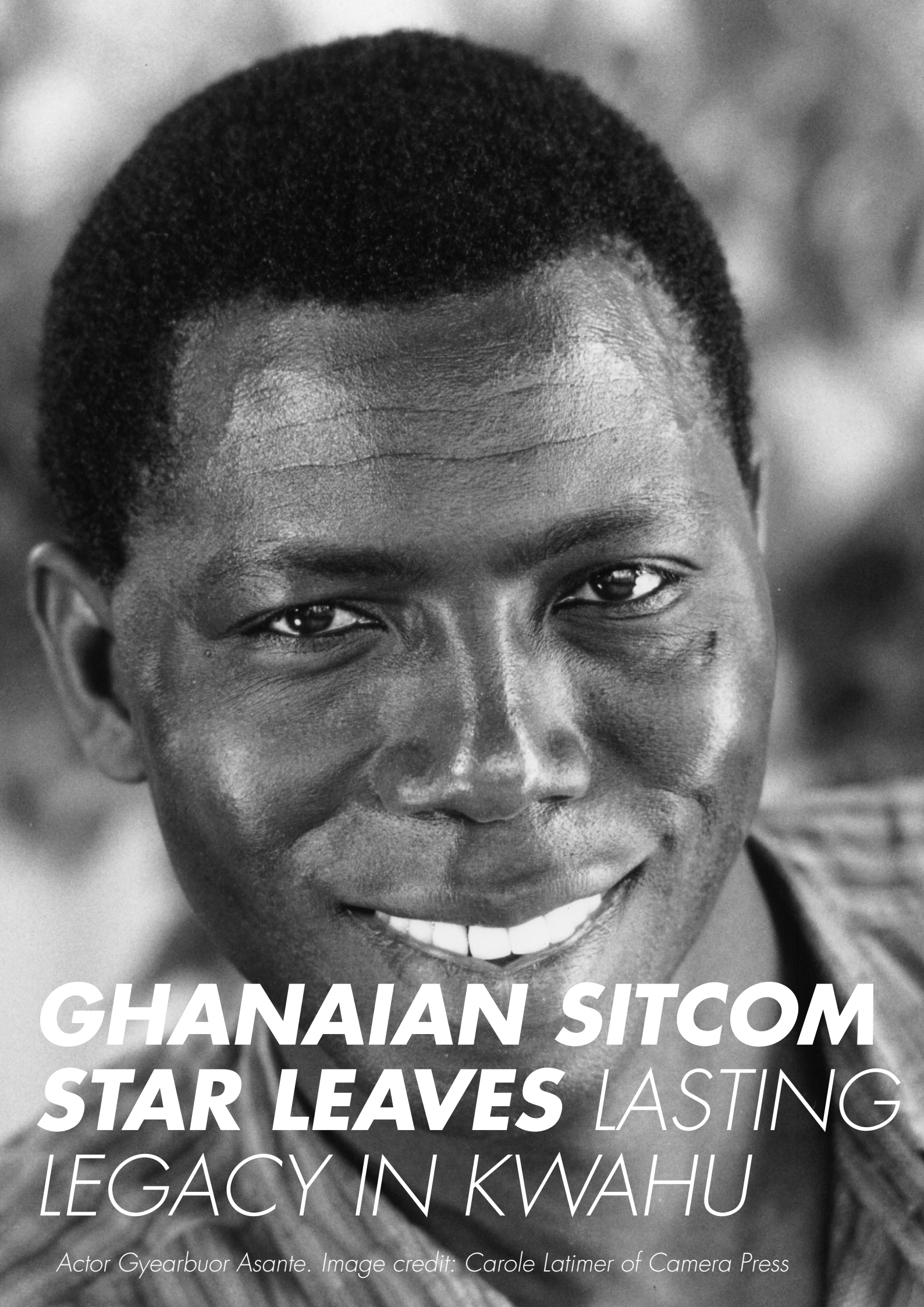


For more, visit Shoobs on <https://shoobs.com/> or on Instagram @[shoobsonline](#)

*Image credit:  
Mark Angelo from Pexels*







# GHANAIAAN SITCOM STAR LEAVES LASTING LEGACY IN KWAHU

Actor Gyearbuor Asante. Image credit: Carole Latimer of Camera Press

TV

*The late Gyearbuor Asante, who famously played long-term mature student Matthew in hit British sitcom Desmond's, was also a royal. His long-term friend and executive producer of the comedy talks about the man behind Matthew.*

**T**he late Gyearbuor Asante came from [Tafo](#), Kwahu, in Ghana's Eastern Region but rather than follow tradition and become a chief, the young thespian got himself circumcised instead.

The reason, according to details from [Friends of Tafo \(Kwahu\)](#) – a UK charity established after Gyearbuor's passing – was to rule himself out of enstoolment. According to Akan tradition, candidates for kingship are not circumcised.

Gyearbuor then left Ghana in the late 1960s to become an actor. His credits included episodes in *Space: 1999*, *Mind Your Language*, *Hazell* and *The Professionals* as well as a TV performance of *Ubu Roi* in 1976. He also played the minister in the 1983 film *Local Hero*, and of course his memorable role as career student Matthew in *Desmond's*.

But life has a funny way of panning out and although Gyearbuor never became a chief, his close friend [Humphrey](#)



[Barclay](#), who incidentally was the executive producer of *Desmond's*, did!

"I met Gyearbuor (or Christopher as he was known in UK then) in 1972, when he was doing such shows as *Crown Court* and so on," said Humphrey. "I visited Ghana many times as his guest and when he died in 2000 of clogged up arteries, at the age of 58, I was the only obruni (white man) at his funeral."

