From California to Ghana

Learning and Adjusting Through Education
Abroad Programs, Volume IV

Edited with an Introduction by Rose Walls
Acknowledgments
Our deepest gratitude is extended to the people of Ghana who directly and passively create the experience of a lifetime through our interactions and learning, at the University of Ghana – Legon and throughout the nation.
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Introduction – by Rose Walls

We are excited to be drawing to the close of the first semester of the 2014-2015 academic year here at the University of Ghana-Legon. Students from the University of California Education Abroad Program (27) and California State University Office of International Programs (8) are committed to spending one semester or a year in Ghana. Our students always come with a lot of pressure, anxiety and concerns from family and friends. They are often asked: Why Africa? We know when one enters Africa there are some key assumptions or realities that one must contend with, such as:

- An infrastructure that is limited or still under development, which sometimes results in unstable or interrupted water, electricity and Internet service;
- A new environment that contains potential medical challenges (ex. #1 malaria);
- A new culture and behavioral expectations;
- Many new languages;
- A more reserved teaching style and new accented speech during lectures; and,
- The overall stereotype or beliefs that all of Africa is somehow less/inferior/stagnant due to its differences in values, cultures, lifestyle and rate of development.

The aforementioned assumptions and realities take a great deal of time and energy to manage, resolve or adjust to. The California students learn to detach a bit from technology here and to live in the present. It hurts though! I watch their pain as they face social anxiety and push forward to interact face to face with new people from Ghana and students from all over the world who are visiting students like themselves. They are often surprised to meet so many students from Denmark, the Czech Republic, England, Korea, China, South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Malawi, Germany, Japan and various other states in the USA; and from other parts of the world.

The students learn to store and ration water and how to live without lights or endure the noise of a backup generator. The slower Internet can limit Skype time and may require an earlier start for class assignments, but this is handled as a minor inconvenience. California students receive an intensive orientation course over twenty-one or more days that help them to understand cultural expectations, challenges and strategies for adjustment. This course also covers a great deal about Ghana's culture, history, politics, governance, economy, geography, art and social systems. The students learn basic phrases of key Ghanaian languages to help with communication and with the help of current University of Ghana students, they learn about the campus culture.

Lastly, California students are forced to examine their own beliefs, perspectives and knowledge about Ghana and Africa. Many are shocked to find themselves with biases, stereotypes and prejudices that they must learn to assess, question and evaluate. This semester we spent a lot of time discussing how Africa is portrayed in the media (ex. One big, poverty stricken, diseased place), films (always waiting for the white man or outsider to save or lead them), books (docile, ambiguous, where animals usually have more character than people). We surveyed unique features of Africa's history (Transatlantic slavery and colonialism) and current efforts (foreign aid and neo-liberal markets) and questioned what is really working or true. California students energetically joined in this dialogue. The truth – the benefit – they leave Africa energized, focused and with better critical thinking skills.
Well, this semester, we dealt with all of the aforementioned issues, plus quadruple challenges.

1. **A strike action by the University Teacher's Association of Ghana**
   A delay in book and research allowances by the Government, as well as the Government’s announcement to cut this salary/service benefit in the future caused lecturers at all public universities to strike. It took several weeks to reach a consensus on pay and a process for the future causing a delay in the start of the school semester.

2. **Ebola Outbreak in West Africa**
   The academic calendar was also impacted when Ghana's President demanded that all institutions delay the official opening and develop and implement a plan to protect and educate students about the Ebola virus which is having a devastating impact on the West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. From November 2013 through the present, almost 4,500 people have died in those countries. While this number is a very small part of the West African population of 309 million, the spread of the virus is greatly feared because it has no known cure and an almost 50% fatality rate according to the US Center for Disease Control. This is in a region with extensive movement and migration across porous borders. Indeed, as at this writing, we see that cases have now been reported in the USA and Europe indicating how the entire globe has porous borders.

3. **A cholera outbreak**
   Cholera comes from the contamination of water or food with human feces. Many poor individuals in Ghana do not have access to pipe-borne or safe water and adequate toilet facilities. This reality, coupled with the large number of vendors who sell food on the street without proper access to water, toilets and standard restaurant equipment puts a large sector of the nation's population who consume this food at risk. In total, it is reported that there have been 16,500 cases and more than 100 deaths in the Greater Accra Region during the outbreak.

4. **National currency in trouble**
   The Cedi lost almost 40% of its value against many foreign currencies from April to August 2014. This impacted the ability of the nation’s citizens to buy food, pay for transportation, save or just survive. Protests (modeling the USA Occupy Wall Street Movement) were organized. One of the goals of the movement was to force government to quickly address the declining currency and worsening economic conditions and to assist the people who were suffering. Protests are still held periodically as the political temperature rises and falls.

This semester, more than any other that I have witnessed in my 3.5 years of work with the California program and 8 years of teaching at the University of Ghana has been a real challenge. It has challenged our students, their families, the institutions in California, our staff, and the University of Ghana, but most importantly, the citizens of Ghana. But, we educated ourselves, communicated and stayed strong. Day in and day out, we meet and interact with people who teach us, care for us, love us, and make us feel welcome. We talk, listen, work, live, laugh, love, dance, cry, sing and for this moment in time – feel our fates are intertwined with the people of Ghana. And this feeling, while layered with challenges – still offers us more riches than we could ever imagine or explain. Read on and share part of our fabulous journey!
From California to Ghana Volume IV is divided into four parts.

**Part One – Issues and Perspectives on Development, Aid, and Public Policy**

Robert Spoden uses a very creative style to explain the intersection of development, politics, and economics to you, his imaginary visitor. He takes you on a short tour around Accra and uses everyday sights to break down and explain complex themes to the new visitor to Ghana.

Skye Steritz discusses three obstacles that hinder Ghana's development. She examines the impact of slavery, foreign aid, and psychological warfare and proposes how Ghana can regain control.

Emily Schefke reviews the conflicting discourse that links the transatlantic slave trade with today's 'underdevelopment' in Ghana and the philosophy of economic liberalization and free trade. Her review highlights why Africa's development is hindered.

Ria Mukerji explores coastal erosion on the Ada Peninsula in Ghana. She highlights the importance of considering climate change, the influx of people and development activities that contribute to rapid coastal erosion. She stresses the urgent need to look ahead in the efforts to decrease erosion.

Mukul Khandelwal shares key sights and conditions he observes during his early weeks in Ghana. He compares and contrasts the similarities with his country of ethnic origin (India) and his home state in the USA (California). He processes leaving home and being lucky to feel right at home – here in Ghana!

Lorrain Ko processes how Ghana's foreign aid acceptance allows Western ideology to have a strong influence on policies and development. She helps us all to understand the concept, 'where you sit, determines what you see', and how sitting in Ghana clarifies one's perspective on development in Africa.

Caroline Flowers uses an anthropological perspective to process the concept of development. She challenges the reader to realize what lens they use to see and examine a society. She processes how colonialism is rooted in the misunderstanding of culture, as well as the non-holistic approach of foreign aid.
Ryan Rodriquez examines the technological divide between the Global North and the Global South. He proposes that Ghana needs an expansion of access to information via the Internet, not for quicker speed – but to extend technology’s reach beyond the elite.

Taylor Davis examines the concept of development and if the definition truly characterizes a fair standard. She seeks a redefinition of development after evaluating her previously held beliefs.

Susan Flores provides a brief analysis of efforts by local and civil society people in Ghana to improve legal aid for vulnerable populations. She uses personal and internship experiences from her time in Ghana.

Elizabeth Blum analyzes the globalization of agriculture in Ghana. Her work helps us to understand the inequities faced by today's smallholder farmers. She challenges us to look at sustainability and problems created by current international trade regulations.

Rebecca Jacquez compares and contrasts the transatlantic slave era in Ghana and North America with the manifestations of slavery in modern society. This review shifts from prisons in California to gender inequality in Ghana.

Part Two – The Question, Challenge and Realizations of Identity

Somalia Miller-Salmond discusses the initial culture shock she experienced after arriving in Ghana. She struggles with the duality of being an African American.

Magalli Acosta analyzes her identity as a Mexican American, which is not one of privilege. She travels through Ghana and has all types of experiences, such as assumptions of privilege, being called 'white', and being informed America is not a destination of everyone's dreams. She learns to question stereotypes and start a real journey of self-discovery.

Brennan Lagman explores his rich and diverse ethnic background while in Ghana. His exploration allows him to acknowledge the richness and uniqueness of each branch of his ethnicity and to embrace the unique opportunity to learn more about the African branch while in Ghana.

Jewell Long-Hayes processes being an African-American in Ghana. While he enjoys the immersion, he struggles with the history and reality of life in America and how this past also comes to Ghana as well.

Terron Wilkerson analyzes the concept of an 'African-American' being an 'obroni' (foreigner) in Ghana. His skin color is no longer a curse and he blends in Ghana, but he has experiences where he is not welcomed by Ghanaians like they welcome other obviously foreign visitors. Can African Americans expect both? Who are they anyway: Americans or Africans?
Part Three – History, Culture, and Social Interaction

Christine Chu processes how ensemble music practice becomes the unspoken connection to help her develop a sense of community or belonging in Ghana. She goes further and identifies other unspoken communal feelings she has observed in Ghana, and emphasizes the need for people to redevelop their connections to the environment.

Janette Rico explores the Adinkra symbols of the Akan people of Ghana. She uses some of her early Ghanaian experiences to demonstrate the viability of the symbols and the culture and wisdom of the Akan.

Eden Loi explains how he chose to forego studying abroad in an Asian country and followed his inner voice and picked Ghana as his study abroad destination. He discusses how this journey has helped him see Ghana’s hopeful future and their connectedness with the rest of the world. He realizes just how much he has learned about the world by following his calling to Ghana.

Christopher Meyer analyzes the effects of Akan oratory and proverbial knowledge on Ghanaian nationalism and national identity. He uses an anthropological approach to discuss the performers in Ghana’s Party Concert Theater. It beautifully demonstrates the power of the arts to influence, motivate and educate.

Michael Sandoval discusses the history of the Ghanaian game of ‘Oware’ and other pit and pebble games. His strategy to learn the game to promote interaction and cultural integration is a joyous review of a great new strategy of inclusion for foreign/visiting students.

LaToya Sykes processes the importance and current relevance of the Cape Coast Festival in Ghanaian culture. The Festival, called Fetu Afahye, dates back to the 17th century and she draws upon her participation in activities in the 2014 event.

Rebecca Heron reviews the definition of culture. She processes what are the important aspects of culture and compares and contrasts Ghana and America.

Part Four – Health and Wellness

Catherine Yount reviews the concept of disabilities and explores how Ghanaian infrastructures address or challenges the concept. She processes how the stigma around disability and cultural attitudes creates obstacles that can be dismantled.

Khushminder (Mandy) Zenda examines the stigmatization placed on the Men having Sex with Men (MSM) community in Ghana. She highlights how research and work around HIV/AIDS has made this a pivotal community to address.
Kim Rabii processes the impact of culture and how it can lead to mistreatment of homosexuals in the health field. She also looks at the avoidance of health care for spiritual treatment and questions how to properly educate and serve both groups of patients who may avoid health care due to culture.

Jenna Gruffy addresses the cholera outbreak in the Greater Accra Region. She explains what it is; how it is treated; and, how it can be prevented. She also realizes she can be active in local prevention efforts.

As you will see, our students have a very diverse set of academic disciplines, interests and perspectives that they bring to or cultivate in Ghana. This book is a unique snapshot of our students and reflects just a fraction of their pursuits in 2014. Their work is curious, informative, flawed, beautiful, and different. It is human. I am proud of them all, because it is not easy to step forward and attempt to write for others and to publish your ideas, thoughts and observations.

Thank you for becoming part of our audience who listens to our writers’ efforts to learn, compare, understand, explore, and analyze. The journey is not always easy, but the experience is amazingly rewarding. As we say in Ghana, “You are invited!”

November, 2014
Rose Walls

References


Summary Profile of Ghana – by Rose Walls

Ghana is considered a regional model for political and economic reform in Africa. It has had a stable democracy since 1992. Ghana has a history of British colonialism; a proud independence struggle (culminating on 6th March, 1957); and a series of coups d'état that overthrew the first democratically elected government in 1966 with support from external forces. This triggered a series of overthrows that occurred during the next 25 years. Yet, Ghana still stands as a symbol for many African nations. From Ghana came the loudest cry for African unity, pushed by the first elected president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Continental unity is still a long term goal to help solve the African challenge of meeting the basic needs such as access to healthcare, food, housing, education and having a voice in politics. This struggle continues in Africa and around the globe.

Ghana is rich with natural resources such as extensive fertile farm land (27.6%), (Country STAT, 2014), gold (the reason it was formerly called the Gold Coast), diamonds, manganese ore, bauxite, and oil. Yet Ghana struggles like most African countries with maintaining fiscal management and ending debt accumulation and dependency on foreign aid.

Economy

“Ghana’s economy has maintained a commendable growth trajectory with an average annual growth of about 6.0% over the past six years. In 2013 growth decelerated to 4.4%, considerably lower than the growth of 7.9% achieved in 2012. Growth has, however, been broad-based, driven largely by service oriented sectors and industry, which on average have been growing at a rate of 9.0% over the five years up to 2013 (Ghana-African Economic Outlook, 2014, pg.1). While Ghana does a significant amount of exports around gold and unprocessed cocoa, it has not developed its industrial capabilities to its fullest potential, however, it does do limited food processing. Ghana has enormous potential due to the proximity to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). To realize this potential, it still has to tackle the challenges of unreliable energy, construction and the cost associated with credit/business loans.

In 2012, Ghana’s GDP (purchasing power parity) was 82.65 billion. Agriculture accounted for one-quarter of GDP and employed more than half of the nation's workforce, mainly small landowners. The services sector accounted for 50% of the GDP. Gold and cocoa production, followed by individual remittances are the major sources of foreign exchange. According to Ghana Economy 2014, (CIA World Factbook), the GDP per capita in Ghana in 2012 was USS3,300. GDP refers to gross domestic product at purchasing power parity per capita. Put simply, this is the value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given year divided by the average (or mid-year) population for the same year.

GDP composition by sector of origin in 2012 was as follows (Ghana Economy 2014, CIA World Factbook, pg 2):

Agriculture: 22.7%
Industry: 27.3%
Services: 50%
Agricultural products:
Cocoa, rice, cassava, peanuts, corn, shea nuts, bananas, timber

Industries:
Mining, timber, light manufacturing, aluminum smelting, food processing, cement, small commercial ship building

Labor force – by occupation:
Agriculture: 56%
Industry: 15%
Services: 29%

National Budget 2012:
Revenues: $9.282 billion
Expenditures: $14.13 billion
Public debt in 2012: 50% of GDP
Inflation rate (consumer prices) in 2012: 9.2%
Exports in 2012: $13.54 billion
Imports in 2012: $17.76 billion
Reserves of foreign exchange and gold in 2012: $5.705 billion
Debt – external (2012): $12.64 billion

Living Standards
The early data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service via a seven year assessment in August 2014 revealed:

- That the dynamics of poverty is still a very rural phenomenon in Ghana with limited access to healthcare, banking, postal service, and schools above the junior high level.
- That only 50% of rural residents get electricity from the national grid.
- That 93.3% of eligible children are in school (6-12 years) and that the average household spends 500 Ghana Cedis on each family member in school.
- That 82% of males and 77% of females over the age of 15 are in the labor force.
- That 25% of the population lives in poverty.

Yet, this survey also revealed that more than fifty percent of rural residents stressed that their living conditions have improved in the last ten years. So hope and improvement abounds as Ghana tackles Millennium Development Goals aimed at reducing extreme poverty, limiting hunger and improving access to education.

Health
In Ghana, most health care is provided by the government and is administered by the Ministry of Health and Ghana Health Services. The healthcare system has five levels of providers: health posts which are first level primary care for rural residents, health centers and polyclinics, district hospitals, regional hospitals, and tertiary hospitals.
Healthcare varies throughout the country. In urban Accra one can find every level of care and a large private network of providers. But in some rural areas, only Level 1 service is available.

Ghana has a National Health Insurance Scheme and it has provided coverage for more than 12 million residents of Ghana (Ghana National Health Insurance Scheme, 2014). The scheme is managed by the National Health Insurance Authority and works with the health sector on service delivery, human resource improvement, and public education about health conditions.

Ghana, like most of sub-Saharan Africa, deals with common diseases endemic to the area. These include but are not limited to: cholera, typhoid, pertussis, chicken pox, yellow fever, measles, hepatitis, malaria, and venereal disease. The World Health Organization and Ghana Health Service see malaria as the number one issue in health facilities (Akapule, 2011).

In 2013, life expectancy at birth in Ghana was 66 years for males and 67 years for females. The infant mortality rate is 39 per 1,000 live births. The current fertility rate is 2.12 children among Ghanaian women. Currently 97.5% of the Ghanaian population has access to primary health care (www.ghanaweb.com).

Ghana has a 1.37 HIV prevalence rate and continues to make strides in maternal and child health. Health spending averages 4.7 percent of GDP (GhanaWeb).

Ghana is a nation divided into ten regions. Each region has a capital. Each region also has a unique culture with fascinating customs, foods, festivals and natural beauty. Ghana is known for its generous hospitality. While the Greater Accra Region has more than 5 million people, and the University of Ghana-Legon has more than 40,000 students and workers, you can still find quiet spots on isolated palm lined beaches, a new friend to share a drink, or stumble upon a new street. Ghana has bustling markets, museums, castles and forts, wildlife protected areas, waterfalls, mountains, crocodile ponds, ancient mosques, mystical lakes and stones, and a growing number of eco-tourism sites.

Ghana has many or most Western amenities and a developing infrastructure, but Ghana’s true gift is its unique Ghanaian character.

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7. Ghana Web:
Part One – Issues and Perspectives on Development, Aid, and Public Policy
The Effects of Development Politics in Ghana as Seen Through My Eyes – by Robert Spoden

Curiosity is what compelled me to make the journey to Ghana. I knew it would not be easy – consistencies that I have taken for granted such as running water, electricity and roads would no longer be reliable. I would see a level of poverty that would make some of the most abject circumstances in the U.S. seem relatively luxurious. I also came here as a student of political science. After debating the fine points of political theory, of writing neat academic papers with elaborately constructed arguments, of reading dense and heady textbooks on Sub-Saharan African political development with material as dry as the paper they are written on, I wanted to come here, and see the Global South for myself. I wanted to draw my own conclusions about development politics, and that required me venturing out of the comfortable ivory tower nestled atop Cowell Ranch in Santa Cruz.

Ghana accepted me as a guest, graciously sending me a student visa affixed to my passport, for a modest fee of course. Initially, I was dazzled. The streets here resembled a jumble of chaos. The differences between what I was accustomed to and what I encountered immediately after stepping off the plane were stark, overwhelming even. Yet, after growing accustomed to my new environment, I sensed an overall lack of social justice. It seems that contemporary development politics play a major role in perpetuating this injustice, and alternative development ideas need to be explored.

We’re well on our way to yet another essay, it seems, but instead of subjecting you to another set of dry academic ideas, I invite you to come with me to Ghana, and take a stroll. We’ll catch a tro-tro, and head to Jamestown, a fishing community on the coast, just southwest of downtown Accra. I know you have a lot to do, but in Ghana, there's always time! The prevailing ethos, “time is money”, doesn’t apply here. I have encountered many Ghanaians who have stopped me on my “important” errand and asked me how I was doing, and actually wanted to know. The nerve of them! But really, what is the rush that we feel in the U.S. all about? Relax we’re in Ghana! Akwaaba! You are welcome! Your imagination will spare you fifteen hours in coach class as we embark on our leisurely stroll.

Our outing begins at Legon campus, also known as the University of Ghana. The landscape here is clean and pristine, and the roads are paved, and decently maintained; there are some stretches with potholes. The most striking feature is that along the roads, on either side is a drainage ditch, about two feet deep. Watch your step! The students here typically come from families that are fortunate enough to afford to send them to college. Financial aid is limited, for the Aid office says that from 2006 to 2011, over 1500 students applied for aid, but about 950 were accepted (Financial Aid Statistics n.d.). The number of total applicants for that period of time seems relatively low, given that there is just under 30,000 students enrolled, last I checked on the web (Enrolment and Graduation Statistics n.d.). Every time I think about this, I shudder, because I am not a traditional student, and my parents are not paying for my education.
Venturing to Okponglo junction, the tro-tro stop at the Southeast corner of campus, we walk by a set of two multi-story compounds under guard and ringed with concertina just beneath the balconies on the second story. You turn toward me to ask a question:

“Why does this building have barbed wire around it, and the others don't?”

“This is where most of the international students stay, and the barbed wire is there to keep those who may be tempted to scurry up the walls out. There are large disparities of wealth here, and like back in the States, if you're wealthy and go to certain quarters, you run the risk of being robbed. In Ghana, foreigners are widely seen as wealthy. Fortunately, most Ghanaians I have run into are really nice. In fact, I have felt safer on the streets here than in some parts of America. A little common sense and awareness goes a long way.” You seem satisfied with my reply, so we keep going toward Okponglo.

On our way to the tro-tro stop, the sidewalk abruptly ends, as a long stretch of it is torn up, forcing us to use the non-existent shoulder of the narrow roadway. The sidewalk has been in this condition for quite awhile. Taxis drive by, some honking their horns. A driver slows, creeping past us in his grey and yellow sub-compact car.

“Where are you going? You should get in my car, I can take you there,” implores the cab driver.

“It's okay. We're going to Jamestown, but want to take the tro-tro. Thank you, and God Bless,” I reply, as a vehicle passes him, blaring its horn.

The taxi drives off, and we continue, passing the massive concrete shell of an incomplete sports stadium. Signs of active construction there are sparse; there are no work crews present, yet it is a weekday.

“So, how long has the sidewalk been torn up, and what's with the stadium?” you ask.

“The government has limited funding. There's not enough revenue to go around, and whatever there is, is not distributed evenly.”