Prior to his passing, Gyearbuor had returned to Ghana in 1995, and was made a cultural ambassador. Tragically, he died five years later in Accra and was buried in his home town of Tafo. That's where the Tafohene (the chief of Tafo) – Nana Ameyaw Gyensiaman III – came up with

the idea of making Humphrey a chief. It is reported that the Tafohene said that the chieftaincy role Humphrey took was the one Gyearbuor died before he could accept.

Fitting, when you consider Humphrey's official title is



Humphrey Barclay aka Kwadwo Nana Ameyaw Gyearbuor Yiadom I, former Nkosuohene of Tafo.

Kwadwo Nana Ameyaw Gyearbuor Yiadom I.

### **DEVELOPMENT CHIEF**

During his 14-year tenure as Nkosuohene (development chief) of Kwahu Tafo, Humphrey split his time between Britain and Ghana, raising much-needed funds for the town. In Britain, he helped mastermind a comedy and musical gala in 2004 which ran annually until 2014, at London's Hackney Empire. Monies raised, which amounted to £100,000 over the decade, went to Friends of Tafo.

Humphrey retired as Nkosuohene in 2014, but remains an elder in the community. During his tenure, he oversaw

**"HE WAS WICKEDLY FUNNY, PASSION-ATE ABOUT ACTING, AND, AS ONE OF HIS ADMIRERS SAID, 'FULL OF GRACE.'"**

the rebuilding of Kwahu Tafo Senior High School. In 2003, the school consisted of one row of classrooms, with four pupils and no paid teachers. By 2007, it was transformed into a major campus with 650 enrolled students, 25 staff, and government recognition.

"It was a great privilege," said Humphrey. "When one is doing charity work it's usual to be channelled into one particular area — say, old people, poverty, education, health. But as development chief for a



whole community you are engaged in everything — from lavatories to music! And as with my television work, what charms me is being involved in the development of talent.”

### **BLACK BRITISH COMEDY**

And on the subject of talent, Desmond's may not be a regular on UK screens today but it remains the longest running Black British comedy to date. The Channel 4 show ran from 1989 to 1994 with 71 episodes. It was the brainchild of Trix Worrell and was produced by Charlie Hanson and Humphrey. The comedy was set in Peckham, London and featured a predominantly Black British Guyanese cast, which included barbershop owner Desmond Ambrose (Norman Beaton), and his

on-screen wife Shirley (Carmen Munroe).

### **GHANA OR GUYANA**

Trix was committed to remaining culturally authentic in the sitcom, which is why Desmond and Shirley played characters from their native Guyana. Even Shirley's sister Susu, played by Mona Hammond, had a subtext written into her character to explain why her accent was Jamaican and not Guyanese. But what was a constant debate in some Ghanaian homes was why the clearly Ghanaian-accented Matthew was 'from The Gambia'.

There was a concern that the phonetic similarity between Ghana and Guyana would confuse audiences, Humphrey explained. It was Gyearbuor



*Loveable characters from comedy show Desmond's: Pork Pie, Desmond and Matthew  
Image credit: Channel 4*



that elected to change his character's home country to The Gambia to avoid confusion. However, all the African sayings he quoted in the sitcom remained Ghanaian!

### **AFTER DESMOND'S**

After Norman's passing, a spin-off show featuring fellow cast member Porkpie briefly aired but failed to garner the same following as Desmond's and was scrapped.

With Gyearbuor gone and Carmen in her 80s, Humphrey confirmed that there are no plans for a return of the show...not even a one-off special. But Humphrey is still in touch with some of the cast.

"I see Carmen and took her to Ghana a few years ago. Robbie (Lee Stanley) supported us throughout the Hackney shows," said Humphrey. "Ram John (Porkpie) used to appear in them too. We are all good friends and very thankful that we had such a good time and did such a good show together — which is still funny today!"

But the last word should go to honouring Gyearbuor, who Humphrey described as: "...wickedly funny, passionate about acting, and, as

one of his admirers said, 'full of grace'. And that is rather charming, because he was Kwabena, born on Tuesday, and in the old English rhyme 'Tuesday's child is full of grace'," Humphrey concluded.



Visit [Friends of Tafo](#) to learn more about how you can support their work.

Watch Desmond's episodes [here](#).





# EXPLORING GHANA'S **TABOM** HERITAGE

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History

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Kai Lutterodt is a British-Ghanaian mobile journalist and founder of Diversity Matters UK, who can trace her ancestry back five generations to the Afro-Brazilian Tabom community that settled in Ghana.

She talks about her ancestor's migration story and her own experiences of visiting Brazil.

*All individual images of Kai alone are credited to:  
Kai Lutterodt and Matheus Len's*





**K**ai first learnt about her Tabom roots from her dad when she was eight years old.

"I always considered it to be this exotic side of my ancestry that I had. It wasn't until I became older that I explored it a bit further and I found out that it was a lot to do with slavery.

"Obviously, as an African, I could empathise with slavery but I never associated it with part of my history.

So, discovering my Tabom ancestry and its connection to slavery made me part of that discourse even more."

Kai's initial journey to Brazil in 2009 was purely for pleasure but a second trip in 2013 shortly after an academic setback, got her exploring more of the vast country (Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Belo Horizonte and Salvador etc).

"I had failed my first year at journalism school so it was either I could fall into depression, which I was close to doing, or use this opportunity to go to Brazil and do the research that I had always wanted to do," she said.

### **ORAL TRADITION**

Kai had a head start, however.

Her paternal aunt Marian was able to furnish her with oral knowledge of her Tabom roots.

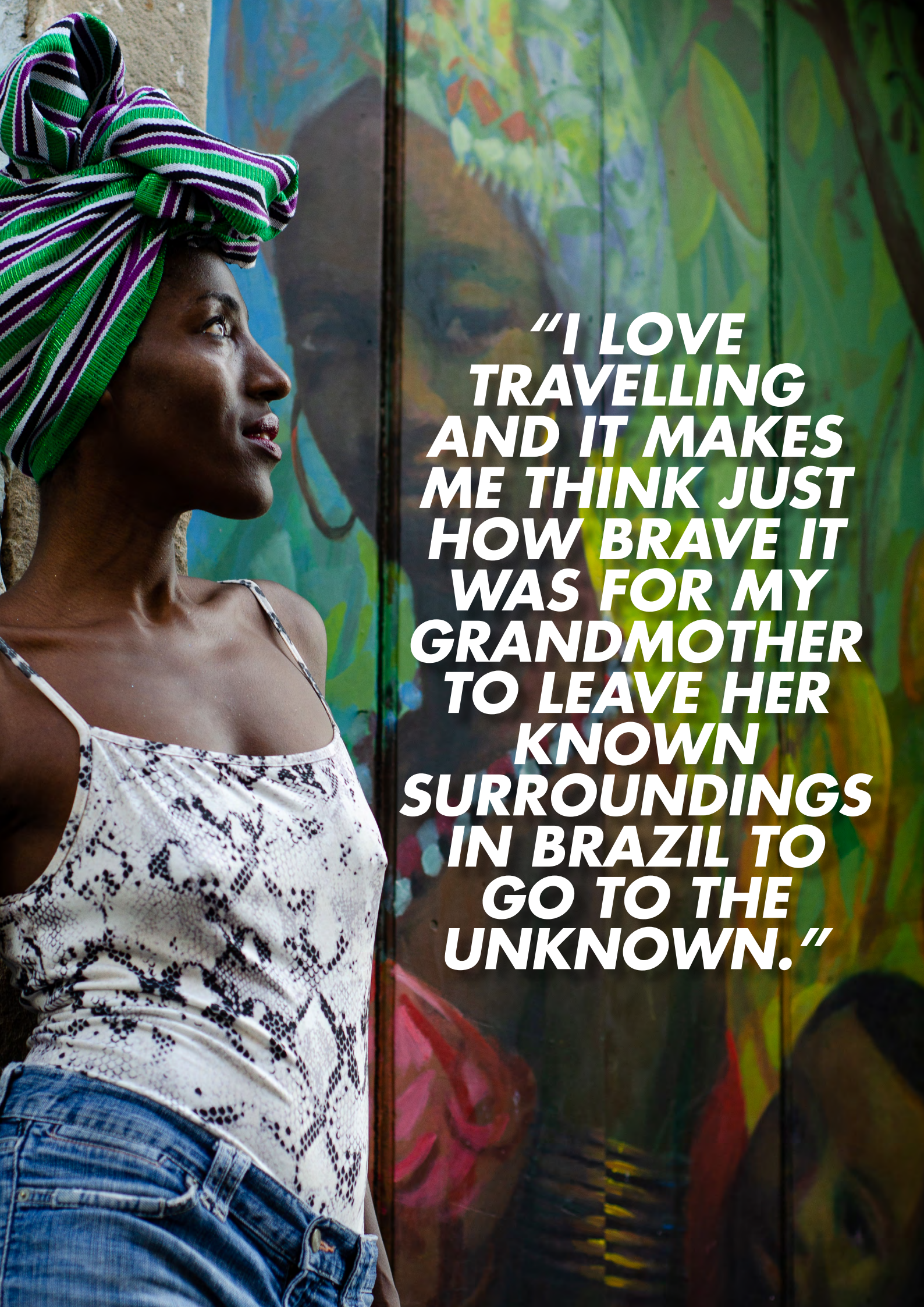
"My aunt was only a child but she used to hear her mother organise family meetings in Brazil House (the cradle of the Tabom people in Otublohum, near Jamestown, Accra) and would pick up information that way."

Kai also got her hands on *Sou Brasileiro* by Alcione Meira Amos and Ebenezer Ayesu, which coincidentally cites her great grandfather as a case study of the Tabom returnees. The book also mentions other ancestors including his mother and his mother's mother – who made the initial



*Kai's great great grandmother travelled from Brazil to present-day Ghana.*





**"I LOVE  
TRAVELLING  
AND IT MAKES  
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GRANDMOTHER  
TO LEAVE HER  
KNOWN  
SURROUNDINGS  
IN BRAZIL TO  
GO TO THE  
UNKNOWN."**

journey from Brazil to Ghana. "The author got almost all of the information right except some of the names were in the wrong order," Kai said.

"The beauty of Ghanaian names is they have a meaning and usually, they describe the order children are born in. My great great grandmother had twins so it turns out the author got the order wrong which my aunt rectified."

### **SINGLE MUM**

Kai's Tabom journey started with her great great great grandmother Aduma (or Adsuma) who is thought to have come to present-day Ghana between 1829 and 1836. It is well documented that two ships sailed from Brazil to present-day Nigeria during those years with some of the returnees travelling on to present-day Ghana.

The second ship sailed a year after the famous 1835 Malê Revolt of Bahia, during which enslaved Africans rose up against their Brazilian slave masters.