We arrive at the highway. There is a bike path and a sidewalk here, and they are frequently crowded with street vendors. Elaborating on what I said earlier, I turn to you and explain, “East Legon is a relatively wealthy neighborhood. The Accra Mall is just a couple kilometers south.” The traffic stopped, as the light turned red. Some young men on motorcycles kept going anyway, taking the light as quaint roadside décor. Women, carrying baskets atop their heads laden with merchandise, meandered between the cars. One of the women had a baby strapped to her back. You look on in amazement as these vendors efficiently hawked water sachets, plantain chips, groundnuts, and toilet paper.

“Wow, Ghana has quite a street culture!”
“Yes, that was my first impression. But I implore you to think about it a little deeper,” I reply, with a serious look. Not immediately seeing my point, I offer to explain further: “I heard a lecture by a Professor Gavua, who teaches in the Archeology Department at the University.”

“Yeah? What did he say?”

“He said that Ghana has been heavily influenced from the outside for hundreds of years, that even some of the fabric that is considered Ghanaian is from the Dutch. Ghana was colonized, and since then has imported most of its commodities. In light of these facts, Professor Gavua challenged us to consider what we see on the streets, with the vendors, with people cooking with charcoal and such, as not Ghanaian culture, per se, but rather, a culture of poverty” (Gavua 2014).

“Circ! Circ! Circ!” An energetic young man, or mate, calls out from the side window of a tro-tro as it pulls up. He steps out, gesturing enthusiastically for us to get inside. Two other tro-tros pull up whose mates call out different destination. It’s a little confusing, as all three young men are imploring us to get on their respective minibuses. I ask the other two mates if they’re going to Tema Station, and one says he is. We get in his tro-tro, delicately packing ourselves into two of the 20 seats crammed in the back of a minibus. The battered door slides shut, and we move forward, rattling past the other tro-tros. The mate, a jaunty young man short in stature, and likely a minor, keeps diligent vigil for potential fares while frequently shouting out the window and pointing his hand upward. We are heading south, into the bowels of Accra.

As you marvel at the street scenery, our progress is slowed by a tro-tro up ahead that has broken down in the middle of the highway. Traffic grinds to a halt, and horns blare. It is hot out, and we are packed inside the small minibus. As the novelty and charm of the tro-tro ride wanes, you remember the last thing I mentioned about culture in Ghana. After reflecting on it for a bit, you ask, “I heard that Ghana is one of the most developed countries in Africa, that its economy has been growing at a high rate for the last few years, and that oil was recently discovered. After being here for a little bit, and experiencing this tro-tro ride, I am wondering if this is part of that culture of poverty you speak of?”

“Very much so. Though the traffic can get really awful in Santa Cruz, backups caused by a broken down public transit vehicle are rare, and when on the bus, even on the way to campus in the morning, it seems a bit more spacious,” I offer.

“Why do they use minibuses here, instead of the kind of buses we have in the States? It would seem like fewer busses that carry more people would be more efficient than more busses that carry less,” you inquire.

“Well, for one thing the minibuses are privately owned. There’s very little in the way of a public transit system run by the government,” I explain. Elaborating further, I continue: “I recently read a piece by Magnus Quarshie who explained that because the public transit is privatized here, thousands of individual owners compete fiercely for their passengers, and he used this term called ‘penny wars,’ in which he described the owners barely making enough to pay their bills.
They never have enough money for important things like depreciation, or routine maintenance of their vehicles, and the necessary repairs are done as cheaply as possible.” –(Quarshie 2007:106).

“Wow, at first I thought the tro-tro system was efficient. I mean, there were like three of them back at the campus wanting us to board their vehicles. But it seems that this comes at a price, because the safety of passengers and the reliability of service are severely impacted.”

Chuckling, in agreement, I reply, “In America, I was always told that the free market, that private industry was the best way to handle public services. I almost believed it, but then I came here and saw the transit system which is almost entirely run by private owners.”

We slowly inch forward. The traffic congestion is chronic, but our Ghanaian passengers are calm. Nobody is in a hurry. Eventually, we make it past the tro-tro. It broke down not too far ahead of us. The white minibus, battered and rusted, had big yellow text reading, “Be Patient,” splashed across its back window. It was stuffed full of passengers. The driver is at the front of the vehicle, under the bonnet, trying to coax his steed back to life.

A thought comes to me about development. I turn to you, saying, “You’ve probably heard about the development aid funding that America, Europe and China has given to Africa as well as other countries in the Global South, right?”

“Yeah, not a whole heck of a lot, but it seems that Africa can never get its act together. I mean, we’ve been giving them money for decades, but much of the continent is in dire straits. Ghana looks a little better off with its highways and cars, but even so I can see how there’s a culture of poverty here,” you answer.

“Well, I’ve encountered some interesting arguments since coming here that addresses what you just said – particularly that part about Africa never seeming to get its act together, and also about your perception of cars and highways as signs of development.”

You look at me quizzically – “What do you mean? Aren’t cars and roads needed for a good economy?”

“Indeed, yes, but think about this: what exactly is development? Why is development nearly always talked about in terms of economics, of rises in GDP and such? Also, what about this concept of car ownership? Sure, lots of people in America own cars, but those who do not have hardship because of the way our cities are planned. That author I mentioned earlier, Quarshie, said car ownership here is about 5 per cent of the population” –(2007:108). I go on: “But, in the end, like in much of America, the infrastructure here is planned around the automobile, and that it seems the people who are doing the planning all drive cars” –(Quarshie 2007:113).

“So there’s a car culture here, despite most people not having their own vehicles. How strange,” you observe.
I reply, saying, “Yes, I think that along with Western aid money and technology, that culture, particularly consumerism, and its symbols of success such as car ownership, have been imported here.” I continue, “In fact, I read this other book by Professor Dzorgbo, who is in the Sociology Department here. He makes a solid argument about development, in that the donors are the dominant actors in the aid relationship, and that along with controlling the money, the West also controls the discussion of what constitutes development. This made sense to me, because when I read his argument, which was based on Michelle Foucault’s theory of power knowledge, I realized that even my own thinking of what constitutes development has essentially been socially constructed” (Dzorgbo 2012:2).

“Wow, I never thought of it like that. So you’re saying that Ghanaians, along with other people in the Global South have not been asked to share what they think about development, and that our perception of development is created and controlled by our capitalist culture?”

“Exactly. We constantly hear that private investment is the answer. Frequently, we are shown images of poverty in the media, and many are moved by such to justify what we do in the Global South. In fact, that same professor addressed this by claiming that persistent poverty in the Global South serves an important purpose because it gives the donor countries, and their citizens something to contrast their wealth to, and that in doing so, creates justification for the Western idea of development” (Dzorgbo 2012:2).

“Interesting, so basically the wealthy perceive that they’re rich by comparing themselves to others who are not?”

“Exactly. It’s kind of sinister, because this implies that development discourse is not really motivated by alleviating poverty in the first place. There was an interesting quote from an official in USAID that the professor used to reinforce this argument – it went along the lines of framing development aid in terms of maximizing private investment opportunity and advancing American interests” (Dzorgbo 2012:4).

Our tro-tro passes by the Accra Mall. There are some high-rise buildings on the right, and one of them is being worked on. A crane is hoisting a bundle of building materials to an upper floor. I point out the structure and explain that it’s a new high rise apartment complex. We continue our journey.

There are frequent stops, and we have to get up and get off the tro-tro in order to allow others to get off and get on. At one stop, there is a man sleeping on the sidewalk – his clothes are covered in dirt. Another man in crutches approaches. He is missing a leg. As I step outside the minibus to let people off, the young man hoists himself into the tight confines of the tro-tro by balancing deftly on his crutches. I can see a bit of anxiety on his face as he built up the momentum to swing his body inside. I wondered whether or not he has ever fallen backward while trying this maneuver. We continue on, getting closer to downtown.
The traffic congestion gets intense. It takes almost 20 minutes to get to the end of the street we were on. It’s hot outside, the sounds of vendors, horns, and the noxious smell of exhaust fills the air. While you are taking in the urban scene, I think about the man with the crutches, and wonder how disabled people are accommodated here. I have yet to see a tro-tro with a wheel chair ramp, but I have seen many Ghanaians who are missing legs, and they are frequently out in the street begging.

We get off at Tema Station. The crowd is intense. The cacophony is undecipherable. Tema Station is a large dirt lot packed with tro-tros, vendors and taxi drivers. We head to the road, and walk past a pristine park that is fenced off. You ask me what that is, and I explain that it’s the memorial park for Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana.

“I learned some interesting things about Kwame Nkrumah during orientation class,” I said. “He was very concerned with African unity, and he was also an advocate for a centrally-planned economy. He didn’t last very long though because the cocoa price collapsed and the economy followed. Cocoa was the primary export and source of revenue for Ghana; any price fluctuation of that one commodity dramatically impacted the whole economy. Nkrumah realized this, and tried to develop a domestic industry that would replace various necessities that are imported, and thus offset the uneven terms of trade. Unfortunately, the economy tanked in 1966, and he was deposed in a military coup. Ever since then, Ghana has received foreign aid, gone into debt and has been forced to implement economic policies that are dictated from donor agencies like the World Bank and IMF” —(Dzorgbo, 2012:67).

“Yes, but wasn’t Ghana’s debt forgiven not too long ago?”

“Interesting point, but in order to qualify for this debt forgiveness, Ghana had to declare itself as a Highly Indebted Poor Country. In fact, I saw a film in orientation class that interviewed Ghanaians, asking about what they thought of this debt relief. What I learned was that in order for Ghana’s debt to be cancelled, its monetary policy was essentially taken over by the West” (Andrew 2006).

“So this is interesting. It sounds like the Ghanaian government’s hands are tied, and that the power vacuum in the economy is filled by Westernized private investment interests. On the way here, I saw evidence of this as we passed wooden shacks amidst pristine high-rise buildings.”

“Exactly. That professor I was talking about earlier wrote about this as well, in arguing that foreign aid is essentially encapsulated in neoliberal ideology, that is, the recipient government has to get out of the way while their role in the economy is diminished. The threat of being cut off from funding is constant, so Third World governments are rewarded with funding and loans by towing the line” (Dzorgbo 2012:2). I also encountered another professor here in Ghana who wrote about the housing situation. Professor Owusu found that private investment focused more on urban areas than on the rural ones, and that in those areas, real estate developers continually favor building projects that attract the wealthy, most of who are foreigners, and that their buildings, the high-rises you saw, are constructed out of imported materials, further marginalizing potential domestic industry.
The end result is that previous occupants of the nearby land are priced out, as their rents increase; they are forced into densely populated and woefully underserved neighborhoods” (Owusu 2013:76).

We have been walking for awhile. Vehicles, motorbikes and cyclists have passed by on the road. The sidewalk comes and goes. Sometimes we have to walk carefully around obstructions whilst watching for oncoming traffic. At times, pedestrians try to cross the road, and you notice the vehicles do not slow down for them, and usually the drivers honk their horns, wanting them to get out of the way.

“Walking down the street here is quite an ordeal. I’m glad it’s daylight out, because if it weren’t, I probably would have fallen into an open sewer. Also, the drivers here seem to be inconsiderate of the pedestrians, yet I was told time was not money. Why don’t they slow down? What's the rush?”

“That last question is interesting, and I have given it a lot of thought. I am a cyclist, and while staying here, I bought a bicycle. Cycling here is dangerous because motorists will frequently cut me off and not really acknowledge my presence on the road. I think it’s worse if you’re on foot actually, at least on a bike you’re moving fast enough to get on the road in a lot of cases, while as a pedestrian, there are frequent hazards and often not a lot of space to navigate.”

“I see, but what explains the attitude of the motorists?” You ask, while wiping the sweat off your brow.

“Yes, it was a bit of a riddle at first, but after thinking about the arguments we have discussed so far, particularly the point made earlier about Ghana being an importer of the consumerist culture and the symbolism that comes with it, I realized that the attitude could be an internalization of the car culture as an expression of power, and the sense of entitlement that comes with it. I’ve observed this phenomenon in America, but I think on the roads it is more pronounced in Ghana because the enforcement of traffic laws is not as prevalent here.”

“So, what you’re saying is that some of the attitudes, and culture even, are not really Ghanaian.”

“Exactly. Going back to professor Dzorgbo’s argument, Ghana, as a recipient in the development aid relationship, does not have a say in what constitutes and symbolizes progress, but rather the donors dominate this discourse”(Dzorgbo 2012:2).

“That doesn’t seem just,” you respond, continuing, “it seems that while we are told development is lifting people out of poverty, it is in fact not lifting all boats, and through the current scheme of private investment, the donors seem to be deriving the most benefit, while more Ghanaians are marginalized by real estate projects and cultural attitudes influenced by this power knowledge you speak of that is coming from the rich.”

“My point exactly. In fact, the transportation system with its attendant lack of pedestrian infrastructure and privatized mass transit serves as a concrete example of this marginalization, and the fatality statistics arising out of this lack of fulfilled need drive the point home.”
“Yeah, it seems obvious that a lot of people here get injured and perhaps killed just by commuting,” you observe.

I reply, “There was an article in *The Economist* magazine that highlighted this woeful lack of safety measures and of leaving pedestrians out in the cold. In fact, it said that the World Health Organization projected annual vehicle-related fatalities to exceed deaths from HIV / AIDS by 2030, and much of them will be coming from the Global South.”

“Oh wow. That’s pretty high, and alarming!”

“Precisely. What’s really bothersome is that same article pointed out that most of the fatalities are young men. There are, or will be, the breadwinners for their families, and as a result that family, on top of the grief caused by untimely death, will suffer financial hardship for a long time” (Driving to an Early Grave 2014).

We arrive by the colonial fort and red and white lighthouse at the entrance to Jamestown. Upon surveying the area, our olfactory sense acclimates to the persistent smell of fish. There are scores of fishing boats, all handcrafted from wood. Many are on the beach, and more are floating out in the ocean. There are countless shacks, makeshift wooden structures that are housing this population. While there is electricity here, there are no paved roads. Housing in this area, it seems has been reduced to the bare minimum of what constitutes a shelter. The residents, all Ghanaian, are very nice. We look at each other, and reflect on the culture of poverty. While through the eyes of a tourist, Jamestown might seem quaint, through the eyes of this student of politics, I see factual evidence that confirms the lofty arguments made by professor Dzorgbo. It would be interesting to know what ideas these people, these Ghanaian residents of Jamestown, whose livelihood is intrinsically linked with the sea, have about development.

We encounter Humphrey, a friendly man who offers to show us around. He is neatly dressed in beach shorts and a polo shirt. He says that he is a teacher for the school in Jamestown, and that he has been teaching the children of the fishermen here for six years. “Education is the answer,” Humphrey tells us. Humphrey explains that during the week, every morning at 6, he will go around the community and pick up the kids, bringing them to the school, which is a big shack with three rooms and desks. The structure doubles as a local church on Sundays. Humphrey entices the children to come, by seeing to it that there is free food. The whole system is volunteer-based. Humphrey said that he doesn’t get paid for his efforts that he, along with 5 other volunteer teachers, try to teach these kids. Ultimately, they identify their best pupils and work to get them registered with the government education program.

While we find Humphrey’s work in Jamestown to be admirable, we were stunned by the lack of services in this community. In fact, a class that I am taking on the management of NGOs, which is being taught by Professor Justice, addresses the role of NGOs, or civil society organizations, in filling the gaps. Professor Justice, during lecture, confirmed my observations when he spoke of areas in Ghana where there is no evidence of government services (Bowley 2014). After my experience in Jamestown, and reflecting on some Ghanaian arguments in terms of development,
I am concerned about the proliferation of NGOs in Ghana that have the potential to act as further transmission points of Western power knowledge. Whenever the politics of development is being discussed, I urge you to consider the point of view coming from the people being developed. It is with these thoughts I will leave you.

Thank you for coming along with me on this imaginary journey. You may have more questions. I invite you to make your journey to Ghana a real one in an effort to answer those questions. It will be worth it, I promise.

Curiosity, that is, the desire to have a more holistic world-view was what drove me to come here. In the end, I got to see both sides of the development relationship, for I was inculcated on the donor side, and now have the opportunity to study on the recipient side. The differences in perception are stark; I will never think of development in the same way. In the interest of promoting social justice, I think we need to ask the citizens and governments of the recipient countries what they need, and in turn do what we can to contribute toward fulfilling that need while looking out after our interests, of course. As a student of politics, I think there may still be room for private investment in terms of development, but after my experiences here, the ideology surrounding private investment needs to play a minor role in the creation of development ideas. The evidence suggests that when private investment takes priority, especially in the arena of public service, people who cannot afford to pay are pushed out. In the end, my perception of the world, in terms of those who are rich and those who are poor has shifted: those in wealth and those in poverty are not separate per se, but rather, they are intrinsically linked.

References


How the History of Slavery, Foreign Aid, and Psychological Warfare Impede Ghana’s Development – by Skye Steritz

Several key factors serve as great obstacles to Ghana’s development. Firstly, the legacy of slavery and violently forceful politics brought by a few European nations, secondly, the crippling dynamics of foreign aid and development “partnerships”, and lastly, the continuing psychological warfare the Western world wages on this country.

Beginning in the 1480s, the Portuguese entered Ghana and began pillaging the nation’s abundant resources. Then came the Dutch and finally the British, who colonized Ghana and stole its autonomy. In his book “Culture and Development in Africa”, A.K Awedoba discusses how the political history of a country directly affects its development, highlighting the importance of having a nation in which the citizens are free to choose their leaders as a key factor in how the country will develop (Awedoba, p. 9). Before colonization Ghana was made up of many different tribes and although they did fight, the people were at least free to select their own chiefs and queen mothers. However, when the Europeans came in, they took over using violent force, subjugation, and domination. Ghanaians suddenly had no power to decide on their leadership. This was a huge loss and setback, as the British took advantage of the Ghanaian people and their rich country. Families no longer had the freedom to earn a living in the way they wished; they lost power over their own livelihood. Ghana is still working to recover from this and it is obvious that “the economic hardships of today are due in no small part to the bad politics of the past” (Awedoba, p. 9).

As Ghana is still a new nation, gaining independence less than sixty years ago, it is still recovering from the harmful dynamics of colonialism. I have witnessed how international corporations come in and play off its vulnerability reaping great profits for themselves. It is clear that Ghana’s leaders are pressured to make economic policy decisions that benefit these corporations that have their headquarters in developed countries (Dzorgbo p. 9). Ghanaians are not benefitting from this influx of corporate products, for it forces their local products to be sold at lower and lower prices. To wrap up this first idea, the poverty experienced by millions of Ghanaians today can be traced back to the unethical external control over Ghana’s politics that began over one hundred years ago with British colonial rule. Slavery and colonialism left a mess for Ghana to clean up, creating huge challenges for the country’s development.

Secondly, foreign aid works to keep the tradition of external control over Ghana’s resources alive, making it the next developmental hurdle. By reading Dan-Bright Dzorgbo’s “Foreign Aid and Ghana: Power Dynamics of Partnership in Development” I came to realize that foreign aid is not at all the humanitarian gesture that it sounds like. The main donors to developing countries like Ghana are the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and rich Western powers like the United States Government. Unfortunately, these donors have exploitative intentions; when they give foreign aid to developing countries like Ghana, the receiving country must accept numerous conditionalities that are usually not in their best interest. In Dzorgbo’s words, “aid has become the principal means of domination and exploitation” of Ghana and many other countries as it gives “Western powers the opportunity to directly control the resources of the developing world for their own industrialization and accumulation of wealth” (Dzorgbo, p. 1). In short, foreign aid ironically hinders development much more than it promotes it.
That is why Kwame Nkrumah “sought to define an autonomous development strategy” in which Ghana could pave its own course of development, move at its own pace, and separate from the externally-oriented colonial policies of the past century (Dzorgbo, p. 6). During his presidency, 1957-1966, he implemented economic nationalism, defined by Dzorgbo as a policy “whose main tenet is that economic activities are subordinate to state building and the interests of the state” (Dzorgbo, p. 6). Economic nationalism was obviously beneficial for the citizenry as proven by the fact that the relative standard of living at that time was higher than it is in present day Ghana (Albert Walls lecture). Nkrumah was a great leader who not only put in place strong statist policies but also smartly limited foreign aid, advocating instead for the union of African countries, whom he believed would be better off if they traded with each other rather than Western nations. In other words, Nkrumah limited foreign aid in order to ensure internal control “over the content as well as the direction of [Ghana’s] development policy” (Dzorgbo, p. vii). If Nkrumah’s policies could have remained in place then Ghana would not face the same serious development challenges it does today.

Tragically, a crisis in the 1960s “culminated in a military coup in 1966, which in many ways was a turning point for Ghana” (Dzorgbo, p. 7). Hitherto, Ghana's greatest development challenge had been to recover from colonial rule (in which all political power was stolen from the native people) and reform a cohesive social, political and economic system. Nkrumah was doing well at this. However after he was removed from power in 1966, Ghana's developmental challenges inflated. The nation's greatest challenges became standing its ground in a global economic policy environment in terms of maintaining control over the “pricing of raw materials and agricultural products” produced and exported from the country (Dzorgbo, p. 6).

Unfortunately, the crisis in the 1960s led Ghana's new government leaders to accept policy recommendations from the IMF and World Bank, who deemed Ghana's previous statist development strategy to be “unacceptable”, insulting the country in a tough time (an example of psychological warfare) (Dzorgbo, p. 7). Ghana's new leadership accepted whatever the powerful donors proposed most likely because they were overwhelmed by the economic crisis and were lacking a clearly outlined national policy. This is when the psychological warfare and Ghanaian subordination to Western capital worsened again. By accepting this aid the government of Ghana basically began to relinquish its power to determine its own development path and social/economic policies, radically reversing policies of the Nkrumah government. The IMF and World Bank's conditions to giving increased aid “amounted to a continuous loosening of control over national economic policy...and removing restrictions placed on the market” (Dzorgbo, p. 9). This undoing of Nkrumah's statist policies came with many adverse consequences.

The newly accepted policies made it easier for the donors to exploit Ghana and its resources as well as to privatize certain crucial industries like water, making it more difficult for the rural and urban poor alike to access safe, clean, potable water. Along with the lack of adequate water supply systems, “for many communities access to health, education, and sanitation” deteriorated during this time (Dzorgbo, p. 13).
It is horrifying to realize that these issues have actually been made worse by the IMF and World Bank as they have forced Ghana's government to set in place policies which have led to devastating unemployment as well as disintegration of services (Dzorgbo, p. 13). In short, foreign aid and its accompanying policies have become perhaps the largest development challenge for Ghana as its country's leaders have shockingly “become more accountable to Washington than to their own citizens” (Dzorgbo, p. 14).

Because of the debt racked up due to foreign aid, Ghana was heavily pressured to declare itself one of the highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) of the world in order to obtain debt cancellation (Dzorgbo, p. 14). This burden of a title is terribly humiliating for a country to have to put on itself. Rich, Western powers who wish to keep Ghana from rising to truly independent economic success meant for this title to be a slap in the face; it is psychological torture, having to declare one's self to be poor and indebted and therefore, in need of help. This sort of violence towards the national and individual psyche of Ghana has been continuing since the transatlantic slave trade began and serves as a hindrance to smooth development.

When Europeans came in and ripped people from their motherland, they also convinced the natives that Christianity was superior to their traditional religions, and in doing so, weakened the culture, robbed them of their pride, and worked to make them hate themselves. Europeans infiltrated the Ghanaian psyche and the damages are still alive today. As noted in the film Taking Root (that discusses impacts of British colonization on Kenya), “culture is coded wisdom [and] when missionaries brought Christianity, [they] cut” the native people off “from the coded wisdom of [their] ancestors”. Indeed, the same British colonizers worked diligently to disconnect both the Kenyan and Ghanaian populations from their powerful roots; it was part of their strategy to control the people of these nations. The British wanted to sever these ties to weaken the local peoples' collective power because when people become disconnected from their cultural narratives, their history, their collective identity, they lose a part of themselves. All of this was part of an intentional act of violence on the psyche. This psychological warfare continues today as the media still works to convince locals that anything from the Western world is superior to anything that comes from their homeland. People cannot build up a strong, independently successful infrastructure if their pride and confidence in themselves has been robbed. Dzorgbo notes how it is easier to control one’s mind than it is to control their actual physical bodies, as was the case during times of slavery.

Sadly, these three factors, namely the wounds of slavery and colonialism, the devastating effects of foreign aid, and the never-ending psychological torment inflicted on Ghana, are holding the country back from being able to reach its highest potential in terms of developing its infrastructure and improving the overall quality of life for its citizens. I would argue that the most detrimental of these is the effects of foreign aid.

While corporations, foreign governments and aid donors like the IMF and World Bank claim to be trying to assist Ghana in its development, the reality is that they are continuing to cripple the power of the people here by causing them to remain in debt through the foreign aid scheme.
Therefore, I believe an important piece of the solution lies in returning to statist policies, following in Nkrumah’s footsteps and rejecting foreign aid all together. This would allow Ghana to regain control over prices of its resources and its development path while disallowing foreign entities from telling the Ghanaian government how it must spend its money. In order to do this Ghana must elect very strong leaders who must be determined to resist external pressure to accept aid.

References

**Reasons Why Developing Countries Are Not Developing – by Emily Schefke**

Development cannot be defined in a universal manner. Though basic needs and wants are crucial in the development of a nation, the way a country achieves these is not always the same. Neoliberalism is an economic and social phenomenon that supports economic liberalization, deregulation, and privatization to enhance the role of the private sector in the economy. Through the utilization of protectionism tools and subsidy reduction, developing nations do not have a fair chance in becoming competitive in the global economy. But still, neoliberalism is deemed to be the best way to improve social and economic stability even though there is little to no evidence of this being the case. When contrasting the United States with Ghana or the rest of Africa, it is easy to say and verify the notion that the United States is first world and Africa is third world without recognizing the historical legacies that still prevent developing nations from becoming powerful and independent. The reason colonial effects continue to exist is due to knowledge hierarchies and the policies of neoliberalism such as free trade. Debt relief is made to look like benign intervention when rather it is sending nations further and further into debt. This is not coincidence but it is instilled to keep certain countries at the top of the economic ladder.

Epistemology or the theory of knowledge plays a huge role in power dynamics. As Foucault argues, “discourse, power, and knowledge are intrinsically related” (Dzorgbo, 2011, p.2). In the United States, a melting pot of cultures and people, it is ironic and, to put it simply -- sad, that history is taught in such a diminished and careless manner. Colonialism, a term we have heard since we were in elementary school did not hold much meaning to me until attending university. Colonialism is the practice of acquiring control over another country through the exploitation of the land and its people. In the rest of my paper, my goal is to write about the disparities that exist between developed and underdeveloped countries that result from barriers that have been placed by the former.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade began in the 16th century and was ongoing until the 19th century. European countries along with the Americas came to extract natural resources as well as enslave people. It was not the first slave trade but it was the largest in volume and intensity. Millions of men, women, and children were uprooted from their homes in West and Central Africa and were dispersed all throughout the New World, which was made up of Europe and the Americas. Slavery, as I said, has always been in existence, but the difference between the enslavement of Africans in Europe and the Americas and indigenous slavery within Africa was like the difference between night and day. In Africa, men and women became slaves due to war, debt, or criminal offenses. They were still seen as human beings and certain rights were still available to them. But when we think of slavery, we think of the type of slavery that was introduced by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Slaves were rather treated like chattel, property, as sub-human. The men, women, and children who were sold into slavery faced harsh and brutal conditions from the moment they were enslaved. Elmina, the first European settlement in West Africa, is where the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English traded and kept the people they captured. The dungeons were filled past maximum capacity and the captives were forced to live in their urine, blood, and other excrements. The women were raped and both men and women were poorly fed and not allowed to bathe until they were put on the ships that were going to send them all around the world. Intellectuals ranging from economists to historians have called this the beginning of globalization and have argued about the impact the transatlantic slave trade had on the development of African countries today.
There is debate on how much the legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade contributed to the poverty, poor-education, and self-hatred of some African people. These are forms of neocolonialism. When people were becoming enslaved along the coast of West Africa, the population declined rapidly. It is documented that around 12 million Africans in the West and Central coast were exported from Africa; this number does not include the millions of people who died in the process of getting to Europe and the Americas. According to Patrick Manning (2009, p. 71) a professor of World History at the University of Wisconsin, by the year 1850, Africa was only half of the population than it would have been if not for the slave trade. In terms of the effect on European nations, economists, like Stanley Engerman, argue that slavery did not even create five percent of Britain’s national income; therefore slave trade was not one of the factors of their Industrial Revolution. Others, such as the Abolition Project, disagree vehemently with this assertion. (http://abolition.e2bn.org) However, we do know that slave labor was essential in the production of consumer goods in the West during the 17th to 19th century, items such as cotton, coffee, sugar, and tobacco as well as the “slave trade provided stimulus to shipbuilding, banking, and insurance” (Digital History, 2013).

Despite the conflicting discourses linking the Transatlantic Slave Trade with the “underdevelopment” of Africa today, neoliberalism, a philosophy that preaches economic liberalization and free trade is one of the main reasons that certain nations are not developing. Not only is the West’s neoliberal approach to development unhelpful with even more of a negative than positive outcome, contrary to popular belief, the U.S. as well as countries like England did not become as powerful as they are today by using the tactics they propose for developing countries. Neoliberalism celebrates deregulation of public spending and social services, privatization of state-owned industries, and liberalization of trade and investment to global flows. While this has become the most accepted formula to development, Britain and the U.S. became powerful countries by using tariffs and subsidies, as well as interventional trade and promoting infant industries, which are devices that they discourage other counties to adopt today. This is what Ha-Joon Chang refers to as “Kicking Away the Ladder” they used to climb up (Chang, 2002). This idea that there is a singular way of development that will work for all countries is absurd, especially when what is preached has not contributed largely to the success of these more powerful countries. There are often a lot of misleading facts that are given by, what many people see as credible sources such as the World Bank and IMF, but I believe the establishment of credibility relates to power relations; by being the beacon of development, countries like the United States and England, which dominate the World Bank and IMF, are able to control information and justify and support their dominant economic position.

World organizations are shrinking the development space for countries but puts up a façade of benign intervention. It is again important to see development as being part of a larger system of power dynamics. In Robert Hunter Wade’s “How to Change the WTO and Global Policy on Trade and Investment: Gaining Acceptance of ’Open Economy Industrial Policy’ by Hoisting Neoliberalism on its own Petard,” the World Trade Organization (WTO) is analyzed and dissected to bring to light the problems of the WTO as well as solutions to insure distributive justice.
Wade explains that “there is a scope for building momentum for change in the trade and investment domain by linking such change to what a recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report describes as the emerging ‘global anti-poverty consensus’ (Wade, 2006, p.2). The reduction of extreme poverty and hunger has shot up on the agendas of many international organizations. Decreasing poverty is an important goal, but if this goal is to be met by using strategies given by the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper or The European Union, developing countries would have to grow much faster than they have in the past twenty years. Wade argues that there are several barriers that the WTO and the Washington Consensus put up that prevent developing countries from “catching up.” To reiterate, developing countries are pushed to engage in “deep integration,” meaning “free markets, zero transaction costs for goods and capital crossing national borders, and western quality standards” (Wade, 2006, p. 3). Wade continues Ha-Joon Chang’s theory of “kicking away the ladder” restating that the WTO does not allow countries to utilize policy instruments that were used successfully by other countries such as East Asian, Latin America, and early industrialized countries such as England and the United States. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was initiated by the United Nations in 1947. The policies that fall under GATT are intended to regulate international trade. Agreements such as Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS) and Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) are just a two examples of GATT’s multi-lateral negotiations that hinder rather than help development as they claim.

TRIMS is an agreement that prohibits local content requirements, foreign exchange balancing requirements, restrictions on imports, and measures that prefer domestic over foreign firms. A number of issues arise from these agreements, notably the obligations and timelines. Many developing countries contend that commitments to TRIMS should be voluntary. Some could not identify members that were inconsistent with the TRIMS agreements because many of the criteria are ambiguous and non-transparent. This has led to many developing countries being unable to meet notification deadlines. Other problems regarding the transition period are that some countries were not prepared to meet the deadline, even if they did notify the WTO. This is due to the requirement to make laws compliant with the TRIMS agreement. By not creating alternative policies, Chile, for example, “had drafted the relevant laws in conformity with the TRIMS agreement, but the laws had not been approved by parliament” (Hoekman, Mattoo, English, 2002, p. 173). Romania also met with a conflict because the removal of a contract between the government and a firm that did not comply with the TRIMS agreement would have legal consequences for the government. Stakeholders in developing countries must be informed on the issues so they can navigate international cooperation, but by agreements being unclear, they serve more as a problem than a solution in terms of development.

Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights is widely seen as a protectionist device that has a high cost for developing countries. It serves as an intellectual property regime, which prevents developing countries from having access to information. It sets minimum standards for copyrights such as computer programs and databases, trademarks, geographical indications, industrial designs, patents, integrated circuits, and trade secrets.
The problem is that industrialized nations forced developing countries to negotiate agreements with TRIPS with the intention of creating a universal standard of Intellectual Property Rights; however, this is after countries such as the United States had already reached a high level of technological and industrial capability. Because technology is so important in international competition and research development and vast expenditures have already been made in industrialized countries, there is obviously a huge imbalance of power. Technological advances are also connected with knowledge, and private sectors made reforms to make that knowledge exclusive. These reforms, industrial lobbies, and monopoly rights granted by the Intellectual Property Rights allowed “aggressive action[s] by the US industries to establish international rules that counter their declining competitive position in world markets” (Correa, 2000, p.5). This framework is another example of how world agreements are typically only benefitting industrialized countries.

When examining the issue of debt relief and its hindrance on developing nations one needs to be clear on the definition of development. According to an Indian economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen, development should be measured by more than a country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or income but by certain freedoms, one of these is the ability to have transparency and participation in social and political issues as well as economic protection from poverty. Debt Relief is disguised to be helpful to developing nations but “what development is can only be established and legitimated by contrasting it with underdevelopment” (Dzorgbo, 2011, p. 2). This means that it is important to the West that there is an imbalance of power. When the West has more power, they can justify their ideas of what development is and therefore the pathway to development. For example, the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative was created in 1996 by the IMF. In order to get debt relief, Ghana declared itself a HIPC country in the year 2001. One of the problems with debt relief is that it does not allow sustainability. For one, NGO and United Nations organizations as well as developing and indebted countries had very little say in the final framework of HIPC. The HIPC initiative dictates how countries must spend their money, but different countries have different values and needs. As documented in the film “Damned by Debt Relief,” one of the most serious criticisms is that the initiatives did does not address the productive aspects of the Ghanaian economy. Villages received trash facilities and toilets, but the people are still unable to generate their own money. Industrialization is a crucial step to achieving development, but HIPC does not provide money to help places like Ghana achieve this. Indebted countries are in a bind;

“these countries are forced, or sometimes they subject themselves willingly, to the control and direction of the West, under the threat of withdrawal of aid if they do not behave according to the discourse constructed by dominant Western nations and the professionals of multilateral development institutions such as the IMF and World Bank” (Dzorgbo, 2011, p. 2).

This perpetuates the domination of the West. Countries have to declare themselves as poor countries to receive debt relief, but they are unable to control their path to development.
Starting from the Transatlantic Slave Trade hundreds of years ago, legacies of colonialism and Western dominance still prevail. Due to intervention by the World Bank and the IMF, developing countries are stuck in a lose-lose situation, where tactics are used to keep developing countries from actually achieving development.

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Coastal Erosion, Development and Ghana - by Ria Mukerji

Coastal erosion is one of the most prominent environmental concerns we are currently facing around the globe, and Ghana with its 560 kilometers of coastline\(^1\), is right in the midst of this challenge. In this essay I discuss the terrible impact of coastal erosion on Ghana’s coast and the impact of short-term fixes that do not address the root cause and compound the problem over time by, figuratively, “kicking the ball down the road”.

Population booms, urbanization and sprawl have all encouraged people to move closer and closer to the sea coasts over the last century all over the world. This influx of people to the coastal areas has caused a plethora of problems both for the humans that now live there, and for the environment itself. The population of the sea line removes the natural barriers between human populations and raging storms, and without these barriers we are infinitely more vulnerable and exposed to Mother Nature’s fury. The elimination of these natural barriers also intensifies the effects of normal wave action in the area, which in turn leads to a much more rapid deterioration of the coast.

The Ada peninsula in Ghana has suffered such rapid coastal erosion and inundation for over the last half century due to the influx of people and the subsequent development activities, similar to that described in the previous paragraph.\(^2\) This erosion had been accompanied by loss of property and livelihoods, economic stagnation and salt water intrusion, all for the sake of development. While there is debate about the immediate causes of these phenomena, it can be argued that anthropogenic actions have contributed to the need for further development and the destruction of the coast in some way.

Coastal areas have always been attractive settling grounds for human population, as they provide abundant marine resources, fertile agricultural land and possibilities for trade and transport. This has led to high population densities and high levels of development in many coastal areas, with this trend continuing at an exponential level into modern times. At present, about 1.2 billion people live in coastal areas globally, with this number predicted to increase to 1.8-3.2 billion by the 2080s due to a combination of population growth and coastal migration.\(^3\) Along with this increase in population follows major investments in infrastructure and the built environment. But it is not only these recent developments that have caused problems for villages like Ada Foah in the Eastern Region of Ghana, but also the construction of those structures that first opened the door to coastal development in these areas.

To see the start of development of the coast of Ada Foah, we need not look farther than the beginning of colonial occupation of the region. While it was the Dutch who first opened up a trade route in Ada Foah, it was the Danish who officially began the development; namely, the construction of Fort Kongenstein.\(^4\) This was a fort used to further the Transatlantic Slave Trade, very similar to the uses of the notable Elmina and Cape Coast Castles to the West. The construction of this structure just on the shoreline has had a massive effect on the erosion of the coast. The Kongenstein Fort has been almost completely washed away over the years, leading the way to the gradual, but persistent erosion of Ada’s coast.
Construction on the coast is problematic for a variety of reasons. Coastlines are highly dynamic natural systems that interact with not only marine, but also terrestrial and atmospheric processes and undergo continuous change in response to these processes. The population that lives along or near our coastlines is extremely vulnerable to numerous human, as well as natural impacts. Both of these issues cause great damage to our coastlines. While natural, almost all storms with high wind and water cause erosion along the coast. This erosion is caused by shore currents, tides, sea level rise and fall, and high winds. Larger amounts of erosion cause the coastline to erode away at a faster rate and this can leave people homeless and leave less land to develop or keep “open” for environmental reasons. Over the years, human society has often failed to recognize the hazards related to these dynamics and this has led to major disasters and societal disruption to various degrees.

The predicted climate change is adding an extra risk factor to human settlement in coastal areas. Whereas the natural dynamics that shape our coastlines have been relatively stable and predictable over the last few centuries, much more rapid change is now expected, as sea levels rise, ocean temperature and acidity increases, tropical storms intensify and precipitation/runoff patterns change— all due to climate change. The world's coastlines will respond to these changes in different ways and at different paces, depending on their bio-geophysical characteristics. Society will have to recognize that past coastal trends cannot be directly projected into the future. Instead, it is necessary to consider how different coastal environments will respond to the predicted climate change and take the expected future hazards into account in the coastal planning processes.

After the money is put in to building on the coast, the economy cannot afford to lose out on such an investment so they have to invest even more funds to build structures like sea defense walls in order to keep these cities safe. These sea walls are not simple infrastructure however. They are costly and hazardous to build, and come with their own host of problems. Let us take Ada Foah as an example. A proposed sea wall project there will deal with some urgent needs to reduce property loss and stimulate livelihood and economic opportunities. However, it will have minimal effect on the actual environmental front, namely in the area of groundwater salinization. It will most likely intensify salinity of surface water in the Volta River and adjoining water points by shifting salinity intrusion further upstream to affect currently salinity-free areas, simply exacerbating present problems. While the precise spatial reach of the salinity is uncertain, the potential for further sea level rise will accentuate the region's water scarcity dilemma if a coherent water management strategy is not introduced soon.

The proposed sea wall project demonstrates the limitations of employing such a static, narrow, objectively designed sea defense project as a response to coastal erosion and inundation. It lacks the capacity to deal with dynamism, complexity and multi-dimensional impacts associated with climate change-related sea level rise. This is the massive issue that environmentalists everywhere face. People follow an anthropocentric view of the world. They focus on who they consider to be the dominant and most important species on the planet and look out for their best interests. The kind of oversight seen in the Ada Foah Sea Defense project is similar to mistakes that dot the history of humankind's relationship with the environment: it is the inability to look ahead, and to anticipate the true effects of our actions.
As an environmental studies major, these are the kinds of issues I anticipate facing throughout my education and in my career. But what I find even more frustrating than the oversight seen here is the absolute refusal to learn from past actions. Ada Foah is, by no means, the first village in Ghana or even on the African continent, to succumb to sea level rise and erosion. It happens time and time again, in exactly the same way, and still we humans resist what is right in front of our eyes; the fact that the time for change is now. What we see happening however, is in line with Ghana’s desire to bring itself into the modernized world.

In developing countries, it is often a difficult battle choosing when to prioritize the environment. In countries like Ghana, which are trying to support a growing population and survive, even I am among the first to admit that it can be challenging to prioritize the environment over the wellbeing of one’s people. With a population that has more than doubled from 11.2 million to 25.4 million just in the last 30 years¹, it is only natural that there has been a push out to the coasts in terms of settlement. In Accra alone, it is estimated that on any given night about 100,000 citizens are homeless on the streets. ² Just driving through the city one can see the poverty lining the roads. When there are issues requiring such immediate attention, how practical is it really to prioritize the management of the number of people flocking to the open – albeit eroding – land on the coast to live?

Understandably, the economically developing nation must remain cognizant of what will actually best employ and empower the best percentage of their population. But it is also imperative to simultaneously employ some long range thinking and execute what is best for the environment and terrain, because that is what will benefit the general population, down the road, for many generations to come.

Building a sea wall in Ada Foah may “solve” the immediate problem, but it brings about new issues. It will increase the salinity of formerly freshwater areas along the Volta River, which will be highly detrimental to the Ghanaian economy down the line. The Volta River is one of the main providers of water in the nation and for it to be infiltrated with saltwater will make extraction much more difficult. In a country where only 20 percent of the population has access to improved sanitation and 40 percent do not have access to clean drinking water³, it is critical to keep those areas clean and uncontaminated. To do this, it requires the Ghanaian government to make smart, intuitive choices in regards to the Ada Sea Defense wall. As mentioned before, solutions that are chosen must take into account the longer term “big picture,” and incorporate within its framework the full spectrum of possibilities that could occur as a result of the implemented solution.

As a developing nation, Ghana faces a whole plethora of obstacles. While environmental concerns may not be at the top of its priority list, it is one of the most pressing concerns of this generation. Coastal erosion in the Eastern Region at Ada Foah is undoubtedly the effect of human neglect and poor treatment. It is the duty of Ghana to make waves in the direction of positive change. Learning from past disasters and incorporating inclusive and intuitive solutions is the way to truly utilize its resources and really make a name for itself on the world stage.
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The term developed country is used to describe countries that have a high level of development according to some criteria. Which criteria and which countries are classified as being developed, is a contentious issue and is surrounded by fierce debate. Economic criteria have tended to dominate discussions. One such criterion is income per capita; countries with high gross domestic product (GDP) per capita would thus be described as developed countries. Another economic criterion is industrialization; countries in which the tertiary and quaternary sectors of industry dominate would thus be described as developed. More recently another measure, the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines an economic measure, national income, with other measures, indices for life expectancy and education has become prominent. This criterion would define developed countries as those with a very high (HDI) rating. However, many anomalies exist when determining "developed" status by whichever measure is used.

To me, the idea of a developed country is a country where basic necessities such as food and water are available and the infrastructure of the country is adequate enough to serve its citizens well. By these standards, almost every country in the world should be a developed country, yet we still consider only a few countries to be part of that upper echelon. I believe this is so because when we look at the "undeveloped" countries in the world, especially the African countries, we fall to the stereotype that those countries are backward, war-torn, and ridden with disease. As a result, we see them as having no hope to reach the level of development we have in the United States. Part of this has to do with the media overhyping every little thing going on in the African continent, such as the Ebola epidemic and the poverty among children, where commercials on American televisions display African children with black, beady eyes having pleading looks on their faces. While the reports on Ebola deaths and poverty among children may be true, they are not as bad as the media claims them to be. Being here in Ghana has showed me that those conceptions of Africa are not true, at least in Ghana. I should be careful though because when I describe Ghana, I am not describing all of Africa. If there’s one key lesson I've learned so far, it’s that one country in Africa does not represent all of Africa. Africa is so big and diverse that each region has its own unique culture and values.