Kai's great great great grandmother Aduma came to present-day Ghana with a child or children and a male relative – either a cousin or a brother called Mamman (Mohammed) Nasau, Kai believes. He was the leader of that clan and the family head of Brazil House. "I like the idea that Aduma was a single mother. I find it very empowering," said Kai. "I love travelling and it makes me think just



how brave it was for her to leave her known surroundings to go to the unknown.”

Aduma’s child or children had the surname Peregrino – a common Tabom name. Aduma went on to have a further child following a marriage to a man called Ade who was related to the Ga Royal House.

This child – Adelaide (Kai’s great great grandmother) – went on to marry a reverend.

### **SKILLS AND PROSPERITY**

Like many other Tabom settlers, Kai’s ancestors brought transferable skills and prospered thanks to the hospitality of the local Ga Manste of the area, who gave land to the new settlers. Kai’s ancestors boast an enviable line of tailors and

seamstresses.

Her great grandfather became a merchant, and his brothers were lawyers who had trained at Lincoln’s Inn, Holborn in London.

But her exploration is not over. “There are still some mysteries in terms of names. My aunty was quite sure we had an ancestor called Fatima, who may have been a sibling that was married off into another family. And I would love to think there is someone in Brazil doing the same research as me which could somehow highlight a link between our two families.”

### **AFRO-ISLAMIC INFLUENCE**

Despite the powerful role Africans played in bringing Islam to Brazil, there is very little recognition or evidence of this

now. Nevertheless, their influence is obvious in popular culture, language and food in Brazil, Ghana and the other West African nations.

Acarajé is a bean dish, fried in what Brazilians call dende oil (palm oil). The same food is called akara in Nigeria and koose in Ghana.

The linguistic similarities between Brazil and Ghana are a little trickier to pin down but Ghanaian words believed to have a Portuguese link include ‘dash me’\* – thought to derive from the Portuguese word ‘das-me’ (give me), and ‘sabola’ which sounds similar to the Portuguese/Spanish word ‘cebola’, meaning onion.

### **MODERN-DAY BRAZIL**

Kai does not believe in coincidences. She found herself close to the point where the Malê Rebellion occurred on the day it started on 24 January.

She also randomly bumped into US Oscar-winning filmmaker Spike Lee, who was filming in Maragojipe (Maragogipe), Bahia during the carnival period.

These experiences laid the foundations for an awareness platform



*Dadinho Tapioca*  
Image by Juliana Annunciato  
from Pixabay



she launched after resuming her studies at the University of the Arts London.

She became president of the African Caribbean Society (ACS) and during her presidency, was able to explore the Latin contribution to the Diaspora and show how wide and diverse it is.

Drawing on Kai's time in Brazil, she went on to establish Diversity Matters in 2014 as a way of challenging perceptions of race and ethnicity and its representation.

In 2016, she launched 'Diversity Matters Awareness Week' and rolled out a number of projects and events promoting diversity in fields such as arts, education and the media. Moving forward, Kai continues to document her travel experiences and recently completed a six-month visit to Brazil and Colombia.