So if the media makes Africa seem like a completely desolate place with literally nothing, that would probably mean that there is not much to be said about internal development across Africa either. In other words, Africa as a whole is still living in the medieval ages. I disagree with this viewpoint. Take India for example, a rising global power with a strong economy and military. A country like that should be on par with the United States or the European Union in terms of internal development if it has that much money and power. By those standards, India should have clean cities, clean water, towering skyscrapers, smooth roads, and virtually no visible poverty. I on the other hand, believe that even though a country like India has a higher GDP and HDI than Ghana’s, Ghana can still be compared with India at least in terms of internal development because in both countries, the development is more or less the same to me. In fact, I can easily make a case that being here in Ghana is exactly like being in India with only a few minor differences. Both countries are so similar to each other not only in internal development, but also in culture. Because of this, I have never really felt like I was in a foreign country because I’ve constantly thought to myself that I’m essentially in the African version of India.
From the moment I got off the airplane at the airport and stepped onto the tarmac, I immediately felt like I was back in the motherland. The smell of gasoline combined with ash and sewage is exactly like the smell back in India, at least in the major cities where air and land pollution are big problems. I remember standing on the balcony at my cousin’s house back in Delhi every morning, taking in that smell that I have honestly grown to like now. Even while walking around the main streets of Accra, you can smell the raw sewage sitting in the deep gutters waiting to be swept out to sea. That exact same smell is what you get in the same setting in any other major city in India. The pollution goes beyond that though because the streets in the major cities of both countries are lined with piles of trash — most of which could easily be recycled. I remember I was at a park in Tamale and there was a big patch in the grass filled with discarded water sachets. There were so many sachets that I could see more of the grey plastic than I could see green grass. It is worse in India when the holiest river among 80% of the population there, the Ganges, has piles of trash floating with the current. I’ve never been there personally, but there’s a picture of my dad taking a bath in the river and only a few feet behind him is a pile of trash. It is pretty embarrassing and disrespectful in my opinion. The fact that India still has to deal with sanitary issues like this still amazes me. Even though India is powerful economically, it is not able to spend money on adequately improving its sewage system or reducing the amount of pollution. That’s one of the reasons why the same major diseases such as cholera and malaria, are found in both countries and are able to flourish.

Those diseases often have the worst impact on the poorer communities because they do not have good access to clean water or adequate healthcare. These poverty stricken communities are especially common while driving around Ghana and it is no different from India. A lot of the other students were surprised to see poverty so visible along the streets, but to me it was nothing new. It is definitely saddening to see people living in squalid conditions but it’s more saddening when, once again, a well-endowed country like India cannot do anything to lessen the situation, mostly because of internal government corruption.

When it comes to the overall infrastructure of both countries, a good way to describe the infrastructure in a simple way would be, “Good enough”. By that, I mean the infrastructure in both countries is like getting a C on a project: only the minimum amount of work is put in to get a passing grade. For example, the roads here in Ghana are littered with potholes, but infrequent or limited work is done to keep them patched up. Instead, drivers simply go around them. What I essentially see is that as long as the road can still continue to serve its overall purpose of transporting people or goods without any major blockage, there’s no need to fix it. Also, power and water outages frequently occur in Ghana but it’s not a big deal among the Ghanaians usually because they’ll always be prepared with emergency water stored in containers or candles to light up. Also, the Internet infrastructure is not as fast as it is back in the States, but it still works perfectly fine. All of these philosophies are exactly the same in India. No one takes any action to improve anything unless it is absolutely, positively needed. It’s showed me that the people here as well as in India are able to adapt readily when something wrong comes up. In the States, everything has to be working at maximum potential and if there is one little flaw, the entire thing needs to be replaced. A lot of my friends have displayed this attitude when they get a small crack on their iPhones; they end up replacing the entire phone with a brand new one.
But the key thing I've concluded is that as long as the people in Ghana or India are able to live their lives without any issue, then those countries should be seen as developed because they have adequate water, food, electricity, transportation, and Internet. The only difference is that it is not as good as what we have in the States. But if the people are able to adapt readily to those imperfections, then it should not be a big deal to us whether or not they have good internal infrastructure. As long as it works for the people in the country, that country should be seen as internally developed.

Like I said earlier, the similarities between Ghana and India go beyond internal development; there are cultural parallels as well. Going back to diseases like malaria and yellow fever, the other reason why those diseases are also common in India is because, just like Ghana, both countries lie along the tropics. Both areas are typically hot and humid all year, with the rainy season occurring in the summer. This type of climate allows for disease spreading mosquitoes to flourish. The only difference is that while India cools down considerably in the winter, Ghana heats up because of its proximity to the equator. It has been strange for me to hear from Ghanaians that they think the weather right now (July-September), which has been cool and breezy to me, has been cold to them. In other words, their definition of cold is my definition of pleasant and their definition of pleasant is my definition of being roasted by the sun. And that is exactly the same way in India as well because the people in both countries are so used to the humidity all the time. As someone from Los Angeles, living in a community only 10 minutes from the beach is nice because the winds coming from the ocean help cool the nearby communities. But because Accra and Mumbai are cities that do not take much advantage of their seaside location and have their backs turned against it, it is hard for that cooling breeze to penetrate the city, keeping the cities hot inside.

Another aspect shared by India and Ghana takes place in everyday interactions. Both cultures place high emphasis on respecting your elders, giving them titles like brother, sister, sir, doctor, professor, and so on. Calling someone older than you by their first name is seen as disrespectful in both cultures. Emphasis on using one’s right hand is also very important among both peoples. In both cultures, the left hand is seen as dirty because that is the hand we use for unclean things, so it’s always customary to use our right hand when dealing with money or shaking someone else’s hand. Also, Ghanaians and Indians are very serious when it comes to religion. I feel like Ghanaians take it a step further when they try to get you to convert to Christianity or at least accept Jesus as one’s lord and savior. For example, before getting aboard a tro-tro, a man pulled me aside and asked if I was a Christian and if I had my faith in Jesus. I said that I was a Hindu and that I believed in God, but not in Jesus and he seemed visibly upset. Little did I know, he got on the same tro-tro as me and began preaching vehemently to everyone on board. Eventually, out of nowhere, he points to me and said, “This man will go to hell because he does not believe in Jesus Christ.” I turned around and smiled weakly at everyone before turning back and staring blankly out the window. He was, however, kind enough to tell me where my stop was and when I needed to get off. Experiences like that definitely would not happen in India but Indians do take their religion very seriously. We are steadfast in going to the temple every day and practicing all of the religious holidays and traditions we have, especially being a vegetarian.
Even though vegetarianism among Ghanaians is practiced more in rural areas and not so much in the urban areas, there are still similarities between both countries when it comes to food and eating. Once again, the right hand is your only tool to consume food with, and you will certainly receive unpleasant stares if you are caught using your left hand to eat food. The smells and appearances of some Ghanaian foods also closely resemble that of Indian foods. Both cuisines take advantage of adding all the spices and seasonings they can incorporate and the results are the same: hot, filling, brightly colorful foods packed with flavor in each bite. For example, the Ghanaian dish waakye is exactly the same as the Indian dish rajma chawal. Both dishes are literally just beans with rice, sometimes served with an egg or tomato sauce on the side. The beans in each dish have a lot of iron and protein, and combined with the carbohydrates received from the rice, both dishes are pretty healthy.

Because of all of these cultural similarities ranging from food to in-person interactions, it has generally been easy for me to adapt to the norm here in Ghana. My parents constantly made sure that I preformed the same Indian customs back home, so I was honestly a little glad that the same rules applied here in Ghana because to me, it just felt right to practice the same norms that I do in India. Once again, because of the vast similarities in culture between the two countries, being in Ghana is not much different from being in India.

When people have asked me whether or not Ghana is like India, I usually tell them that they can essentially say that they have been in India now, just replace the Ghanaian people, food, and language with Indian ones. Obviously, Ghana does not have the size that India has when it comes to economic or military pursuits, but these two countries are more similar than most would think. The definition of development in the first paragraph immediately goes into how countries must meet all the items on a checklist to qualify as being developed, but one criterion they fail to mention is the people and how they adapt. If the people in both countries, or in any other country with average infrastructure, can live happily and adapt to changes in that infrastructure, whether for the better or worse, then why shouldn’t that country be classified as developed? They might wish that their internal development was better, but the fact that they have access to water, power, paved roads, and so on should, at the very least, put them on a basic level of development. Just like the title of this paper, it’s basic, but it’s still developed and it gets the job done, just not on the level that we are used to in the U.S.
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Sociological Imagination and Focusing on the Bigger Picture: How Ghana's Foreign Aid Sustains Western Ideology – by Lorrain Ko

The most eye-opening class I took as an undergraduate student in the U.S. was a sociology class where I was first exposed to the idea of a sociological imagination. The sociological imagination, which was coined by American sociologist C. Wright Mills, is a framework, perspective, or a new set of lenses that transforms consciousness by making the familiar strange. This new perspective trains the mind to notice the bigger picture by seeing what is happening at the level of society as a whole. By adapting such a perspective or framework, I began to see why certain aspects such as behaviors and discourses of the societies we live in are the way that they are and to always wonder what emanating factors produce and influence such discourses.

This perspective really became useful when I first learned that race was a social construction. Because I was so desensitized to its long-established familiarity I unconsciously believed it was a natural occurrence, which made it difficult for me to understand that people created race. It was not only until I was challenged to define what race was, that its normality was breached. My experience in Ghana has allowed me to realize that race is indeed a social construction that was created and used in order to establish an inferior race for the sake of power and capital. The system, which relies on inequality and the production of social injustices such as racism and poverty, is apparent in the deceivingly benevolent foreign aid Ghana and Africa are receiving from the Western world.

Prior to my arrival to Ghana, I was well aware that every foreigner would be addressed as “obroni”, and I prepared myself to not take offense because it is generally not said with any ill-intention. As a Korean-American, however, I was unprepared to constantly be asked if I was from China, be called “China”, or pick up on the word “Chinese” in a conversation in a native Ghanaian language as I strolled by. Even though I knew that many people who assumed I was Chinese did not have bad intentions I could not help but be rubbed in the wrong way and it led me to wonder why I was bothered by such a harmless assumption. I came to the conclusion that it was because in the U.S. people are so focused on the idea of race and ethnicity that my generation was always taught to be sensitive to being as politically correct as possible. Because racism is often seen as a sensitive and controversial topic, we have been educated to avoid behaviors or speech that may come off as being racist due to the atrocities of slavery and Jim Crow (US laws enacted and enforced between 1876 and 1965 that allowed and supported racial segregation).

Although racism is no longer explicitly practiced as it was during the Jim Crow era, the idea that different races still exists shows how it is still very much the reason why racism is still prevalent in a subtle manner. Simply focusing and trying to resolve social issues, such as racism and poverty, divert peoples' attention away from a bigger issue at hand. The capitalistic system, in which those in power prosper from the subordination and exploitation of an established inferior group of people, is the complex issue at hand that involves a cascade of various players.
This system can be seen in the power dynamics that are observed in Ghana’s relationship with Western countries that provide Ghana’s foreign aid. In theory, aid is seen as a means to alleviate economic burdens for countries that lack the necessary capital to be able to improve economically and ultimately be able to create a self-sustaining economy. Africa as a whole receives roughly 30 billion dollars in foreign aid, but 192 billion dollars is generated from its natural resources (Sharples, pg 5). This statistic begins to stir skepticism towards the main purpose of a supposed benevolent act. As discussed in Dan-Bright Dzorgbo’s “Foreign Aid and Ghana: Power Dynamics of Partnership in Development,” aid is used deceivingly in order to obfuscate the Western world’s hidden motivation in order to sustain domination and exploitation. In other words, foreign aid is used to ensure the economic welfare of dominant Western nations such as the U.S., rather than to improve social conditions or the welfare of a recipient country.

In order to understand why powerful countries are able to sustain their dominance, Dzorgbo explores the French post-structuralist sociologist Michael Foucault's' explanation on the relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power. Foucault argues that power is generated, controlled, and spread from discourses, so that those with knowledge have the means and power to control the agenda and enjoy ideological power that structures society (Dzorgbo pg. 2). He further explains that discourse is power because it consents specific people to speak and be heard, while some people's ideas are disregarded because they are seen as implausible. Additionally, discourse is the medium through which power is generated and sustained.

Accordingly, Foucault's' explanation implies that those who create and hold the ideas of development set the standards. Contrasting the superior ideas with underdeveloped countries thus legitimizes the set standards in order to perpetuate and sustain the ideology of those in power. Furthermore, this system relies on the existence of impoverished countries in order to justify the Western world's ideology. The chronic poverty and hardships impoverished nations face help convince people of rich and poor countries alike, the efficacy of the rich people's knowledge, which in turn reiterates the importance of the ideology for the people in dominant countries.

During a brief time in the postcolonial era, Ghana possessed ownership of its national policies as an independent and sovereign nation. Kwame Nkrumah, who was Ghana’s first prime minister, strived to stray away from an externally focused system that colonialism established during its reign. However, Nkrumah's nationalistic development plan was hindered when a military coup overthrew him from power in 1966, which was a downhill turning point for Ghana (Dzorgbo, pg. 6). Since the economic crisis it faced in the 1960's, Ghana was forced to accept IMF and World Bank policies, which meant falling under the rule of Western power. Since Nkrumah’s removal from power, Ghana has yet to recover from the economic crisis, even though there was an overall increase in foreign aid (Dzorgbo, pg. 9)
In order to receive the aid, vulnerable recipient countries must agree to accept certain recommended policies, such as a multi-party democracy. This in turn caused countries, such as Ghana, to release control over its state affairs, serving as an opportunity for donor countries to seize total control over the development process. This in turn led to the construction of a country that maintained the supremacy for as long as possible. This vicious cycle feeds off of the products, such as poverty and racism, of the system in order to justify the scheme. The cycle will continue to persist so long as people focus on the symptoms and not the core of the actual issue. It is the system, which is controlled by those with the most power or capital that relies on its products, such as racism, in order to sustain itself.

Furthermore, the Western ideology cannot be spread unless the oppressed group also supports the same discourse. Dzorgbo mentions that it is easier and more effective to dominate people in their minds, than to physically control them (Dzorgbo, pg 5). This has been apparent in several of the interactions I have had with Ghanaians. Most, if not all, of my conversations with Ghanaian men have included discussions that focused on how much they idolized the U.S. and embraced foreigners who come from a white American background. The idealization of Western culture and civilization was evident in one of my lectures from a Ghanaian professor who strongly advocated that students in Ghana should try to strive for American and not Ghanaian standards in order to reach their full potential. The association of the white race with the “best standards” perpetuates the idea of race. A significant part of this discourse involves race and conforming to the belief that one is indeed inferior to a more powerful and superior race that exists in the idealized world.

I once believed that poor countries were impoverished solely because of a lack of structure, development, and benevolent leaders at the state level. Although underdeveloped countries do lack a strong dependable administration, it is due to several key social factors, which include the globally dominant system's need for impoverished countries. One can argue that Ghana and Africa's lack of economic success is an issue at the national level when comparing it to the success of rising Asian economies such as China, Taiwan, and South Korea who have also received aid from the World Bank. However, in the published study, *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*, success of these countries was unrelated to the policies introduced by the World Bank but rather, the development of a strong state (Dzorgbo, pg 14). If the motivation behind the Western powers were truly an act of benevolence, a transformation of a competent administration, in order to create a self-sustaining economy would have been observed, rather than a push on policies in accordance with capitalist interest.

The social injustices commonly observed will continue to prevail if society continues to encourage people to focus on the issues the system generates. Having a sociological imagination allows one to see that issues at the individual level are produced and influenced by what is happening globally, and to society as a whole. The events trickle down and create conditions in which individuals live in. While coming to the realization that the system is what needs to be reinvented I could not help but feel powerless when it came to trying to alleviate the issues. I also realized that just as much as this system, which was founded upon oppression and exploitation, took generations to be created, it can also be slowly changed and that it has to start from somewhere. However, this change must first occur by understanding that a transformation in consciousness and discourse need to take place.
Since people assume that what they see is how they objectively are, questioning the accuracy of our molded understanding allows us to begin to see the validity of the discourse we are fed. I am guilty of being a product of Western ideology. But, when we become more conscious of what is happening at the level of the system as a whole, we have more control and responsibility of what we can do. Traveling to Ghana and broadening my global scope has provided invaluable insight to the world that I live in. It is true that “where you sit, determines what you see” because now that I have immersed myself into a foreign environment, the world is not the world I thought it once was when I was living in Southern California.

By acquiring a wide-array of experiences and seeing various places of the world, I realized that it is critical to be as open-minded as possible by submerging myself into new environments or listening to different points-of-view in order to choose the most objective perspective. This will allow us to slowly stray away from potentially distorted perspectives that are shaped by the norms of everyday life. It is impossible to know and be familiar with every viewpoint that exists in the world, but by being conscious of what kinds of perspectives we are forced to adapt allows people to know what types of questions to ask themselves which is the first step in straying away from the ways of talking and thinking of the Western world.

Based on my personal experiences in Ghana and learning about Africa’s role on a global scale, I have realized that there is no race but rather a single human species. A formal definition of the term “species” according to the Oxford Dictionary, states that it is “a group of living organisms consisting of similar individuals capable of exchanging genes or interbreeding.” This portrays the homogeneity of people regardless of socially constructed differences and that this relation allows people from all over the world to be able to connect with one another.

References


Development Through Different Lenses - by Caroline Flowers

Unlike the discipline of anthropology, which uses an open or culturally relative lens to observe other cultures, sociology has a more uniform way of examining development based on a specific collection of lenses: modernization theory, dependency theory, postcolonial theory, and neoliberal development. Through these four lenses, founded on the legacies of economists and the discipline's earliest thinkers, this paper seeks to explore development and better understand its process within the Ghanaian framework. Today, in a market dominated society it is crucial to establish how the perspective of development became so economically driven.

One of the first contributors to lay the foundation for the modernization theory in his “The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto,” was American economist, Walt Whitman Rostow. Written in 1960, Rostow suggested that there are exactly “five stages of growth,” economically speaking, with which to “identify” a society's developmental progress: “the traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption” (Rostow 1960: 4). While Rostow's theory was science based, it is important to note it was not based in social science. This distinction is evident as he consciously lumped the varying “traditional” societies together, disregarding the unique cultural history of each society, which played a key role in their ability to develop.

Rostow seemed to be focused on the financial achievement of a society and just how quickly that society was able to grow in terms of entrepreneurial productivity. He had a clear expectation of where he thought societies should be, and what further development a society needed to implement in order to reach their “maturity.” Operating from an American perspective, he assumed that all societies had the potential to achieve the same “modern technology,” he enjoyed, if only they tried hard enough to obtain it. As one of the initial theorists to influence modern-day neo-liberal thinkers, Rostow’s concepts seem to have problematic implications on the many other aspects of life encompassed within the sphere of development: “To equate development with westernization can be a serious error…To accept that westernization is development leads ineluctably to the endorsement of a 'copy cat' approach to development” (Awedoba 2007: 14). Awedoba warns that failing to take into consideration the differences that exist within a particular society and blatant disregard for cultural behaviors, may result in an unsuccessful adoption of development policy.

In addition, Rostow believed that the less developed society in fact wanted “an economy [that] demonstrate[d] that it had the technological and entrepreneurial skills to produce not everything, but anything that it [chose] to produce” (Rostow 1960: 10). His theory led people to understand development in terms of reaching a state of modernity, moving away from a traditional society in order to become modernized. Contrary to Rostow’s finite progression, Awedoba argues that “Development has no Mecca and all nations and people are developing and this applies to even the so called 'Developed' Western societies…different countries may develop in different directions and at different rates” (2007: 16). When examined from a multidimensional vantage point, progress will not look the same across different cultural, political and economical backgrounds.
If the modernization theory exercises a “top-down” ideology, those individuals with advanced technology and economic stability looking down upon, or waiting for, the lesser productive to speed up their economic growth, then the dependency theory can be seen as centered around the people’s needs, a “bottom-up” perspective. Andre Gunder Frank gave a clear example of how crucial the lens through which one examines a society can be when he articulated dependency theory in his 1966 collection of essays, “Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution: Essays on the Development of Underdevelopment and the Immediate Enemy.” Frank wrote the essay at the time he did in response to the debate on Third World subordination in the early stages of the post-Second World War. According to Dan-Bright Dzorgbo, “[the] subordination was manifested in a lack of control over the exploitation and pricing of the raw materials and agricultural products on whose production and export most developing countries depended” (2012: 6).

Gunder Frank first begins by establishing what previous thinkers failed to conceptualize: “[One] cannot hope to formulate adequate development theory and policy for the majority of the world’s population who suffer from underdevelopment without first learning how their past economic and social history gave rise to their present underdevelopment” (Gunder Frank 1966: 3). Challenging the notion that all development occurs along the same linear progression, having a beginning and an end, as stated in modernization theory, Gunder Frank articulates the interwoven relationship between “the metropolis and its economic colonies” as cyclical, a non-linear structure. This structure, referred to as the “World Systems Theory” by U.S. sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, is an economic network consisting of a “metropolis,” which is the developed, capitalistic-core, and that concentrated wealth is then fueled by the “satellites,” the underdeveloped countries. Hungry to retain their stronghold over developing countries, such as Ghana, the developed world has not ceased their aid giving once the developing economy has reached a higher “stage of growth,” as Rostow referred to it. Instead, “[a] half century of international development co-operation has institutionalized aid as a powerful tool in international relations... [and] tied [it] to an ideology and discourse that facilitate the domination of the developing world by the developed countries” (Dzorgbo 2012: 16). Despite the slight variation in terminology among the theorists and sociologists over the years, “metropolis-satellite structure” according to Gunder Frank, and Wallerstein’s concept of “core” and “periphery,” they seem to agree there is “a whole chain of constellations of metropoles and satellites [that] relate all parts of the whole system from its metropolitan center in Europe or the United States to the farthest outpost [in the world]” (Gunder Frank 1966: 6).