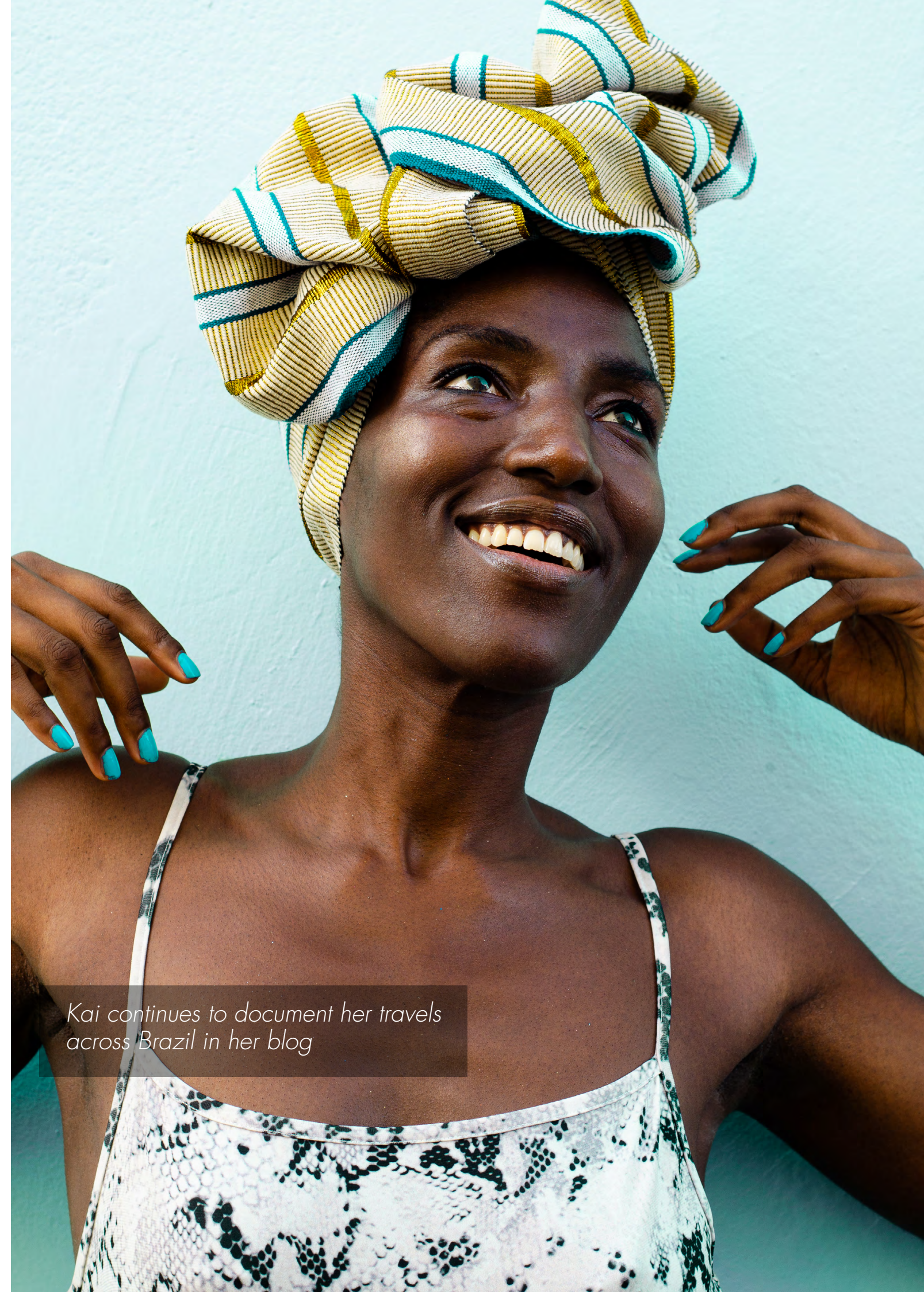


*The Tabom name came about because it was their common response to being greeted.*

*The name comes from the Portugese words 'esta bom' meaning it is good.*

You can read about her experiences in her blog: <https://travelmakerkai.blog/> or on Instagram [@travelmakerkai](https://www.instagram.com/travelmakerkai)

*\*Tabom. The Afro-Brazilian Community in Ghana Marco Aurelio Schaumloeffel (2014)*





# **GHANAIAAN TENOR OUT TO TRANSFORM OPERA MUSIC**

Music

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Ghana is best known for such musical genres as highlife, hiplife, afrobeats and gospel. But one Kumasi-born artist is bucking that trend by carving a name for himself as Ghana's first opera singer.

*Nino's staff is a reminder of his journey following his car accident.  
All images credited to Nino*







**N**ino – aka Kofi Agyemang Offeh – has been singing and composing music since childhood. Even though he started out singing gospel and highlife, he developed a passion for opera, thanks to his father's interest in classical music.

Despite gaining some success as a highlife artist, Nino couldn't shake the feeling that he was destined to do something else. A turning point came when he was hospitalised after having a car accident which could have cost him his voice and limbs.

"I remember lying in the hospital bed, watching myself performing on TV and hearing my songs on the radio. That's when I thought, I

haven't done what I am supposed to do," he said.

### **INSPIRATION**

As softly-spoken as Nino is, his singing voice is a clear contradiction. His sentences are punctuated by a rich booming rendition of – Handel's *Cogeti* or *Nessun Dorma* (None Shall Sleep) – from the Giacomo Puccini's opera *Turandot* – just to hammer home his point. His passion is infectious.

"If I were to be the president of Ghana, I would rule the nation with music because music is the centre of everything," he said. It is this love for opera that propelled him from his home city of Kumasi to London where he has worked on honing his talent to a more international crowd for more than eight years.

Inspired by Black opera singers including South African [Pumeza Matshikiza](#) and Italian great [Luciano Pavarotti](#), Nino has been driven to succeed. The Ghanaian tenor taught himself to sing some of the world's best-known opera classics with the help of YouTube. He now boasts Italian, Spanish, English, French, German, and Latin, among the main languages he can deliver in.

### **TWI OPERA**

He has also performed in his native tongue Twi but without the infrastructure necessary to compose and produce a piece, it has been difficult for him to deliver a song in true operatic style, he said.

Ghana has a symphony orchestra which was established



during Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah's presidency by Ghanaian composer Philip Comi Gbeho. The National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) Ghana performs works of composers from Ghana and other African nations as part of its African Composers Series, which was established in 1996.

Although Nino said he has collaborated with the orchestra, he said a stumbling block for him is that the orchestra is geared up to playing choral music and not opera.

"...with opera music you must have a timpani (or kettle) drum, for example, so if you give [The Symphony Orchestra] a composition that demands that – how are they going to play it? They

are going to play it with what they have – piano, violins etc – and that will spoil the beauty of the song," he said.

### **ATTITUDES TO OPERA**

Another more pressing challenge is the limited interest Ghanaians have in this style of music. And the 'sometimes' negative reactions from those in the west to a Black man singing opera.

It is considered to be for the upper classes – not something that ordinary people can appreciate, Nino said. As a result, it requires a re-education.

He is reminded of an incident when - after singing in Italian at an event in Ghana – someone shouted out in Twi from the audience: 'Hey... yen tiase-o'

**"IF I WERE TO BE THE PRESIDENT OF GHANA, I WOULD RULE THE NATION WITH MUSIC BECAUSE MUSIC IS THE CENTRE OF EVERYTHING."**

I, for example, listen to Irish singer [Enya](#) and I don't know what she is saying but it still means a lot to me."

But he is far from despondent about the reactions of some. "I just live to inspire people by getting the zeal to venture into new areas. You don't need the whole world to say what you are doing is good.

– (we don't understand), adding also that Nino should explain it to him.

"I found it quite interesting because music in itself is not just about the language, it is about the composition of the song.