While Gunder Frank was the first development thinker to expose how most historical experiences, carry an ethnocentric disposition, and how they have been recounted with an “ignorance of the underdeveloped countries' history” which has led to the assumption “that their past and indeed their present resembles earlier stages of the history of the now developed countries” (Frank 1966: 3). This misconception was further explored through the post-colonial lens.
Colonialism is rooted in the misunderstanding of other cultures, and in the capitalistic agenda of the ethnocentric leaders of the developed nations, to “rule on the cheap.” A perpetuating theme of modernization theory is that the modern capitalistic society has an innate responsibility to alleviate the sufferings of the developing society who, from the perspective of the colonizer, needs rescuing from their economic misfortunes and to be shown how to advance into technical modern society, in order to maximize their resources. Diverse cultural traditions, varying geographic elements, and a wide range of historical occurrences do not allow for the developed countries to compare their development with that of the rest of the world. This lack of cultural relativism has often resulted in a familiar language, a form of manipulation over the minds of the developing world rather than by control over their bodies as was the case during colonialism. If there is misunderstanding or resistance is met, then a denial of financial aid is applied in order for the settler to achieve his agenda: “The industrialized societies have devised a more insidious form of control, in this case through the aid establishment and changing development discourse, to replace colonialism and the naked display of imperial power in their quest to secure foreign resources” (Dzorgbo 2012: 5). The rationalization of what was done to the colonized, are some of the impacts that shaped post-colonial theory.

The kind of social structure a society existed in prior to the arrival of the colonizer, the pre-existing social systems of that culture, plays a major role in what colonialism looks like in each region and how it, later once colonizing powers are removed, affect a country’s ability to develop. Sprouted from the dependency theory, societies that lack an internal political stability, initially, and experienced growth based on their close ties to their colonizer, suffered greater collapse when they reached independence. The United Nations Development Program highlights Ghana's periods of successful growth, one of which occurred immediately after reaching independence under the Nkrumah administration. But the organization seeks to provide a fresh perspective on vulnerability and target the current situation within the country: “Although Ghana’s growth has been fairly robust, the source of growth has always been biased in favour of extractive and capital intensive service sector which do not have direct poverty reducing effect” (UNDP website 2014). Within the destructive cycle of European-Western extraversion, the colonized are the ones who are blamed for their inability to regroup and succeed in development, despite the fact that they are the victims trapped inside the capitalistic web.

Recognizing the condition and unique needs of each country in recovery from the effects of colonial expansion, post-colonial thinker Amartya Sen helped to create a system that might evaluate the country’s needs on an individual level, rather than perceiving the entire colonized world as a whole entity demanding the same aid and support. A.K. Awedoba seems to agree with Sen’s opinion that development must be seen “as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” at a more focused, cultural level. He suggests that, “…Africa is in need of not just any development but rather a particular kind that is tailored to suit African requirements and circumstances and meets people’s aspirations” (Awedoba, 2007: 12). While neither of them is proposing that culture alone is the path to development, both Sen and Awedoba acknowledge the importance of using a broader view to measure development and well-being. Sen’s perspective is consistent with the Human Development Index (HDI).
Published by the United Nations, it measures three specific indicators of a country: health, education and income. Using the HDI, one is able to see the importance of first creating social reforms, adequate living conditions and human well-being, and then, only after those exist, can economic growth be possible.

Although Sen’s social-choice ideology has been received by many, the governing superpowers of the world are not interested in this “bottom-up” theory, and would prefer to hold the developing world accountable to their financial standards.

Two institutions that control the world's money, formed out of the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, are the International Monetary Fund (IMF), responsible for handling such things as interest rates, currency tariffs, and exchange rates, and the World Bank, who is in charge of providing loans. Both of these organizations will report that their role, and the purpose of their creation, is to help the developing nations alleviate themselves from poverty. How or why these countries are suffering from poverty, due to the decades of colonial aftermath, is of no concern to the neo-liberal elites running the institutions; their interest lies in the capital development of the impoverished country. Financially driven, the IMF and the Bank have placed stipulations upon what a country must follow before granting a loan, known as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). In order to qualify for a loan, a country may be required to reduce spending on social services, devalue the currency, lower tariffs, just to name a few. Demanding that a country, already struggling to meet the needs of its people, torn apart by colonial forces and left to rebuild a society with the minimal amount of resources that still remain, must eliminate those very services which provide a living for most, is a purely capitalistic mentality stemmed from the earliest modernization theory.

Ghana is a case in point, as described in the paper, “Foreign Aid and Ghana: Power Dynamics of Partnership in Development.” Upon receiving their independence in 1957, under the direction of Nkrumah, Ghana’s governmental development strategy was that of a well-balanced socio-economic infrastructure. Such a multifaceted approach to progress and strong national coherence enabled Ghana to propel along their own chosen developmental path. However, “the 1960s crisis would not only expose the weakness in the nationalist development strategy but also drive Ghana into accepting IMF and World Bank policies from which the country has never recovered” (Dzorgbo 2012: 7). Despite the adverse social consequences, the Ghanaian government adhered to the SAP requirements, and according to the international community, adjusted successfully for an African country, with the aid they received.

Although there were times when Ghana was reluctant to accept aid because of the repercussions that were associated with handing over control of their policy making position, inevitably, the lack of economic stability forced Ghana to participate in the neo-liberal model of capitalism, and adopt a market-based economy. Regardless of the aid that was meant to alleviate Ghana’s economic burden, Dzorgbo reveals the other societal domains that were affected: “The IMF/World Bank successfully consolidated their control over policy making and the direction of development in Ghana, forcing the government to implement policies that led to massive unemployment and sharp deterioration in services, especially health and education. In effect, the [SAP] penalized the poor severely” (2012: 13).
The IMF’s requirements made it impossible for Ghana to stand a chance of alleviating their situation as a player in the new world order in trade; the Ghanaian government could not meet the set of measures imposed by the IMF. Ghana has struggled to respond to the basic needs and well-being of its citizens. The role of the IMF is to provide a short-term solution, while ultimately maintaining domination over Ghana’s development and its resources, and leave the long-term development plan up to Ghana to figure out.

It is aggravating as a cultural anthropologist, trained to observe a situation or group of people from a holistic approach, to watch some of the most powerful people in the world make decisions based on a purely economical viewpoint, consciously choosing to act as though they are completely unaware of the interconnected nature of social beings. There is no way for anyone to produce financial growth when the rest of the parts are out of balance. One individual, who has brought this reality to light, criticizing the policies of the IMF and World Bank, is neo-liberalist thinker and former vice president and chief economist of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz. In an article entitled, “The Fat and the Furious,” published in Vanity Fair magazine, Stiglitz revealed information from his eye-witness accounts as VP, and encouraged the public to recognize that “the wealthiest often stand actively in the way of policies that would improve life for people in general” (2001). While it seems the financially driven neo-liberals choose to draw upon the legacies of modernization thinkers, it is vital for the remaining population, and future policy makers, to acknowledge other legacies have been formed by dependency and post-colonial theorists and choose instead to create a legacy where the people are given the resources necessary to decide for themselves.

References


Back home my lab at school is wall to wall with electrical equipment: oscilloscopes, spectrum analyzers, and computers are all within reach. You can walk down to the basement of the engineering building and pick up anything from an obscure discrete component stamped in silicon to the lowly resistor without paying a dime. Things are different here in Ghana. I'm really hoping this doesn't come across as a gripe; rather, my hope is to highlight a technological divide that exists between Ghana and what you might call the West. I'm particularly interested in the colonial heritage of that divide, and how this pattern has reverberated into the modern day. As an engineer from the United States my outlook on the role of technology and society has been challenged during my time in Ghana. Some labs in the engineering science building are no more than rooms with desks in them. From meeting people at the International Students Hostel, and reading past essays in 'From California to Ghana,' it seems as though many students felt 'called' to Africa for some sort of greater good, to fix things or experience a new way of life. Ghanaians have even formulated a question that encompasses this expectation: "What is your mission?" is a familiar refrain here. This predicament is the proverbial elephant in the room; how can we as students reconcile the expectation of action with the respect of Ghana as a capable and independent nation? This technological divide, unequivocally, is present by design. More nefarious still is the information gap precipitated by it. The problems with communication, and the rough distribution and availability of information that I have faced during my time in Ghana have raised some serious questions about the politics and economics of knowledge and technology.

I must admit that my call to Ghana was less about a Western savior mentality or existential crisis and more about a girl. The past Fall semester, my girlfriend had decided to study abroad here in Ghana. Communication had been difficult at times and I was intrigued at the idea of this not wild, but not modern country occupying a third space between the two. The black star on the continent of Africa has seen the capacity of its telecommunication network expand five fold over the past five years. When I found out that my UC financial aid would cover my semester abroad, I jumped at the opportunity. Aside from the romantic perspective, as an American engineer Ghana offered a unique opportunity to see how a national communication network is built from the ground up. To my mind I had my mission, and I had the motivation; however, my decision to study abroad was not without a caveat. The infrastructural issues that drew me to study here were such that I did not have the power or capital to change them, their roots tracing back to the colonial past and the transatlantic slave trade. Further still, I did not know if they should be changed even if they could. In a sense, my questions about international communication and the flow of information into and out of the country had already been answered by this tragic reality of Ghana's colonial past. One of my favorite authors, Albert Camus once wrote that, “...Man has an idea of a better world than this. But better does not mean different...” These words ring loud for me. I'll admit that ideas about teaching and fixing and changing what was wrong with Ghana passed through my mind. Yes, I could spend my time here trying to fix things to some American standard, I could volunteer my time to teach school kids how to program. At the end of the day, would I have made the world any better? Further still, would Ghana be any better or different? Guilt about my American privilege forced a certain obligation upon me, but I promised myself that I would come as an observer – a student, not a teacher.
My firmly held belief that Ghana needs and deserves an expansion of access to the information and far-reaching community that the Internet provides did not come without some hesitation to participate in nation building or a harsh critique of a 'developing' nation's infrastructure. I believe this stems in part from the nation's colonial past, and partly from my desire to respect the independence and potential of Ghana as an independent and capable nation. Of course, the philosophical question of whether or not the average Ghanaian would benefit from better Internet still remained for me. The issue of communication is a particularly sensitive one considering the history of communication in the country. On the heels of an electrical revolution in England, James Clerk Maxwell's experimental discoveries had opened the door for intercontinental communication via the telegraph. Before long, England's empire was knitted together through a vast network of submarine cables that run along preexisting shipping lanes - the very same lanes that fueled the transatlantic slave trade. The direct descendants of this tool for foreign rule from afar are the modern fiber optic cables, which bear nearly the entirety of international communication into Ghana and much of West Africa. Access to the worldwide web, cheap long distance calls and a myriad of taken for granted services would simply not be possible without these glass cables that circle the globe and tie together continents. Without a doubt, the average and more than likely above average Ghanaian was not given the opportunity to chat away on the telegraph. Rather, the telegraph was a mechanism for exerting power. Why then, would a ruling power don such capability onto the ruled? It is my belief that the modern state of information affairs is an echo from the past, and that the situation has been exacerbated by economic, and therefore, political motives.

This interdependence between accountable, effective governance and a capable communications network has been highlighted in recent years by the Arab Spring, and various other online social movements. Recent international rankings have shown some improvement in the level of corruption in Ghana, but the country's record on land rights, and a yet to be seen record on oil extraction in light of the so called 'African resource curse,' point to some uncertainty. Reports from Ghanaian watchdog groups have warned of a push towards a more Nigerian policy on profits for natural resource production. For example, of the $287 million devoted to public sector spending, nearly eighteen percent went to the office of the president, a non-productive, bureaucratic entity. At the same time, public works projects such as roads and bridges have been underfunded and left unfinished. With public officials being generally underpaid, bribery is common amongst judges, right on down the line to postal workers (The Heritage Foundation, "Ghana").

My job during my time in the US Air Force was to take a base operating in what was known as 'bare' conditions and turn it into a fully functioning communication hub. An interesting part of this training included exercises where we would operate with and without communications capabilities. During missions where we had to keep our radios off, we were lost; however, during operations where our radios were allowed to stay on we could move as a single entity. This anecdote from my personal experience has highlighted how critical communication is for just about everything in our daily lives. I've been particularly impressed by the way Ghanaians communicate with one another, with a definite sense of community and collective. A popular saying here is that, "I am because you are, you are because we all are", a spin on the oft-quoted line by Descartes.
Online communities are rampant in nations where there is an almost non-existent sense of community and a priority of self over the group. I am excited to see what such an online future holds for Ghana and other African nations, which have traditionally stronger ties to the community and the greater good.

While increasing the average connection speed is a nice statistic for the World Bank, it does little to bridge the technological and information divide that exists between Ghana and the West. By stressing the construction of community access points over the speed-up of Internet that only a few can access, I argue that Ghana can bridge the divide more rapidly by putting the technology in the hands of the youth. A computer in my hands is an exceptionally dangerous thing because I’ve internalized it; I’ve had a computer in my home since I was five years old and it surely had slower Internet access than I’ve experienced here in Ghana. This internalization of computer technology and the cultural and informational wealth that it can provide have not yet become central to the youth’s experience. Just as I struggle with the polyrhythms in my traditional African drumming class, I can see that my peers here at the University of Ghana either struggle with or don’t even know about tools that can help them in their personal studies. If the emphasis of technological expansion becomes more about access than the expansion of capability for the few, I believe that youth of Ghana can push their country to the fore in little more than a decade.

Some might have you believe that expanding access to the Internet is all about getting Ghanaians on Google or Yelp. Perhaps, add a few more businesses to Google maps, invest a few million here, a billion there, and the issues would be solved. To me, the problem of information distribution is much deeper than an infrastructure in its infancy, but the lack of a cultural imperative for distributing information and technology. Bearing in mind that the average Ghanaian earns an equivalent of about 2 US dollars a day, it is not surprising that the Internet is slower and harder to come by. My argument, or rather insistence, on pushing the envelope of Ghana’s technological frontier is not to make it easier for students at the international hostels to stream movies faster, but to expand this technology’s reach beyond the elite, to push this nation ever forward.

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Producing Knowledge and Reinterpreting Development – by Taylor Davis

Sometimes ‘Development’ is a theory, defined socially and economically as a collection of ideas and implementations that are used strategically to affect social change. Sometimes Development is a condition of existence, categorized based on levels of infrastructure, wealth distribution and access to resources. Sometimes it is a history, manifested over time through a series of interaction between nations and world powers, escalating over confrontations and exploitation. And sometimes Development is a reality, shared by human beings over varying ideas of comfort and social expectations. But who really defines development and how does it affect the realities of certain societies in the world? How does this definition benefit a few people at the expense of others?

At home I study Feminist thought, and to me it is more than just the study of women and women’s roles, it has a lot to do with subverting mainstream understandings of discourse and knowledge. When concerned with a subject as monumentally influential and powerful as that of aid distribution between nations and global organizations, I naturally look to understand who is producing the knowledge and understandings that justify the ways in which aid is distributed in the world today. Development is one of those classifications that serve a purpose for certain groups of people more than it can be an actual reflection of real life experiences. It is a part of a discourse that is concerned with labeling certain nations and areas of the world more inferior than others. Michel Foucault a post-structuralist who has contributed a lot to studies of sexuality, knowledge and power, emphasizes how those with the most influence in the thought of society holds the power to mold knowledge and discourse, creating an apparatus through which knowledge and understandings are produced. “From Foucault’s postulate…it can be argued that the development experts and institutions today are the manufacturers and holders of the development ideas; what development is can only be established and legitimated by contrasting it with underdevelopment.” (Dzorgbo, 2) So for world powers such as the IMF and the World Bank, the terms of development such as “first world”, “third world”, “developed”, “developing”, “underdeveloped”, influence the ways in which the rest of the world will come to see places like Africa, Southeast Asia and South America, these places in the Global South which are held up to standards of development designed to keep them subservient and dependent to self-proclaimed “developed” nations.

Although presented in the mainstream media otherwise, aid is not charity, and unfortunately nothing in this world is free. Aid comes in the form of hidden agendas and ulterior motives based on strategic interests of global governmental organizations and aid-lending countries. Because of tactics such as policy-based lending, receiving aid means accepting neo-liberal free market economic policies. For Ghana, during the period from 1969 – 1972 when government was making considerable effort to integrate neo-liberal policies, aid increased significantly. Conversely, in the 80s when anti-imperialist spirits were making a comeback, Ghana was no longer considered aid worthy and foreign financial assistance rapidly declined. (Dzorgbo, 9-10)
Even when funds finally reach the economy it’s channeled into the extraction of raw materials to be exported for the manufacture of western products. Raw materials are sold very cheaply at prices that are only possible due to poor labor conditions, unfair wages and environmental destruction. In addition, funds are hardly ever successfully reintegrated back into the nation's economy. Aid breeds corruption; it creates greater and greater wealth disparities when the funds received only touch a few “well-placed” individuals. Funds that are channeled into national socio-economic development such as education, health care and affordable housing are few and far between. Development, as defined by the powers that be, is based on the fact that certain areas of the world will never actually develop to the standard that has been set. It is also defined by cultures that may be developed in material excess, but are severely underdeveloped in many other capacities. The help nation-states in the Global South receive from the outside world is used strategically to lock them in a state of dependency on western powers. Similar to the “American Dream,” we are conditioned to aspire to an idealized standard of living that doesn’t exist. So called “developed” countries experience similar struggles to those in the Global South, yet they are not talked about it; issues of poverty, lack of resources, and governmental corruption.

All of these theories of global development I was aware of before I decided to come to Africa, but I was not prepared for the sort of internalized self-criticism that I have encountered in the short time since I’ve been here. The aspiration to the proverbial westernized idol shocked me. I assumed that the corrupt polices of the conglomerated western powers which has confined them into a state of dependency would be common knowledge. Yet more and more I am coming to understand how effective the western development ideological apparatus has been in controlling the way the people will understand certain realities, even their own. The most striking example that I observed was the extent that people here in Ghana will go to get to America. Some are willing to commit fraud, lie about marriage relationships, or offer bribes, they are so desperate. I’ve asked, “What’s so special about America?” The answer is usually something along the lines of, “In America, I can get a nice job, and then I will have a nice life.” Many do not to see the structural oppression in western society that inhibits the majority of people of color from achieving social or economic success.

Because I am an 'Obroni', and I am from America, I am assumed to have money. It is not thought that because I am an African American, I might have struggles as well; the challenges that my parents faced to create a better life for themselves, the fact that I have to work hard to attain my education, that is often irrelevant to a Ghanaian who is convinced that America is the land of the free, and who experiences a completely different kind of struggle. The hardest thing is that I have had to face within myself is the relative privilege that I enjoy in the global society. Being here, it is very difficult to make bold statements like, “I’m so poor,” which I frequently remind people back in the States.

What coming here has meant to me is the redefinition of previously held beliefs about developmental status in the world today. It was easier for me to be more removed from my ideas about global poverty when it wasn’t staring me in the face, and now I realize that the realities of development are a lot more complicated than I had realized.
The thought that I couldn't get out of my head throughout our tour through the country was, “Some of the stereotypes are true!” It was a hard to swallow that many people in rural areas live in straw and mud huts and sometimes tin shacks, that there were villages set up just like in the stories with family compounds and chief’s quarters. But this isn’t to say that westernization has not touched Ghana. One of these huts can be under a huge billboard for Bailey’s Irish Cream or the new Samsung Galaxy S4. The realization for me was that underdevelopment does not mean the negation of developmental influence. Because even as I fought against the mainstream understanding of development, my issue was that I assumed westernization in the Global South and in Ghana would resemble the westernization I experienced in America, and subsequently the same type of poverty that is so prevalent in America today. I neglected to understand that poverty here is a reality shared by a significant amount of the population, and it is colored by traditions and customs that predate America by hundreds of years. These cultures, in my opinion, are almost like western nations’ kryptonite, which is why the West is so bent on eradicating them.

Unfortunately, development is not tailored to the cultures that it has invaded. Perhaps if the motives were aligned, the lens of development could be readjusted to compensate for the disruption of local beliefs and customs and to work to maintain its survival. I am starting to believe that what needs to come together is a greater investment into the preservation of African self-esteem. Ghanaians and other Africans need to be reminded how integral they are to the rest of the world, they need to reclaim that power, and development needs to be redefined in a way that empowers Africa to take a hold of her resources and her potential. There is a great need to debunk western ideas of a singular developmental issue and a single solution for all cultures in the Global South. A.K. Awedoba talks about the “African Personality” and the response from various Africans to Western models of development. “…The school curriculum including subjects taught, the examples used and the medium of instruction takes the African pupil and student far from his or her African cultural environment and [then it looks like] formal education…must necessarily be non-African and to acquire it should entail thinking, feeling, behaving non-African.” (Awedoba, 2) Institutionally education is linked with ideas of modernization and thus, western culture so that the acquisition of knowledge and higher education is reserved only for those who fit this model excluding any other traditions or customs that individuals in non-western societies may have experienced in their lifetimes.

Awedoba goes on to break down the ways in which traditional customs throughout the different cultures of Africa can be used to answer questions of socio-economic development. He argues that “African cultures are vibrant and dynamic and they can serve as resource for development rather than as liabilities.”(Awedoba, 8) He uses the important example of female genital mutilation (FGM). Many western reactionaries who are offended by the thought and appalled at the practice would see it necessary to intervene heavily into the practices. Yet their intervention often comes in the form of western ideas of modernization as “good” and traditions as “bad” and there have been many attempts to curtail FGM by fining villages heavily for practicing it. In the example given about the issue of FGM in the Tain District of the Brong Ahafo Region, measures which were successfully integrated into the region included educating young girls on the history of their culture as well as HIV/AIDS education.
“Additionally they were taught traditional dancing and dressing, self-maintenance, socialization, home management skills,” this sort of educational assistance is a way of focusing on aspects of development that include self-realization and cultural awareness for both those within and outside the area and a type of social development that allows traditions and beliefs to be preserved while simultaneously moving on to forge new paths.