We have some songs that have no lyrics but we still like the song.



*Nino  
performing  
Nessum  
Dorma  
at KSM's  
Thank God  
It's Friday  
(TGIF) Show*



Do what you feel like doing and you will, by all means, get people following you and appreciating what you are doing.”

### **NUSLAM**

Far from shying away from promoting opera in his native tongue, Nino believes he is helping to shape modern opera by bringing Ghanaian influences into his work. He calls this fusion Nuslam. Nuslam synchronises elements of palm-wine and highlife music with the rhythms of opera.

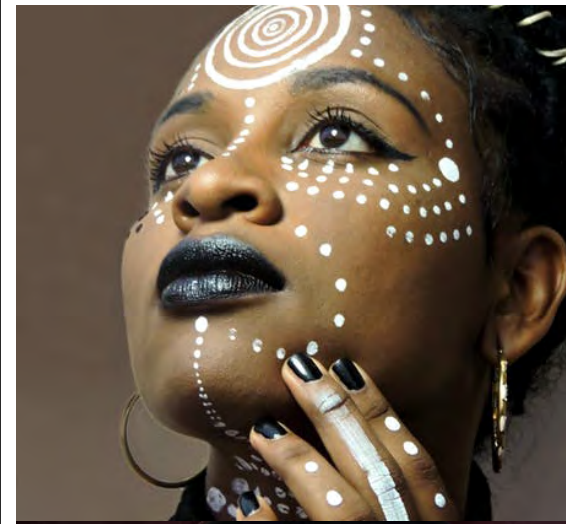
Since he started out almost a decade ago, Nino has developed a fan base. He has performed at BEFFTA (Black Entertainment Film Fashion and TV and Arts) Awards 2014, and

at a charity function staged by Ghanaian footballer Michael Essien.

Nino’s dream is to cultivate interest in opera among the younger generation. He wants to find talented musicians able to learn and play the required instruments in order to build an orchestra and eventually establish an opera house in Ghana. For now, Nino is focussing on producing his own music and recording a single with an orchestra in London featuring his original pieces.



*To learn more about Nino and his music, check him out on YouTube [here](#).*



# Your voice, your way – join us!

**The AKADj Magazine is a product of years of sharing the extraordinary experiences of ordinary Africans on the Continent and across the Diaspora.**

These stories are designed to inform, inspire, challenge and disrupt the stereotypes often associated with Africa and Africans.

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and be part of a movement to reshape and take ownership of our narrative.

Be part of the conversation by commenting on these posts and, if you want to share your unique story, or support the publication through sponsorship, drop me a line at [abena30@hotmail.com](mailto:abena30@hotmail.com)

*MisBeee*  
**WRITES**



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language

# INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

*If you are the child of parents who emigrated from Ghana to Britain, it is likely that you grew up with less to no fluency in your Ghanaian language compared to your parents.*

*This phenomenon is something that inspired writer-director Pamela Sakyi's 2015 documentary **British Ghanaians: Lost in Translation**. She speaks to MisBeee about some of the reasons behind the phenomenon and the public's reactions to her documentary.*

*All images credited to Pamela Sakyi*



*British Ghanaians: Lost in Translation* started out as a passion project for Pamela Sakyi, who was on her own journey learning Twi. She was intrigued to find out why other British Ghanaians she met were not fluent in the language – like her.

“There are a number of successful British Ghanaians and quite a few of them can’t speak their Mother Tongue fluently,” she said.

“The documentary goes through and looks at why this is happening and also highlights that if this continues, British Ghanaians could lose touch with their languages, their cultures, their cultural history and their cultural heritage.”

*British Ghanaians: Lost in Translation* is Pamela’s first documentary and was developed by Pamela’s media production company SparkleLight Productions and international TV network OHTV – the executive producers. It was officially recognised by the West African Film Festival in 2016. *Gadget Show* TV host Ortis Deley, who has Ghanaian and Nigerian heritage, presents the documentary and interviews leading British Ghanaians. They include the Right Honourable Lord Paul Boateng, retired sprinter and writer Jeanette Kwakye and GUBA Awards Founder and CEO Dentaa Amoateng. For Pamela, it was important to unpack some of the reasons

behind this language endangerment, and to explore the importance community plays in preserving culture.

There are over 80 indigenous languages actively spoken in Ghana with English designated as the country’s official language. Packed into all that is an assumption, for some, that

speaking the Queen’s English is also seen as a sign of prestige. Some of these assumptions were carried along with those Ghanaians that migrated abroad from Ghana, with some choosing not to pass the language on to their children. This dual identity is further complicated by the fact that being African was not considered



Pamela Sakyi flanked by Dentaa, Ortis, Naomi Fletcher and Claire Clotey



**"I WOULD GET MY MUM'S OLD HIGHLIFE TAPES AND TRY TO PHONETICALLY REMEMBER WHAT THE WORDS WERE TO THESE SONGS."**

to be cool until fairly recently – let alone speaking the languages.

Thankfully, things are changing and through Pamela's research, she has observed that in areas where there is a strong sense of community, (as is evident in Asian and Arab communities, for example) the language fluency thrives.

Her documentary has reignited her desire to learn the language, which started as a child.

"There was a time when I was seven or eight, where I would get my mum's old Highlife tapes and listen to them and try to phonetically remember what the words were to these songs."