One of the most important things I realized was that colonialism was not over. Modern day imperialist thought comes in the form of theories of development, manifested through developmental aid. Yet, for me, coming here to Ghana gives new meaning to the phrase, “seeing is believing,” and while I feel more affirmed than ever before in my beliefs that global governmental organizations like the World Bank and the IMF are actually just neo-imperialism in a horrible disguise, I can actually see with my own eyes how successful they have been in colonizing the bodies and the minds of everyone in the world today. Not just in Ghana, but in America and Europe too, where people actually believe that the work they are doing in the Global South is actually for the benefit of those countries. I still have much to learn, and there is no way that I will learn it all in the small time that I will be here, but now I have a mission. My mission is to connect with this culture that I have the pleasure of immersing myself in, connecting with all the nuances and all the customs old and new. And if I can help those around me, it will be to assist in a development that is based on cultural conditionality and self-awareness, helping those in the motherland rise up and rise above a structural oppression that has got us all fooled.

References


The Law and Civil Society in Ghana: Observations of a Non-Profit Approach to Human Rights Justice in Ghana – by Susan Flores

Abstract

This essay aims to provide a brief analysis of the existing efforts to promote human rights by local and civil society actors in the urban center of Accra, Ghana. The resources include first-hand observations as well as direct references from legal texts. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate a counter-narrative of active and positive participation on the part of civil society to provide free legal aid to the more vulnerable populations of Accra. I note that the actions demonstrated in this paper counter the normative reports often seen in the media regarding developing countries.

Key words: Justice, Civil Society, NGOs

Prior to arriving in Ghana for the first time, I studied the basic demographic information of the West African nation through local and international news sources and basic historical texts within the broader West African literature. Admittedly, it was not comprehensive enough to replace first hand observations. Nevertheless, a common theme of the current Ghanaian narrative was the account of difficulties faced by the prospect of becoming a developed and fully industrialized post-colonial nation. Even as this paper is being written, the international news concerning Ghana is on how badly the economy is doing and the possible role of international fiscal and monetary intervention (Ghana Web 2014). The theme has consequently carried into my firsthand observations as well. However, my focus intends to highlight a counter-narrative of progress in the form of legal justice and the defense of human rights in Ghana.

For the purpose of this study, I will use the Oxford Encyclopedia definition of a “third world country”, i.e. a noun for the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, solely to distinguish the disparity of infrastructure between Ghana and noted 1st world countries i.e. the U.S. (Oxford 2014). Recognizing that the term carries negative connotations of superiority and in many instances hypocrisy on the part of the so-called “first world” due to its own dearth of infrastructure, the disparity of infrastructure is still wide enough to deem the term relevant and functional to this study. To better understand the trajectory of Ghana’s recent development, this paper will focus on my own work and involvement, thus far, with a non-profit legal aid organization based in Accra, Ghana: the Justice Foundation. This paper aims to show the degree of involvement by a particular NGO in addressing issues marginalized by public officials and offices alike, particularly in the face of more prominent, but no less important economic troubles.

My involvement with the Justice Foundation, herein TJF, is through an unpaid internship with the organization. It is a new organization, established in August of 2013, but has already made several strides in the direction of legal justice. The idea of civil society entered political theory when theorists began to insist that a social community is capable of organizing itself independently of the specific direction of state powers (Chandhoke 1995).
This concept aligns with TJF’s own mission statement that aims “to work in concert with relevant governmental and non-governmental agencies/bodies to ensure an effective and efficient justice delivery system” (The Justice Foundation 2014). As is evident in the organization’s goals, Ghana’s public officials do not always fulfill their intended purposes of enforcing the law in a fair and just manner. Thus, the demand for civil society groups and organizations such as TJF remains high. Such collaborative measures are necessary for the development of Ghana, in order to ensure both trust in the government and encourage stability overall.

Promptly after my start at TJF, I was assigned a task which included drafting the Human Rights Chapter of Ghana’s constitution into a “Frequently Asked Legal Questions” (FALQ) forum for TJF’s website. This led me to closely read the chapter and its 36 articles concerning human rights. During my study of the Chapter, I came across many concepts similar to the rights granted in the U.S., such as freedom of speech and the right to a fair trial (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana 2006). In all, the Chapter is comprehensive and addresses many of the issues concerning Ghana including those highlighted in the local media. Interestingly, on the basis of the Constitution, Ghana is very much aligned with the first world. Yet, much like in the United States, the existence of rights and laws does not always translate to their manifestations. After having drafted the FALQ, most of my questions concerned the criminal offence procedures. It was there that I saw the most vulnerable spots of exploitation between the law and the protection of those rights, violations of which I had heard by second-hand accounts.

Part of the orientation program for the study abroad program included a cautionary tale about a student who got arrested. The efforts that followed to get that student out of jail were extensive, time consuming, and expensive. Working with an attorney through the criminal justice process was very difficult but the outcome was positive and the student was released. However, more unfortunate cases have been a part of Ghana’s legal proceedings which resulted in some Americans being jailed. People often joke and ask, “Why didn’t they bribe someone?” The concept of bribery is by no means exclusive to “third world” countries, but the casual pervasiveness of such actions in developing countries is still striking. In a car ride with an attorney I asked him if the use of phones while driving was legal. He responded, “No, it’s very illegal but everyone does it and no officer is going to arrest an attorney over that. Even if you’re not an attorney, you can very easily bribe them” (Personal Interview 2014). This pattern of contempt for the law, both by the public and by officials, provides the basis for civil society groups’ work in narrowing the gap between the law and behavior. Another example of such a disparity involves a fellow intern who is a student at the University of Ghana’s Faculty of Law. She informed me that there’s an ongoing joke among the students as to how easy it would be to commit the perfect murder, due to the various hindrances to justice such as dishonest officials. Yet, as author Satya Prakash Dash declares, “A strong civil society has the potential to hold the government and the private sector accountable. Civil society can be a crucial provider of government legitimacy” (Dash 2001). Strength of that nature is apparent in the work of TJF and its outreach efforts. It is important to highlight the influential role the state plays even when civil society organizes itself, in effect ensuring that the existing body of laws and regulations work for the people and not against them.
After detecting the extensiveness of the criminal code of conduct, I had to compile a separate and lengthy FALQ solely for the Criminal Procedure Code. Right to a fair trial and the ensuing procedures are already listed as human rights in the constitution, but the codes of conduct themselves demand a comprehensive analysis of their own. An interesting detail I found was the constitutional law demanding a translator for a person under suspicion. It states, “A person charged with a criminal offence shall be permitted to have, without payment by him, the assistance of an interpreter where he cannot understand the language used at the trial.” (Constitution Article 19.2.h 2006) This measure, despite belonging to the constitution of a “third world” nation, is extremely progressive if one takes into consideration that the right to an interpreter is not guaranteed by U.S. law until after an arrest has been made. Furthermore, it is under statutory law, not constitutional law. In other words, in certain states any criminal procedures, before the actual trial, can proceed without the need of an interpreter despite the accused’s incompetence in English. (Cornell School of Law 2014). This finding is an example of a “third world” country enacting a law more protective of its residents than a “first world” country.

An example of the potency of TJF’s work in bridging the gap between the law and its enforcement is evident in their ongoing legal aid clinics. The most recent one was established earlier in May in the community of La, a suburb of Accra (Graphic News). The clinic managed to address upwards of 70 clients, which mostly consisted of inheritance rights and land disputes. Most importantly, the services were offered free of charge by pro-bono attorneys and law students. The executive director of TJF, Mr. Kwaku Agyeman-Budu, commented in a concluding speech after the clinic was opened, “In spite of constitutional provisions which guaranteed human rights, rights and civil liberties were being violated on a daily basis” (Graphic 2014). Recently I asked another of my fellow interns, Stephanie, what she thinks is the most common hindrance to legal aid. She responded that language barriers are a big issue, particularly in the less urban regions of Accra and Ghana as a whole (Personal Interview 2014). Although English is the official language of Ghana and thus official texts are written in English, many people are more comfortable communicating in a local language (American Embassy of Ghana 2014). Moreover, dwindling literacy rates are an issue in Ghana as well, with the adult literacy rate most recently deemed at 67% of the total adult population (Index Mundi 2010). It should be noted that literacy rate definition consists of the ability to read and write a short, simple statement and by no means includes comprehension of legalese. She also noted that a significant amount of people who attended the clinic simply needed interpretation of their documents, a simple enough task capable of any attorney and yet costly if they had sought help directly from a firm (Personal Interview 2014).

Currently my role as an intern has also involved me in a direct collaboration with a widely distributed fashion, entertainment, and lifestyle magazine, Glitz, which will feature its first legal aid column the Glitz Gavel in November. It is part of a broader advocacy program that aims to include the middle class in becoming more informed on the legal aspects of the media, fashion, entertainment industries as well as family law. Regardless of economic success, consumers in third world countries can still fall prey to human rights violations. Nonetheless, the core focus of TJF lies in assisting the vulnerable classes of Ghanaian society. A new clinic, in a different part of Accra, will soon be in held in October.
Organizing this upcoming clinic has shown me firsthand the enthusiasm for pro-bono work that local attorneys have. More importantly, the enthusiasm the law students have shown reveal an even more promising future group of attorneys. I have been part of a group of Ghanaians who believe in justice and human rights and who work diligently to educate and protect all residents of the nation. Civil society does work and can have an impact on justice and human rights in a positive way in Ghana. My experience at TJF so far has exceeded my expectations not only of the work load, but of the dedication to promoting justice by using existing “third world” institutions to effectively work for the people despite the pessimistic narrative seen in the media and literature.

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9. Personal interview with Ms. Stephanie (September 11, 2014). Faculty of Law, Legon Campus.


European colonization has a strong legacy in Ghana. Independence from the UK was declared in 1957; however, this did not reverse Western control of Ghana’s resources. Ghana became increasingly dependent on the West through various programs implemented by organizations, like the World Bank, which continued to focus agricultural production on export crops with the help of regulations that promoted multinational agribusinesses. These businesses discourage the preservation of healthy environments, communities, and individuals as small farms were eliminated. Globalization and the many programs that come with it are oppressing smallholder farmers because neoliberal economic development promotes corporate farms that focus on producing exports rather than feeding the country.

The Green Revolution was a huge turning point in agricultural production that began in the 1960s. Created with the intention of feeding the earth’s exponentially growing population, this revolution started the modernized agricultural techniques that commercial farms continue to use today. These new technologies include disease resistant and high yielding crop varieties, which transitioned many countries from growing food to meet domestic demand into an export economy of cash crop production. Increasing trade and the reliance on Western powers followed with the exploitation of Ghana’s agricultural resources. This is one form of neocolonialism, or simply put, another way to allow the West to once again extract wealth from countries like Ghana, but this time they do not have to be physically present in the nation as was required in the colonial period in history.

However, these new technologies have consequences. Genetically altered crops require more fertilizers, increased water usage, and toxic pesticides. These technologies affect the health of ecosystems and communities tremendously and the future viability of natural or traditional agricultural production. This revolution was a quick fix, ignorant to the future affects that it is having like global climate change. These may not have become pressing issues if the focus were instead on supporting smallholder farms to allow people to grow food to feed their communities (McMichael 76-79).

Colonization planted the seeds for foreign privatization of agriculture in Ghana. As demands for exports began to rise, there was an inevitable shift in production from small-scale farming to the mass-production of cash crops like cocoa. This global sourcing creates ‘food miles’ (the distance food is transported from the time of its production until it reaches the consumer) that have a tremendous ecological impact and also deepen international dependencies. As there is an increase in exports, there is an understandable increase in imports as commercial farms take over land that may have been previously producing foods that people could live on. Cash crops cannot sustain a country, therefore food sovereignty was decreased. Unfortunately, this knowledge did not stop the rise of multinational agribusinesses and the regulations that support their goals (McMichael 11).

In order to fully understand the situation that smallholder farms are in, we must first assess the global regulations that created this inequity. One example is the Public Law 480 Program. This US Law was created in 1954 with the intent of setting up future markets for commercial sales of US
grains. In order to support the expected growth of demand for these products, intensive agriculture became the new focus, which created serious problems for smallholder farms. Farms began to prioritize profit over any other factor, instead of maintaining and preserving the land using traditional growing methods. The era of “the development project” created this agribusiness model, focused on the short-term economic gain of agriculture, rather than long-term sustainability (McMichael 70).

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) program began in 1994 when it opened markets for trade by giving corporations more rights in member countries. More specifically, “GATS 2000” provided “unlimited market access to foreign service providers, without any regard for social and environmental impacts of the service activities” (McMichael, 180). This obviously gives commercial production of agriculture an unfair advantage. It allows for liberalized trade and financial practices, which make it easier for global corporations to control markets. GATS advocates also believe that turning public entities, like water, into a privatized and profitable commodity would increase the efficiency of the bureaucratic system. Water is a crucial element in agriculture and as it becomes privatized, the privatization of farms follows (McMichael 178).

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is another huge influence in the expansion of inequity of global capitalism as its main goal is to regulate nations through liberalization to allow private companies to trade freely (McMichael 169). As farms continue to grow to the corporate level, small farms' rights and values are ignored and even though economic productivity may increase nationally, the economic well being of most people declines. The Agreement on Agriculture was created in 1995 in order to reduce trade protections, implement farm subsidies, and increase government interventions. After being implemented, the global price of food dropped dramatically because countries like the US subsidized commercial farms to mass-produce export crops. These staple crops that were once grown in countries like Ghana, are now shipped all over the world, competing with local markets that are unable to produce cheaper crops and are therefore unable to sell their crops in their own country. Corporate farms succeeded in producing agricultural goods for as “cheap” as possible with the resultant real cost being borne by farmers in developing nations (McMichael 169-171).

In addition to the WTO, the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) had limitations that made the poor even more vulnerable. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative created by the IMF and World Bank in 1996 was created to “provide exceptional assistance to countries with unsustainable debt burdens” (McMichael 187). With these and many other global forces on agriculture, combined with the vulnerability of small-scale farms with internalized risk, an inequitable world for smallholder farmers is created.

The global capitalist system that focuses on economic gain as the main metric for evaluating the productivity of a farm is one of the underlying problems that make small farms vulnerable. This focus destroys the security of small farms and shifts the agricultural focus to the export of cash-crop monocultures. Finding other viable alternative evaluation schemes that address the ecological, social, political, and other effects of farming systems is important. For example, using a Genuine Progress Indicator will measure not only the economic performance but also the consequences of these performances.
It will show that the majority of privatized agriculture in Ghana is ultimately unsustainable and favors only a small percentage of the population economically.

Another cause of vulnerability for small farmers is the power relations between individual farmers and global, federal, and local governments. It is extremely hard for individual farmers to fight the regulations set by the World Bank. Even organizations like the Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen which was created “to be funded by the farmers themselves to operate as a cooperative venture at the district, regional, and national levels” (according a study by the US Library of Congress) was affected by power relations as they did not receive any support from the government, leaving subsistence farmers at a huge disadvantage (La Verle Berry).

The people of Ghana have responded to these challenges in many ways. A range of co-operatives were created to help counteract some of the negative consequences. A co-operative (in this situation), as defined by the National Rural Electric Co-operative Association, USA, has a voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, gives members economic participation, is autonomous and independent, provides education, training and information, it cooperates with and has concern for the community. Some farm co-operatives address the global market decline of certain crops, like cocoa, in Ghana. In one study done by Socodevi (a Canadian organization for international development), one of the goals of these cooperatives was to increase “the intensity” of “modern” input use (fertilizers, pesticides, and mechanical implements) and hence per hectare yields of members would be significantly higher than those of non-members” (Calkins). Another goal was to improve the quality of life of these areas, which they define as the “living area per capita, total value of possessions, habitat quality, health, and child nutritional status” (Calkins). This co-operative could make a better economic situation by combining small farms into a “commercial village”, possibly helping them to compete with privatized farms.

The most successful types of co-operatives fight privatization competition by appearing as one large corporate farm. This helped individual farmers create a standardized product and have more power over markets and pricing. These communities are often called “Commercial Villages”. Previously, the government would own the land that the farmers produced on. As their land technically belonged to the government, the sense of ownership and control declined dramatically. Some farmers would have rather destroyed their farms than join the government-run “co-operatives”. This obviously did not empower farmers, but the ability to compete with the private sector or agriculture could have. Food co-ops sprouted all around the country, avoiding the middleman and increasing food sovereignty. Empowering sustainable farmers to join together in order to be successful would help sustain the food needs of Ghana, creating more independence.

Trade unions in Ghana have existed ever since the British colonization of the “Gold Coast” and they exist in many other countries around the world. But, like in many countries, the large union organizations do not always serve the interests of the majority of the membership. In Ghana, the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) is the largest union organization. It has had little success in protecting the rights of small farmers.
The GTUC has had a pattern of government control. Workers and small farm owners have often been dissatisfied with their representation. This dissatisfaction sometimes causes uprisings, which then draws militant union action against the government. This sometimes leads to further unrest and then oppression of citizen’s human rights. Globalization gives the GTUC more power under the bureaucratic system, which benefits from the privatization of agriculture (Waterman).

Another organization that is more focused on supporting smallholder farms is the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). They believe that it is “essential to target the small farmers who constitute the largest segment of producers” (Chamberlin). Smallholder farms dominate Ghanaian agriculture. These farms not only produce commodities for export but they produce crops that are vital for food security (Chamberlin). In order to support these farms, they work to improve productivity and efficiency. IFPRI recognizes that many attempts of expanding high-value production-market chains have created a bias toward “better-endowed” farms (Von Braun). This is an extremely important realization, as many can over-look these consequences when setting regulations, just as many world powers have done. Studies have also shown that small producers that focus on food crops instead of cash crops have stronger linkages for economic growth and poverty reduction (Chamberlin). These food crops generally stay in domestic markets, increasing the sustainability of the country as well as the food sovereignty and food security.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is an agency of the United Nations that is working in Ghana to “enable poor rural people to overcome poverty” (IFAD). IFAD aims to implement agricultural modernization, sustainable natural resource management and enhance private-sector competitiveness, similar to the main goals of the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda created by the Ghanaian government. The IFAD financed projects aim to make small, rural, “entrepreneurs” more competitive with the privatized market. This is an unfortunate necessity for smallholder farms, as most regulations support the goals of large corporate farms. In order to be successful in this, the IFAD “plans, tests, monitors, and evaluates the financial, economic, and environmental outcomes of these projects” (IFAD). After an IFAD office in Ghana was established in 2011, more collaboration with governments, farmer organizations, research institutions, the corporate private sector, and others allowed discussions of policies and how to be successful in their goals for scaling up. Though the projects that IFAD undertakes are well thought-out, there was no mention of collaboration with individual smallholder farms. Their importance is often over-looked when organizations focus on “reducing poverty” while improving the government’s economic development strategy. The system is stacked against these farms, and it takes uncustomary critical thinking to question the way that the world uses agriculture.

Independent, sustainable, smallholder farms are vital for the health of individual bodies, communities, ecosystems, and the future of our planet. As climate change becomes an underlying theme across the world, global powers need to realize that there are more important things than economic growth. When the world was organizing trade and production, the excitement of economic growth may have clouded other aspects of the issue. The first world, in a lot of ways, created an interdependence that causes a lack of food sovereignty and increases poverty. Organizations that will be successful in solving these problems will recognize the affects of globalization in order to understand how these small farms in Ghana need support.
References


The Manifestations of Slavery in Ghana and California – by Rebecca Jacquez

“Slavery is still in our immediate environment, it’s not far from us. It is ongoing in our societies. In our localities we can see sex trafficking, human trafficking, child prostitution. This is happening right here in Ghana, in Europe and other parts of the world. We can see the mental slavery, economic slavery and political slavery. To fight against slavery it takes your effort and it takes my effort. You have a role to play. I have a role to play. Let us revolutionize our minds because until we change the way we think we will forever be in slavery.”

–Tour Guide at the Cape Coast Castle

A main tourist attraction in Ghana is the Cape Coast Castle; it contains the remains of the dark era of the transatlantic slave trade. Although indigenous slavery was present in what is now Ghana prior to the transatlantic slave trade, it was not the same form of slavery as that which took Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. The transatlantic slave trade was much more ugly, horrible, and devastating to humanity. It took years of resistance, resilience and organizing of black people and morally devoted allies’ to end the transatlantic slave trade. The enslavement of people continued past the so-called end of the transatlantic era in 1808. The institution of slavery in the Americas ended at different times for example, Mexico ended slavery in 1829, and the United States ended slavery in 1865. As you can see from the dates the world did not end slavery of black people on one single day or point in time, rather, the ending of slavery of black people was scattered throughout many years. The tour guide at the Cape Coast Castle asked the people on the tour to think about the different ways in which slavery still persists in our society. Nothing in our society today can equate to the lived experiences of the transatlantic slave trade. However, forms of slavery in our society in general, Ghana and California in particular, are a tragedy in humanity and need to be dismantled. The role of race in the prison system of California is interlinked with the longer history of the role of race throughout the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, and making of the United States. Race determines who is targeted into the prison system and who controls and continues these injustices. Like the modern day slavery of the prison industrial complex, witch camps in Ghana are also institutions of modern day slavery. However, witch camps in Ghana are institutions of inequality based on gender. Gender plays one of the leading roles in the determining who lives in the camps. Both race and gender hierarchies are two interesting aspects of modern day slavery, in Ghana and in California, that are interconnected and should not be ignored. For the purpose of this paper I will examine the intersection between the role of race, within the prison system in California, and gender within the witch camps in Ghana. Then explain that in order to eradicate ourselves from these mental, economic, and political forms of modern day slavery we have to imagine a world without racism, sexism, and slavery.

The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) in California has become the largest prison system in the history of the World in general, and the largest prison system where race plays a large role in particular. Race is a social construction that maintains social currency in the United States, it limits the opportunities and access a person of color has. The white dominated racial hierarchy in America influences who benefits and who doesn’t from the PIC. Since people of color have been at the bottom of the embedded racial hierarchy in America throughout the history of the United States it is only a repeated story when examining the PIC. According to the Public Policy Institute of California in California’s Changing Population it states,
African American men are dramatically more likely to be imprisoned than any other group...Just more than half of California's adult male population is nonwhite or Latino (56%), but these groups make up three of every four men in prison: Latinos are 41%, African Americans are 29%, and other races are 6%. Among adult men in 2010, African Americans were incarcerated at a rate of 5,525 per 100,000, compared to 1,146 for Latinos, 671 for non-Latino whites, and 43 for Asians. (Grattet and Hayes, pg.1)

Not only does the statistic above indicate that people of color are being incarcerated at higher rates but it also shows there is a much higher probability of incarceration for people of color than for white Americans. People of color are targeted by the white structure of power to be incarcerated. It is not by chance that brown and black people are incarcerated at higher rates than white Americans but rather, it is a continuation of historical structural racism and oppression of people of color.

The white power structures in the United States are at the expense of the oppression of people of color. People of color do not benefit from the PIC, socially, politically, or economically, the same way the dominant white racial group does. What does it mean to have a continuation of white dominance in our society and in the prison system in particular? It means that the racial hierarchy that is placed in society is supporting the PIC, and the PIC supports the racial hierarchy. There is an ongoing cycle of oppression and dominance. Due to the continuation of white dominance in the California prison system, white Americans are benefiting from the PIC economically, politically, and socially. One example of how white Americans benefit from the PIC is their chances of being targeted on the street or into the prison pipeline is lower than the chances of people of color, especially black men. During my first full month studying abroad in Ghana there was an unfortunate shooting in Ferguson, Missouri in the US. Michael Brown was unarmed and shot by a police officer on August 9, 2014 and tragically his death is part of a long historically rooted problem of racism. Would Michael Brown have been shot if he was white? We can really never know, but statistics show us that white Americans are less likely to be shot while unarmed when in an interaction with the police. The Huffington Post reported that in Chicago, “blacks accounted for more than 67 percent of city’s police-involved shootings in 2013.” (Bellware, Pg.1) Michael Brown's death is an insight into the criminalization of black bodies in America which white Americans will never have to face if society does not dismantle the white structures of power that uplifts and continue the Prison Industrial Complex.

There are many forms of resistance and calls for revolution against the PIC and historically we know that when studying or looking at oppression in society, we must simultaneously take a closer look at these various forms of resistance. Specifically in California, the conversation about mass incarceration has increased in recent years. Many students, specifically at the University of California, Berkeley are taking courses that include or focus on the issue of mass incarceration, are planning conferences with high school students regarding mass incarceration, and organizing protests and other actions. In 2013, 29,000 inmates across California went on a hunger strike to call attention to the conditions of solitary confinement. It is up to all of us regardless of race to abolish the modern day slavery of mass incarceration in California, because like the transatlantic slave trade it is an injustice to humanity, the same is true of witch camps in Ghana.
Witch camps are part of the obsession of witchcraft across the African continent which is enslaving many people in witch camps based on gender. Witchcraft is generally understood as having magical powers that are often used for bad purposes. Societies differ between their attitudes toward witchcraft but the English word witch usually has many negative connotations attached to it and usually refers to a female. In *Culture and Development in Africa* A.K. Awedoba writes, “in African Societies witches can be of either sex, although women are more accused or suspected than males” (Awedoba, pg. 215). So although men can be accused of witchcraft, the accused women generally receive much harsher treatment than men who are similarly accused. During the *Ghana Society and Culture* class Dr. Mavis Dako-Gyeke gave a lecture on “The Vulnerability of Women Children and Civil Society's Response” she said,

“Women are 50% of Ghana’s population and they are the poorest of the poor. Elderly women who suffer from age related mental health problems are often accused of witchcraft. There are six witch camps in Northern Ghana where women, many of whom are old and widowed live in exile as a result of being accused of witchcraft. (2014)”

This represents the society's entrenched bias against vulnerable populations like women and children, the deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes and systemic gender inequalities.

Gender inequality in Ghana and around the world is male dominance at the expense of women. Male dominance in Ghana means that within the slavery institution of witch camps, it is men who are benefitting, not women. What does it mean to have male dominance in relation to the witch camps in Ghana? It means that, for example, males keep or gain power by accusing a woman of being a witch. Witches who are accused are not treated with sympathy; they become shunned by their families and neighbors and they may be banished (Dako-Gyeke). According to the film *Witches in Gambaga* if women deny being a witch then they will or might be killed. “To be born a woman is to be born under a shadow. (Badoe, 2010) The killing of women resulting from a false accusation by men is how the social construction of gender plays a role in the violence against women. Women can be treated like they are monsters and their lives ruined. Rich, poor, successful, it doesn’t matter; women are vulnerable to the violence of men and a male dominated system. Women who are very successful in society are often seen as a threat to the men and when they are accused of witchcraft their possessions are divided up and distributed to the family. Even a woman’s son can unjustly accuse his mother of witchcraft and get away with it. In Gambaga, women who live at the camp under the sanctuary of the Chief have to pay to live there; if women show up without any money then they must pay off their debt by doing labor on his farm. At the witch camp it is as if the women are on house arrest. For some women labeled as witches, the male leaders in the village can limit their movements: they cannot go to the market, to another person's house, or be seen playing with children. Thus, women are victims of control, violence and sometimes death by a male dominated society.

Death and violence against women in Ghana will continue until the structure of patriarchy is addressed. This is the root of the problem, not whether or not witchcraft is real. A.K. Awedoba writes, “... for the individuals who dread witchcraft, accuse their neighbors or themselves of being witches, the existence of witchcraft is real and palpable. The beliefs associated have widespread repercussions on individuals and society at large.”
There have been responses to witchcraft by society, Dr. Mavis Dako-Gyeke mentioned The Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organizations in Development as a positive example. This organization works collectively together to identify issues, raise awareness, and hold policy makers accountable. “These forms of breaking down patriarchal notions are fundamental to the eradication of this form of modern day slavery in Ghana” (Dako-Gyeke, 2014).

We must move away from race and gender hierarchies in our societies, because if we don't the population of people of color especially black men in America and women in Ghana will continue to be targeted by these systems. The socially constructed notions of race and gender have real implications on people’s lives and they alter their lived experiences. Regardless of race and gender, we are all one people so the continuation of these two forms of modern day slavery are a social tragedy. It will take the people from California, the entire United States, Ghana, the continent of Africa and countries across the world to break down gender and racial hierarchies. “You have a role to play. I have a role to play!” The abolition of modern day slavery has started, and as the transatlantic slave trade ended, and slavery in the Americas ended, these forms of slavery will end as well.

References


Part Two – The Question, Challenge and Realizations of Identity
Back to My Roots - by Somalia Miller-Salmond

Two-thousand and fourteen is the year of new adventures and opportunities. The saying goes there is a first time for everything and I experienced both traveling outside the United States and flying on an airplane for the first time. Hours from arriving in Ghana, I could not believe that I would be in a different country in less than two hours, this moment was surreal. Stepping off the plane at the Accra airport the heat and a distinct smell struck my attention. I then realized I was far away from home and there was no turning back.

Being raised in America for the majority of my life, I have been privileged to have access to higher learning, running water, and electricity. However, I desired change, and traveling to the motherland has always been an aspiration of mine. I felt culturally estranged from the land that gave birth to my ancestors and had to see for myself Ghana’s culture, history, food, environment, wildlife, heritage, and music. As an African American, the opportunity to immerse myself within the Ghanaian culture is a blessing because I value experiencing my roots and interacting with those indigenous to Africa. My journey in Ghana has been a mix of emotions; yet I am getting in touch with my African roots socially and culturally as an African American.

Culture Shock.

I remember these words distinctly as Auntie Rose talked about the stages of cultural adjustment: “Culture shock is brought on by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Its stages consist of: the honeymoon stage, the hostility stage, the humor stage, and the home stage” (Walls, 2014). My first night at Volta Hall is an event in which I experienced the hostility stage. I could hardly sleep because I was sweating a great deal from the heat. I experienced taking a bucket bath for the first time, which was unfamiliar to me, and I did not have stable access to the Internet. I asked myself, “What did I just get myself into?” I was frustrated and I missed the comfort of home in America. I began to idealize my home culture and the life I had there. As my journey in Ghana progressed, I can say I have experienced the humor stage of cultural adjustment. While living in another country, you have to learn your way around, and sometimes you will get lost or make mistakes. It’s all a learning process. I was able to laugh and joke about getting off at the wrong stop when riding the tro-tro, the primary public transit vehicle. I have finally settled down in my room and my Ghanaian neighbors are friendly and willing to answer any questions or concerns I may have. I realize now that it takes time to settle down and become familiar with a new environment. Culture shock is bound to occur, especially for an individual that has never traveled before. However, there are ways to cope with it by making friends, immersing yourself within your new culture, and being positive when situations do not turn out as expected.

Happy. Homesick. Hopeful.

As I continue to adjust to this new environment, my range of emotions is like a roller coaster. At times, I have this feeling of comfort because I know I can blend in physically with the Ghanaian natives. Dark skin, braids, and a petite shape I feel at home with my fellow “sistas” and “brothas.” Then, at times, I feel distant because I am an African “American”, as I was born and raised in America.
In a class where I was the only international student in a room full of Ghanaian students, I knew I could blend in physically, though my American accent pinpointed my difference. It made me feel like an outsider at times because I could not relate to my fellow Ghanaian peers who grew up in Africa. I know my ancestors originate from Africa, but I cannot pinpoint exactly where. Which tribe or tribes did they come from? How do I start this process of finding out about my African heritage? I felt lost and experienced an urge to research my African and to reconnect to my families’ African lineage. Like a roller coaster, my emotions continue to shift, yet there are many days in which I have enjoyed my stay in Ghana.

Our seven-day road trip is an event that I will never forget. We were constantly on the move, traveling from the Ashanti Region, to the Northern and Eastern regions of Ghana. I enjoyed many sites, such as Mole National Park, the Kintampo Waterfalls, the Manhyia Palace, and the Larabanga Village. Ghanaians are a truly welcoming and joyful people. They welcomed us as international students and were delighted to talk about their culture, customs, and ways of living. I even took pleasure in hearing the Ghanaians complement me on my name. When I would say, “My name is Somalia,” they would react by asking, “Where are you from?” I then would respond, “America.” They were amazed that my name is Somalia without having ties to the country. Most of the Ghanaians I met did mention that my name was beautiful and that they would not forget it.

The student advisors for the program made my adjustment to Ghana much easier because of their guidance in aiding the international students around Greater Accra. Personally, they enhanced my experience in Ghana by being only one call away, telling me the ins and outs of their country, being truthful about things you should and should not do, and letting me know up front what is considered disrespectful in the culture. For instance, you must greet someone with a “Hi” or “Hello” while passing them, even if you don’t know them. In a way, our student advisors were like our parents, prepping us for our new environment, as international students, we followed their lead.

I must admit it is a whole new world out here.
The first day driving around the streets of Accra after getting picked up from the airport, my eyes were glued outside the window as I took in my surroundings and the people. It was interesting to see women and men, both young and old, and little kids selling food, drinks, candy, and hats in the streets. I think it is convenient to have people walk down the street and sell items such as snacks while one is in traffic. It reduces the hassle of having to stop at the store. But then again, what might it mean for the children living in the country who have to sell those items on the streets just to make a living? In America, one is more likely to see people on street corners spinning signs that advertise a company than see people approach cars to sell things. Something I see more of in Ghana than in America is a large number of black people in public in authoritative positions. Some would assume this is obvious since I am in Africa; however, this is totally new to me. I observed beautiful black women on billboards advertising hair, cheerful black children advertising drinks or food, and black men and women advertising African fashions. I was shocked to see that the majority of faces on display were black because I am not used to seeing such things. I have this feeling of pride and satisfaction when I see beautiful black people. I was further intrigued in knowing that all authoritative positions were predominantly made up of black individuals, like the police chief, professors at the University, and the political leaders.
Just from observing the fashion billboards and attending classes, I am aware that the Ghanaians, especially those in Accra, take pride in their appearance. Whether it be attending a lecture, going to church, or running errands, dress is important. My typical attire for school in America is jeans, sneakers, and a regular t-shirt; sometimes, I throw on gym shorts and a workout shirt if I do not feel like dressing up. On the contrary, many Ghanaian male students wear buttoned up dress shirts, dress shoes, and ties. Ghanaian female students use purses, wear skirts, sandals, and nice blouses when attending class. It is appealing to see the dynamics of dress at the University. Most of the Ghanaian students I have noticed care about their appearance and dress to impress. I think it is commendable to know that the students take pride in their appearance because it shows that they have respect for themselves and each other. I can relate to this custom of dressing decent because growing up my father would always have my sister and me in nice outfits and make sure our hair was properly done before departing for school. He would not let us step out the house looking unkempt. I believe it had to do with a sense of pride and appreciation that as a single parent and black man he could take care of his baby girls without a woman. Thus, I respect the Ghanaian student’s tidy appearances because it shows that they care about their self-image, which is something that we all should care about. When you look good, you feel good.

Getting in touch with my roots.

I am getting in touch with my African roots socially as an African American in Ghana. Generally, I believe Americans know very little about Africa – only what we see on the evening news. I have learned firsthand about this culture comprised of different tribal groups, traditions, languages, and even religions. Talk about diversity, Ghanaians are the prime example of a group of people unified regardless of differences. I have been in rooms with Ghanaians from the Ga tribe and others from the Ashanti tribe. They respect one another, regardless of their differences. I had the opportunity to connect to others socially by immersing myself in cultural activities provided by the study abroad program. We went to the Adanwomase Village, where we participated in eating a popular Ghanaian meal called Fufu. Fufu is a starch staple mashed and molded into a ball served in a bowl with soup and it is to be eaten with your hands. You should not eat Fufu with your left hand because this would be considered disrespectful. Ghanaians do not eat with their left hand because they say the left hand is used for dirty things, such as wiping one’s bottom. Furthermore, in Adanwomase, we had the opportunity to learn about Kente weaving. Kente weaving is a job that men do on the weaving loom, while women tend to the family and household. Kente is the cloth that can be used to create a traditional style of clothing in which symbolic patterns are used as designs to show status. Its history is that it was once used to cover up the body and to be worn on special occasions. Today, it is worn anytime and remains an art in Ghana. At the Adanwomase village, Kente is sold for a profit, which helps out the village financially. The various colored, well-designed cloths continue to be a popular purchase among tourists, seeing as Kente is a form of fashion and art.

I have also been getting in touch with my African roots culturally through dance as an African American in Ghana. Dance is a big part of the Ghanaian culture. “If you are not dancing, you are not living life” (Professor, Oh! Nii Sowah, 2014). The dance professor is a remarkable individual. He greeted the international students and spoke with us about Ghanaian traditional dance, and how it expresses a communal identity and harmony amongst Ghanaian people.
I learned that dance is a way of communicating, thinking, and living. As we all gathered in a big circle and moved our bodies to the beat of the drum, I observed relaxation amongst my peers, less nervousness, and harmony. I clearly remember Professor Nii Sowah saying, “Close your eyes and relax to the drum rhythm” (2014). In this moment I felt my body at rest and ready to engage in traditional moves. I was able to let myself go, and enter my peers' space, and invite them to enter mine. Professor Nii Sowah's lively spirit made me feel comfortable to move to the beat as the Ghanaian musicians beat their palms on the drums. Even when I felt that I was dancing awkwardly the Professor and Ghanaian student assistants made me feel less shy and connected to them. Dance in Ghanaian culture has no limitations or boundaries. It reflects everyday life in Ghana and the value of community.

Being an African American in Ghana has been an interesting experience. I appreciate this opportunity to be able to go back to the motherland and experience everyday life in Ghana. This new cultural setting has allowed me to gain knowledge about the Ghanaian culture and immerse myself within traditional practices. It has also been a struggle to immerse myself into a new cultural setting as it is my first time traveling outside America. However my stay in Ghana so far has allowed me to become comfortable with the people and interested in the Ghanaian culture. I am continuing to learn about myself as an individual as I continue to make friends, explore new opportunities, and draw closer to my African heritage.

References


Lost and Found in Ghana – by Magalli Acosta

As soon as I set foot on Ghanaian soil, I knew this would be a completely new and different learning experience. As a Mexican American living in the United States, travelling to Mexico every summer, and having had the opportunity to study and travel in Europe, this time I was determined to take the road less travelled. I wanted to experience something different that would force me to step out of my comfort zone. The truth is that I have never been part of the minority even though many may say that I am part of the classified minority group in the country where I was born and in the ones I have visited. I have always been able to blend in some way or another with the people around me. In the United States, I live in a 98% Hispanic community in the Southern California area where large populations of Hispanics reside. The high school I attended had an Hispanic student population of 99%. I attend the University of California in Riverside in which Hispanics compose nearly a third of the student population on campus making it the second largest group on campus (UC Statistical Summary of Students and Staff). When in Mexico, I fit in just right. After all, I am Mexican even though I was born outside of the country. I speak Spanish like the rest of the population. I share the same culture and the same accent. When in Spain, my skin color allowed me to blend in as well. Even though the way I spoke Spanish gave it away that I was not a native of Spain, I was able to communicate easily and go about my days without calling people’s attention. Therefore, I have never dealt with the possible consequences or experiences that a person may go through for being culturally, linguistically, or physically different from those around them.

This time it is different. I am no longer one in a million but instead I am one in a few. Physically standing out from the crowd has allowed me to put myself in the shoes of others when it comes to being in a place where you are perceived as being different and therefore treated in a distinct way. I was never used to stepping into a room or walking down the street and knowing that people will look at me inevitably because my skin color is different. In my sociology classes in the United States we constantly touch on the subject of white supremacy. White supremacy is the term used to refer to all the overt and covert privileges that come along with being part of the white racial group (Gillborn 2006). As a Mexican American, I am not white and therefore I am the victim when speaking of the consequences of white supremacy.

In the United States, Mexicans have had it tough when it comes to integrating into society. There is a long history of racism and stereotypes that have been created to refer to Mexicans or people of Mexican descent, such as “illegal” immigrants, criminals, and abusers of government aid to point out a few. My family migrated from Mexico involuntarily. I say this because even though it was a choice they made, this choice was a consequence of the failure of the economic system in their country. I know it has not been easy. My parents work in the agricultural sector as farm workers. They spend most of their day from dawn to dusk working in physically challenging circumstances for only the minimum wage. I have had the opportunity to work with them every summer when not in school since I was fifteen. This to me is a form of slavery. Not being able to enjoy the money you make for leisure activities and having to spend it all on the basic necessities of living in America because you earn a minimum wage is not fair. You have one choice, which is no choice at all, to simply work to be able to live.
Now in Ghana, I am no longer perceived as the victim but the opposite. I am from America which causes many to automatically assume that I am privileged. The story takes a sudden change. I am not African. I know I am not white. They know I am not quite white, yet I am referred to as an “obroni” meaning a white person or at times it is also used to refer to a foreigner. It is as if I have shifted from being the oppressed to being the oppressor.

When we travelled to Tamale in Northern Ghana, we were given the chance to do some shopping for leather goods. It was my first experience bargaining for goods in Ghana. I am not a good bargainer. I tend to just give in and pay the full price instead of going back and forth about something. I decided I had to give it a try since we were told that our bargaining skills were going to be put to the test for most things we buy in Ghana including services. I stepped into one of the shops and after walking around I spotted a few items that I really liked. The bargaining began. The seller told me a price and I offered to give half of what he had mentioned. He seemed frustrated and told me that there was no way that I would be given the price I requested. I decided to go up a little on the price but he still refused. He then went on to tell me a few things that I had never been told before. The seller said that just because I was an “obroni” I would not be given a good price. He spoke about the work he has to put in, the family he has to feed, and the fact that I had no right to ask to be given a low price just because I was “white”. This caught me by surprise. I wanted to tell him how I felt. I am not white. My parents and I also work very hard to make ends meet. I do not live in a luxurious house or in a nice neighborhood. I am not rich. I am not on this trip on vacation or because I have a lot of money. I am a Mexican American student who has been able to get an education because of external aid such as grants and scholarships. I have worked hard to obtain the funds to pay for my educational expenses such as this study abroad program. I may even have it harder than this man for all I know. He was in his shop alongside his wife and child. My parents do not work alongside one another or with me. They work long hours in the sun and I barely get to see them. There was so much going through my mind. At this moment is when I realized I was no longer perceived as anything else but one of “those Americans”.

Aside from that experience, I have been able to have good conversations with local people with whom I have had the opportunity to ask about the perception of Americans in Ghana. I have also had the chance to talk to them about my experience being born and raised in the United States but with my roots deeply ingrained in Mexico. This has allowed me to experience an even exchange of information that has helped to go beyond the stereotypes of both countries. On one occasion I was talking to a young man about what he thought about travelling outside of Ghana or possibly migrating to another country to live in the future. He said he was born in Ghana and would never leave. I asked about the possibility of living in the United States if he had the chance. We tend to think people would migrate from Africa, a continent that we may think of as underdeveloped or less privileged, to America, the land of opportunity, if they could. I was wrong. The young man's response was very interesting. He said that America has never been on his list of top places to visit. He would never want to live there because he has developed the idea that people there are too busy and unhappy. He described American people as individualistic, ambitious, and materialistic. As much as I like to think that I am not like that, being in Ghana has allowed me to realize that our society is very influential on how we grow to be as a person.
I never saw myself as too individualistic to the point where I cared more about myself over others. I also did not think I was too ambitious or that ambition was a bad thing. As a matter a fact, in school we were always taught that we should always strive to obtain the best we can, have big goals and big plans, and that would lead us to success. In terms of materialism, I was not aware of what this term actually meant. In Ghana, I have learned to value things I had taken for granted in the U.S. For example, I have learned that running water is a luxury. In the traditional residence hall* where I am staying, we hardly have running water which means that we either have to wait days for it to come again or go fetch water from a tank, which means carrying buckets with water up and down the stairs or from across the hall. In the United States we do not worry about this. We know that there will always be more than enough water to take a shower and we even had time to sing and do a little bit of dancing while we listen to our favorite music in the shower. In Ghana, there is neither time nor water for that. That's when I realized that I am very materialistic when it comes to having things I do not necessarily need or an excess of those that I do.