Pamela's mum, who speaks Brong and Asante Twi, supports her passion and is helping her learn the

You can watch an excerpt from the documentary and check out more of Pamela's vlog interview below.



language again with regular lessons. The documentary has sparked a similar drive in Ghana's Diaspora communities with people voicing their own



experiences of disconnect with their Mother Tongue. “It is one thing when people watch it and relate to it,” she said. “But to hear someone say your documentary inspired me to sit down with my parents at the weekend, or get a book to learn the basics of my language – that for me – is what the documentary was made to do.”



Visit SparkleLight Productions - <https://www.sparklelightproductions.co.uk/>

For Pamela on Instagram - [@bglostintranslation](https://www.instagram.com/bglostintranslation)



*Pamela is pictured on the studio set of her documentary with members of Me Firi Ghana and a female make-up artist.*





A photograph of a woman with short, curly red hair hugging a young girl with dark curly hair from behind. They are standing in front of a rough, textured stone wall. The woman is wearing a black t-shirt and a pearl earring. The girl is also wearing a black t-shirt and has a slight smile. The lighting is warm and natural.

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Well-Being

# **MISDIAGNOSIS, MENTAL HEALTH AND ONE MOTHER'S JOURNEY**

*Misdiagnosis delayed one London-born teenager's treatment for Asperger Syndrome by 17 years until a chance visit to a doctor in Ghana changed her life for the better.*

*Image credit: [Photo by Eye for Ebony](#) on Unsplash\**

*\*To respect the privacy of Jayne and Ann-Marie, models were used to depict this article.*





*Ann-Marie was born  
in 1998*

*Image credit: Thiago  
Borges from Pexels*

**J**ayne Ashiagbor initially thought nothing of her baby daughter's energetic nature. Ann-Marie was born in 1998 and at six weeks old, she stopped sleeping in the afternoon and it was increasingly difficult to keep her still. As she grew older, her behaviour became more unusual.

"By the time she was four years old, her cousin, who was also her best friend, left the nursery they both attended. That was the first time I saw her struggling. She wasn't sleeping well at night and would wake up and stand at the foot of the bed and ask: 'did I do something wrong, why can't I play with my cousin?'

"In hindsight, I see that children on the autism spectrum like routine and Ann-Marie's behaviour was because her cousin's departure broke the routine," said Jayne.

As Ann-Marie headed into her early teens, her behavioural issues became even more pronounced. She was bullied at school and started developing suicidal thoughts after being hit by a car. It was then that she was referred to children & adolescent mental health services (CAHMS).

Still Ann-Marie's behavioural issues spiralled. She played truant from school and on one occasion, left her classroom in the pouring rain and stood in the playground. She had to be sent home because she was soaking wet. Jayne eventually put her

career in consultant training and education on hold to care and home-school Ann-Marie.

Turmoil within the family did not help either. Jayne and her husband divorced and his move to Ghana hit Ann-Marie hard. Then Jayne's father died in 2010.

### **UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR**

Despite people picking up on Ann-Marie's unusual behaviour, Jayne could not see it. Things came to a head when 12-year-old Ann-Marie unexpectedly left the house one night and jumped on a bus. Luckily, a cousin noticed and alerted Jayne in time so she could find her.

"I remember when I found her, her left leg was jerking and she kept repeating: 'You can't scare me.'"



The situation made her realise just how circumstances can change in a flash. "In 1998, I had a career, I was earning good money, I had two healthy children, I was married and I was comfortable."

### **TAKING CONTROL**

Jayne's frustrations mounted because she still had no diagnosis for Ann-Marie so she decided to take time out with her and visit family in Ghana. "A friend whose mum had mental health issues recommended visiting a psychiatric doctor at North Ridge Clinic in Accra," she said. "Dr Sammy Ohene assessed her based on her symptoms and prescribed Risperidone – an anti-psychotic medication. Within days, her hyperactivity

died down and she became confident, outgoing, and independent."

Dr Ohene works at the School of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Ghana and sees patients at North Ridge Clinic a few days a week.

But the calm was short-lived. Jayne finally received a formal diagnosis when the pair returned to England some weeks later. Ann-Marie was diagnosed with early-onset psychosis and her Risperidone treatment was replaced by three anti-psychosis drugs instead. Within months, her daughter's erratic symptoms returned and within a year she stopped speaking.

Desperate to find a resolution, Jayne took another trip to Dr Ohene who reinstated her Risperidone treatment.

**"SOMETIMES,  
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BECAUSE SHE  
IS MY CHILD.  
SHE IS HERE  
FOR A  
REASON  
AND SHE IS  
OURS FOR A  
REASON."**



*Image credit: Arno  
Partissimo from  
Unsplash*



"I think the difference between the diagnosis I had in Britain and the one in Ghana was the focus," said Jayne. "Dr Ohene focussed on Ann-Marie's symptoms, whereas in Britain, because she was taking other anti-psychotic medication, this labelled her as a psychosis patient and influenced how she was diagnosed."

"In addition, there is a lot more 'red tape' in Britain and diagnosis takes a long time, because health practitioners want to be extremely cautious. I believe that is why some people go down the private route to get a diagnosis and turn to the NHS for treatment."

After further intervention from Dr Ohene and more waiting, Ann-Marie's condition was thoroughly diagnosed in Britain

as Asperger Syndrome in October 2015. Research suggests that ADHD can mask diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome and other conditions on the autistic spectrum, and is the likely reason for delayed diagnosis.

### **THE FUTURE**

Now that Ann-Marie's symptoms have been diagnosed, her condition is under control and her speech is returning. She has developed an interest in IT and is studying the subject at college. Jayne is also looking to her future and wants to establish her own charity to share knowledge and offer support to other parents.

One of the biggest issues she has found is the lack of

understanding linked to the condition. "Some people can be very judgemental. I have had people tell me that I waited too long to seek help, or others that tell me they are praying for her to 'snap out of it' and become normal.

"The most important thing for me is that my daughter is here and she is healthy. Sometimes, I forget that my daughter has challenges because she is my child. I wake up and I look after her. I've never once cried to God and asked: 'why me'? She is here for a reason and she is ours for a reason. God never gives you more than you can handle."



*To find out more about how to support people on the autism spectrum, visit:*

- The National Autistic Society at <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
- London-based voluntary support group <https://www.a2ndvoice.com/>
- Autism Awareness Care and Training (AACT) in Ghana <http://aactgh.org/>





## ABOUT SPARKLELIGHT PRODUCTIONS

Sparklelight Productions is a London-based Media Production Company. It is the brainchild of a visionary Christian director, who would love to see more positive films distributed across the UK.

The Director, Pamela Sakyi, has a long history of working in film and television production in a wide range of roles (Runner, Production Assistant, Events Co-ordinator, Edit Assistant, Video Editor, Scriptwriter, Director, Producer and many more).



Pamela Sakyi

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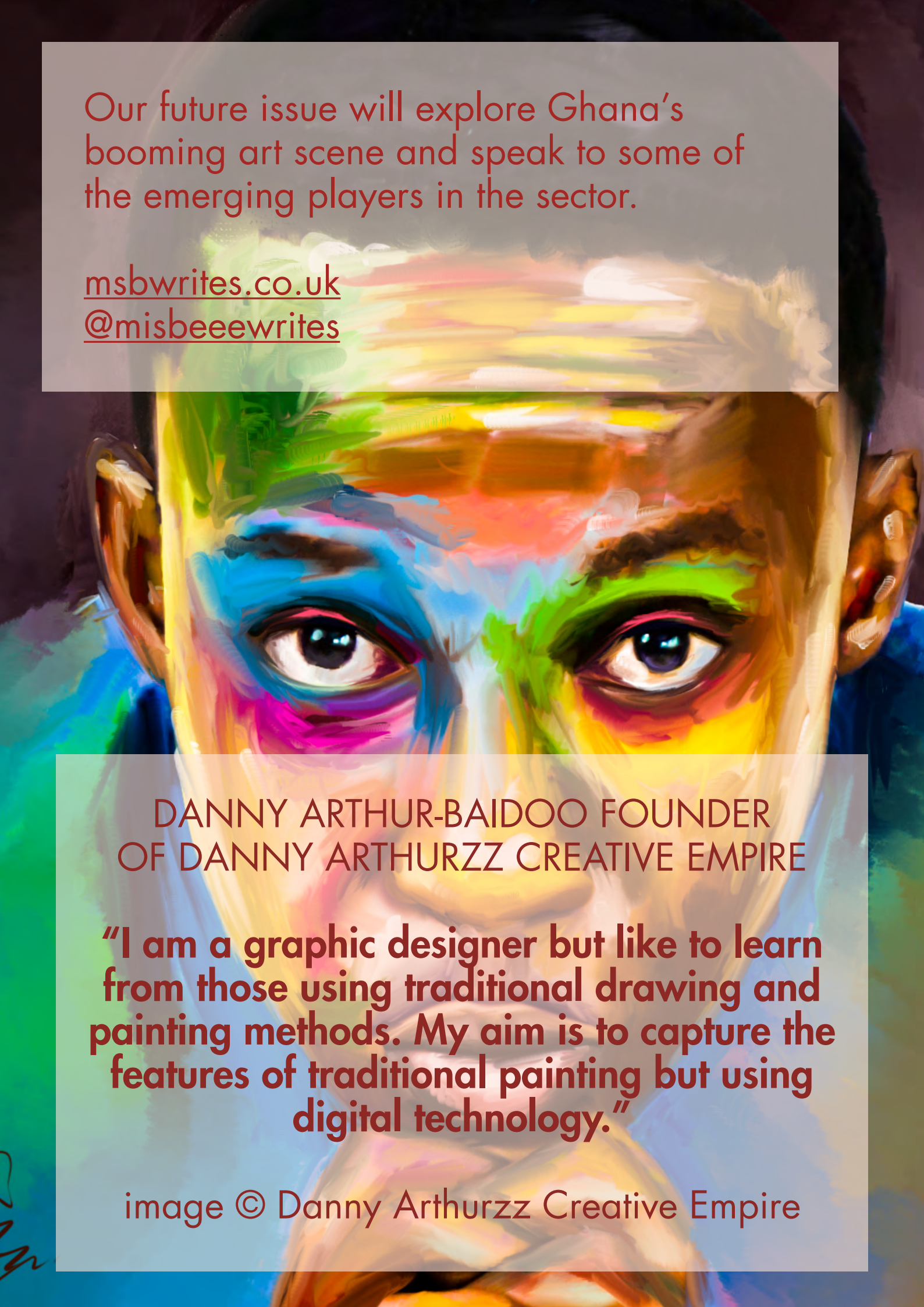


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Our future issue will explore Ghana's booming art scene and speak to some of the emerging players in the sector.

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DANNY ARTHUR-BAIDOO FOUNDER  
OF DANNY ARTHURZZ CREATIVE EMPIRE

**"I am a graphic designer but like to learn from those using traditional drawing and painting methods. My aim is to capture the features of traditional painting but using digital technology."**

image © Danny Arthurzz Creative Empire