I have been able to learn so much about not only Ghana and the way of life in what is classified as a “developing” country but more than anything I have been able to learn so much about myself. The way of life is completely different and comparing it to what we are used to allows us to understand that there is no right way to live and be happy. It is something that comes along with personal choice and that is made easier by the values that one’s society prioritizes. When we think of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, we tend to emphasize the stereotypes that linger around when we talk and look at Africa from an American perspective. We may think of underdevelopment, poverty, and limited resources, to name a few, which all together may lead us to the false conclusion that people that live in these conditions are not happy because they are deprived of the things we are used to in our ‘developed’ country. I have learned something really important. It does not mean anything if we are the most developed country, have the most advanced technology, and have power if we are not able to live comfortably and actually reach happiness. All those things are temporary and do not mean anything if we do not learn how to use them to make us live a satisfying and happy life along with the people we love and know. I like to think about it in this way. We can picture Ghana and America as two young boys. One boy always has the latest toys out in the market and the other boy may have only a few toys and definitely not the latest ones. The boy with the numerous toys that represents America is too busy trying to buy the latest toys that he does not have time to play with them. He might not even have good friends since he is always thinking of what to buy versus spending quality time actually enjoying his toys with friends. On the other hand, the boy that does not have the latest toys who represents Ghana, may not have the latest toys but plays with what he has and dedicates the time to play with friends. He does not stress over obtaining the latest toys but instead enjoys what he already has. I created this analogy to help explain how materialism and ambition may not always lead to happiness. Instead, being able to live life as we can and help others as much as we can, often leads to greater personal satisfaction. It is more about the notion of community versus individualism.
When I first announced that I had taken the decision to study abroad in Ghana I got a variety of responses. First of all, people would ask me, “Where is that?” When I told them that it was a country in Africa, they would congratulate me for being so brave. Some people would try to scare me and would talk about the dangers, the lack of resources such as water and electricity, HIV/AIDS, underdevelopment and so forth. I received very little positive responses. My parents were upset and worried but they were eventually supportive of my decision. With all this negative perceptions about Africa, I began to feel a little nervous. Was it really that bad? Would I regret my decision? Would I survive? Little did I know then that it is not even close to what people or even I pictured. On the contrary, it is more than I could have ever imagined and most importantly I have learned that there are so many hidden treasures in this place. I have learned to love the people, the culture, and I am looking forward to the next four months as I know I will learn so much about Ghana and about myself. I do not regret my decision one bit because I already feel the impact this experience will have on my life. I am happy to live the experience and be able to eliminate those negative and false stereotypes about Ghana, its people, and the way of life.

It has been a few weeks since I first arrived. I have experienced a mixture of emotions. I went from being really enthusiastic about this new experience to feeling indecisive about actually going about with my decision up until the UCEAP withdrawal deadline. I went from being sad to leave home for such a long time to being really excited about having the opportunity to study in Ghana and not just visit as a tourist. I have changed from thinking of Ghana as an underdeveloped country and associating that with a negative perception of the way people live to learning to understand that people here make the most of what they have and that is what matters at the end of the day. I have gone from feeling sympathetic about the conditions in which people live to admiring the way they live regardless of the circumstances in which they may find themselves. I cannot emphasize how rewarding this experience has been thus far and the eagerness I have to continue to learn about others and share my experiences with them. Through interactions and conversations I have been able to learn and break the false stereotypes about the life in an African country. By sharing my experience and my story as a Mexican American in the United States, I have also helped others understand and also prove wrong some of the stereotypes about Americans from an African perspective. And in the end I have learned that it is not about where you live and what you have, but about what you do with what you have to live life happily.

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* Editor’s Note: Traditional residence hall. California students can choose to live in an international hostel build for international students. These hostels are modern with ceiling fans, generators and surplus water. The traditional residence halls are older and lack these amenities. Yet it is where 99% of the Ghanaian students are housed and one who chooses this setting has a drastically different and more integrative experience.
The State of California is one of the most diverse places in the world. The United States in general is home to a medley of cultures, but California is actually the first state in the history of the U.S. where 'minority groups' now comprise the majority (Frey, 2011). It comes as no surprise that growing up in California I have come across people from an array of ethnic backgrounds. These backgrounds help people to understand their heritage, giving them a sense of ethnic identity; a sense of where they come from; a sense of uniqueness that makes them ironically stand out from others by belonging to a large group of people who share the same heritage.

America is also the land of categorization and for a long time people could easily categorize, or identify themselves as part of an ethnicity. According to the Oxford American Dictionary, “An ethnicity is simply the fact of or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural history and tradition” (2014). As our society is evolving, ethnic and cultural boundaries are slowly becoming blurred as ethnicities are being integrated through marriage, courtship and reproduction. An increasing number of mixed race individuals, such as myself, are finding it harder and harder to place themselves in a category, to find one true ethnicity or culture to identify with. As a very mixed individual, I have struggled for a long time in finding a true ethnicity with which I can truly say I share a common tradition with. Coming to Ghana, I was hoping that I would be able to really, for the first time, explore in depth one part of my multi-ethnic background, and for once in my life touch a part of my roots.

I am a Filipino, Native American Indian of African and European descent. My mother’s mother is African American and Native American. My mother’s father is African American and European. My father’s mother is of European descent. My father’s father is 100% Filipino. This makes me an interesting blend of heritages.

Growing up, many areas of my life were very fragmented. Counting the University of Ghana, I have attended 15 schools. My parents divorced when I was four years old, and I lived with mom and her new husband at some points, and then with my dad and his subsequent significant others at other points. My life was full of changes, and my development was infused with bits and pieces of different cultures, but really void of any main cultural influence.

When I was four years old, my mom married my current stepfather. He is half Japanese and half of his ancestry is of European descent. Life with mom was mixed with Japanese, 'White' American, and African American culture. My maternal grandparents raised my mom below the Mason-Dixon Line during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, in Jackson, Mississippi. My grandparents were the closest thing I had to a true sense of an African American heritage, but because they lived so far from me at a young age I have faint memories of them. My Grandma Evans passed away when I was eight, and my Grandpa Evans when I was fourteen. My mom is one of six children, all of which were raised in a staunch Jehovah’s Witness household. When my mom left the Kingdom Hall after divorcing my dad, most of them stopped talking to my mom, save a couple of my aunts. After a few years, their involvement in my life was virtually non-existent. After the age of eight, I barely ever saw any of my Black aunts, uncles or cousins.
On my dad’s side, my Grandpa Raul died before I was born. I never even saw pictures of him or 
heard his story until last year. Coming from the Philippines to create a better life for himself, my 
grandfather chose to assimilate to be a white American. He married my Grandmother, an 
amazing woman named Gayle. The Lagmans were brought up in a home void of Filipino culture, 
and in turn, that part of my heritage was lost.

This confusing cultural structure in my family has made it hard for me to completely relate with, or 
describe to others the culture I was raised in. People look at me with a confused face, and I eagerly 
await the question, “What exactly are you?” To my response, Filipino’s will ask, “Don’t you speak 
Tagalog?” African Americans will ask, “Let me see a picture of your mom, you’re not Black.” Others will enquire what Native American tribe my family comes from. Growing up with this mix 
of races has been, in many ways a blessing, but also a curse. Not being able to have a culture with 
which I can truly identify, and not knowing much about any of my many roots has left me to feel 
culturally lost.

To be quite honest, I did not originally plan to come to Ghana. Like most people of African descent 
that I know, the desire to come to Africa is residual, if not non-existent. It just so happened that 
Ghana was one of the only choices that would work out for me. The reality of actually coming to 
Africa to find my heritage did not even hit me until I landed for my layover in Nairobi International 
Airport. From the plane my heart raced as I looked out upon the vast expanse of the Serengeti. As I 
stepped from the plane, and took my first breath of African air, something filled my being with 
excitement. I felt like a leaf that, before this, had been lost in the wind, not attached to any 
picular branch, and I had finally met the breeze that would carry me to my roots.

In the terminal I saw African people all around me: African women and men with their rich, 
mahogany color, some with African cloths and patterns decorating their heads and bodies, and 
some in western clothes. I saw people laughing, joking, smiling, arguing, and yelling in different 
languages. I sat in the waiting room by a group of African women. Though I could not understand 
their conversation, I felt connected to them. I watched as they talked in their language, laughing, 
animatedly sharing stories using their hands to describe the emotions of the event. They 
reminded me so much of African Americans at home, yet they were African. I was already 
beginning to see my roots, and how these people, though so far from us in time in space, were so 
alike the people of color at home.

In my first few weeks in Ghana, my orientation process led me to experience more and more of 
Ghana, enriching my understanding of my connectedness to the Africans. Ghanaian culture has a 
lot of things that are very similar to the black culture in America. One of the things is the emphasis 
on the family and community. In Ghana, the family is of great importance. Ghana is a collectivist 
society; more importance is placed on the collective, the group, the tribe, the kinship group, 
rather than the individual. In America, African Americans generally have very big families, and 
they stay well connected over time, though my family is not the best example of this. A lot of my 
African American friends in California are 3rd, 4th, maybe 5th generation or later Californian. But 
even still, they will return to the South for annual family reunions that are massive in size and 
scope.
This is very different from other ethnic groups, particularly Caucasian Americans, who focus on the nuclear and immediate family, or closer tiers of the extended. This collective and family focused culture is something that has survived the slave trade, and settled its way in the heart of the African descendants of America.

Another thing that I found fascinatingly and connected to was music and dance in Africa. In one of my dance lessons with an awe-inspiring man named Oh! Nii Sowah, he emphasized the importance of music and dance in African Culture. He told us, “Music and dance are the Soul of Africa. There is a song and dance for every emotion, every occasion, because dance is part of the circle of life. In Africa, a man has not fulfilled his role in society if he has never danced” (2014). Dance in Africa also expresses the collectivity. Dances incorporate people moving together in unison, sharing space. It is reminiscent of dances like the two-step, the electric slide, and the cupid shuffle; all collective dances that are done at African American gatherings for different occasions.

Young Ghanaians are also very into popular and new styles of dance. After attending a few club events with Ghanaians, I learned about the popularity of dance styles like Azonto and Akayida. These dance styles are done to 'Hi-Life' and 'Hip-Life' music, which are modern music forms with African, hip hop, and electronic influences. At the party, the way the guys get in circles and dance together, hyping each other up—trying to be together, but at the same time outdo each other—is just like dances with young African Americans at home. It is very similar to popular dances like the Dougie, the Jerk, or Strolling. These dances are done in a group, but also leave room for individuals to improvise and try and outdo others. The vibe surrounding the dance is very collective; it's about dancing together in a large group, building excitement together and getting hyped to the music playing. Watching the Ghanaians dance, I felt the same exact level of energy, and love for just dancing that I feel when I am with a group of black people at a club or a party at home. It is something that I only feel with them, not with my friends of other ethnicities.

African American music is also tied very closely with music of Africa. For instance Jazz, which is one of the pinnacles of American music, is evolved mainly from African music, but is more like a contemporary marriage between western music and African music. Jazz evolved partly from Blues (Blues became Gospel, Jazz, and Country), which is derived from the field songs that slaves would sing on the plantations they were on. When Africans were enslaved in America, they had every part of their culture stripped from them, but without their drums and instruments, they still had the music of Africa in their hearts, and it carried on through song. Jazz in turn gave birth to Soul, Funk, Rock, Pop, and later down the line Hip-Hop. The elements of these musical styles can be heard and felt in the music of Africa. Oh! Nii Sowah talked about how the beat of the music is a part of the soul, and how in Africa, the drum is the heartbeat of the music (2014). In predominantly black music in America, the beat is also the heart, particularly Hip-Hop. It is a common joke that African Americans can never be off beat, because the beat is a part of them. Also, in African drumming, most beats are based on the offbeat of a song, whereas western music is built on the on beat of a song. This is also a key component of Jazz, which is based on the offbeat.
The importance of respect and looking respectable is also a very important part of both cultures. In my Mother’s home, we were told to address every elder as Miss, Missus, or Mister. Most African Americans traditionally refer to their elderly women, especially the mothers and aunties as Ma'am. Greetings are a sign of respect, and respect to elders is also a fundamental part of Ghanaian culture. In Ghana, everyone has a proper greeting, and it is considered rude to not greet people, particularly elders, with the proper title such as auntie or uncle, brother or sister. A part of African American culture that is slowly fading away is looking respectable, which is also a big part of Ghanaian culture. In the South, Black children wore their nicest clothes and shoes to school, even if they were their only pair. It is important to do your hair, tuck your shirt in, and be on your best behavior everywhere you go. When I was young I also followed a lot of these rules. In Ghana, young adults still uphold this value and it shows how important it is to them. Going to class, they will dress in their best clothes, as if they are going to church on some occasions.

The most powerful point of my time here in Ghana was my experience at the slave castle in Elmina. This was the point where I felt I finally had seen the point where the paths of my African and African American roots crossed, where one split to become another, though they are both part of the same tree. In that place, I got to see firsthand the horrifying conditions that my ancestors were kept in. After seeing the castle and the dungeons, I stood on the viewing deck, looking out on the horizon, and I cried. I looked out, and I knew what was beyond. I knew that beyond that distant horizon was America; the land that I call home. It is the land that to me is safe, familiar, and full of people that I love and hold dear to my heart. It is a land of opportunity, education, and comforts. It is everything to me and yet it would never have been for the poor souls of that place. But in that moment I realized that it is everything for me that it was not for them because of them. It was because of their chains that I am now free. Had my ancestors never endured such hellish conditions in chains, never survived the seas in chains, never ploughed the fields of the new world in chains, America would never be the land of the “free” that it is today.

It was at that moment that everything came together for me. It was in that moment that I realized that this is where it all began. On this continent humanity began. On this land, music and dance began. On this land the love for the family, the need for respect, and the love for African culture began. And it was in these dungeons that African American began. Everything I mentioned before came together so beautifully for me at that point, and it was here that I finally achieved my heart’s desire: to truly, truly touch my roots. Like a leaf that, before this, had been lost in the wind, not attached to any particular branch, I had finally met the breeze that would carry me to my roots.

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In most cases it is human nature to want to belong and fit in. To find a place, group, people and land that they can claim as theirs and that of those before them. This paper will illustrate the conflict or struggle faced by a person who finds himself at a crossroads between the nation he grew up in and the continent which he desperately wants to embrace as his home. The problem facing the attempt to embrace the continent is that the languages, customs, culture, and identity were systematically erased from generation to generation. Other than the books read, the physical attributes and a self-maintained belief in oneness with Africa one is left alienated from those people he longs to call “Brother, Sister, Mother, Auntie, Father and Uncle.” With the stripping away of all the roots that would allow for one to be able to trace their ancestry, there appears to be no place to call home for the subject.

Being an “African-American” in Ghana adds many layers to one's stay. The expectations the Ghanaians feel towards you for sharing the same skin tone, the preconceived notions that most Africans have towards Americans, the different treatment received by you and others in your program, and the internal battle between the African and the American in the term “African-American.”

I am a person of color, but not any color. I am a BLACK MAN and for the longest time, even prior to my travels to Africa, I was made painfully aware that I was a Black man in White America and that I didn’t belong. The reason why I didn’t belong was quite eloquently put as, “We are Africans, and we happen to be in America. We are not Americans. We are a people who formerly were Africans who were kidnapped and brought to America. Our forefathers weren’t the Pilgrims... We were brought here against our will; we were not brought here to be made citizens.” The significance of being a black man in Africa is quite simple. If a Black man cannot feel accepted and embraced in Africa, the Black Continent, where would he? One of the driving forces for my journey into Africa, but especially Ghana was that the continual degradation and overall disrespect for the sanctity of the black body raises questions as to how can a black person especially a young black male survive. In the wake of the Ferguson, Missouri shooting, where an 18 year old boy was shot in the top of the head for being a shoplifting suspect, my attitude towards my sanity while remaining in America resembles that of someone writing during the time of slavery.

The only difference is while a black man was writing, “If I remain in this bloody land, I will not live long... I cannot remain where I must hear slaves’ chains continually and where I must encounter the insults of their hypocritical enslavers,” the slaves were clearly defined and the chains were just as obvious. Currently the world (especially America) would attempt to power wash history and claim that we live in a post racial society, that everyone is equal and that being born black is not a handicap. Do I have more freedom than my grandmother? Yes. Can I go to a college dominated by white people? Yes. Can I claim America to be mine with confidence when every day I see racism? No. Have the chains depicted by David Walker been removed? Not at all, they have only been relocated to my brain and hinder me in my possible movements. So if I cannot claim America as my home then my only refuge must be “the motherland”; Africa.
My feeling of not belonging in America was quickly replaced by my realization that dark pigmentation didn't make you African. In the earliest parts of our experiences in Ghana, the California students were told not to feel negative about the term “obroni”. That the term meant “white person” or “foreigner” and was not a derogatory term meant to belittle the target of the term, but instead was just meant to classify people whose history didn't originate here; in Ghana. This concept was quickly accepted and rejected by me. The reason I found myself accepting it was that it made sense that the Ghanaians would have a term for immigrants and outsiders not native to this land. On the other hand, I found myself rejecting this term as a proper label for myself because for all I know I was a native of Ghana in the earliest of my family history prior to the forced migration now known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. Toni Morrison wrote in Playing in the Dark, “American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to the themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen,” but what about me? I clenched at no title of American nor wanted my “African” to be tarnished by it. These terms, “obroni” and American were synonymous and both depicted the same fact; that I belonged nowhere. If in America my skin, lips, other physical characteristics and African ancestry did not allow me to be viewed as a “true” American and my place of birth, upbringing and the “privileges” of being born in the land mass known as the United States of America does not allow me to avoid the term “obroni” then one must only conclude that the ideology of “Dual Consciousness” conceived by W.E.B Dubois most hold true even in Africa.

“One ever feels his twoness - an American, a Negro [African]; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” In what ways does W.E.B Dubois’ “Dual Consciousness” apply to my stay here in Ghana? In almost every way I find the American customs I grew up with confronting and conflicting with the Ghanaian way of living. Examples of this can be everything from as small as punctuality. One may exaggerate and say that everything in America starts exactly on time and that nothing in Ghana starts on time, but within the first couple of days we were introduced to a phenomenon jokingly called, “Ghanaian Man Time - GMT.” While we were first introduced to “Ghanaian Man Time” in less formal settings, as time drew along one began to realize that GMT was just as much part of the culture as the traditional dance class, because we were late, moving slow, or still in awe at each new activity or lecture and demanded more, more, more.

Bigger incidents that lend themselves to Dubois' work are the discussion of foreign aid and Pan-Africanism. While neither of these points nor my ideas is exclusive to being Black or American, they invoke a sense that one majority might find themselves having one viewpoint differing from the other. On the topic of “foreign aid” it is safe to bet that the two parties, the “lender” and “beneficiary”, may have different thoughts on what that means. The “lender” being America (and other Western countries along with China) may believe that since they are “graciously giving” this economically inferior country money that they have the authority to dictate how it will be spent. This fact was made obvious in the film we watched called, Damned by Debt Relief. In this movie the audience is taken along a journey that depicts what it means to receive aid from global powers; in many cases it means humiliation and dependency. The Ghanaian intellectuals and other members of society viewed the manner in which the aid was given quite skeptically often illustrating that it was demeaning and ineffective.
Many of the aid given to Ghana after being forced into the labeling of a “Highly Indebted Poor Country” was inadequate, poorly maintained and did nothing to address the root problems that led to the need for aid in the first place. How did this film and the differing views resonate with Dubois’ “Dual Consciousness”? Because I found myself hosting “two unreconciled strivings” and “two warring ideals in one dark body.” The American in me wanted the Western powers to throw money at a problem, but the African in me was not seeing this as aid. I do not view any money given by the U.S.A, Britain, and other Western powers as aid given, but reparation earned. I feel this way because many of the Western powers’ “opulence is literally scandalous, for it has been founded on slavery, it has been nourished with the blood of slaves and it comes directly from the soil and from the subsoil of that underdeveloped world. The well-being and progress of Europe have been built up with the sweat and dead bodies of Negroes… Europe is literally the creation of the Third World… The ports of Holland, the docks of Bordeaux and Liverpool were specialized in the Negro slave trade and owe their renown to millions of deported slaves. So when I hear the head of a European state declare… that he must come to the aid of the poor underdeveloped peoples… we say to ourselves: ‘it's a just reparation which will be paid to us.’”

In these incidences, in these moments what is a man to do? Does the African whose ancestors were torn away from their homeland overlook this fact and relate with the enslavers? Does the dark complexioned Westerner, who has only ever visited Africa for short periods of time and in books, deserve to claim a land that his own personal birth place has continuously exploited and which he like every other non-native of the “Dark Continent” has to learn its culture and customs? What am I to do? The answer is not simple because the questions are complex. Man is and always has been complex when it came to identities and the case of the African-American is no difference. By adding the extra component of being not fully accepted or viewed as an African only further complicated the idea of identity in this case. In the attempts to clarify which of the identities he was supposed to or allowed to claim he has forgotten it was never in his control to choose. The definition of an identity is “the characteristics determining a being.” Dubois' concept of dual consciousness clearly accepts both of the warring ideals as equal parts of the African-American identity, but that these two ideals were never or are rarely at rest. As far as which label one may accept or choose, the journey is different for everyone. As for me, I claim the words widely attributed to Kwame Nkrumah (the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana). “I am not African because I was born in Africa. I am African because Africa was born in me.”
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Trials, Tribulations, and Looming Triumph: The Life and Times of a Black-Skinned Obroni in Ghana – by Terron Wilkerson

For the past six weeks I have awoken in a place thousands of miles, several countries, and an entire ocean away from North America, where I have resided my entire life. However, ironic as it may seem, this foreign land still feels like home. My experiences thus far in, and all throughout, Ghana have been greater than I had even dreamed before stepping foot onto the Lufthansa Airlines jumbo jet in late July. This was a feat that I had previously thought to be impossible. Ghana has provided the backdrop for many new and impacting observations. I have noticed several stark similarities and differences between Ghanaian and African-American cultures. A multitude of observations and comparisons have come with my experiences. My observations have been of a defining unity of similarities and differences between both cultures. These feelings, observations and experiences have culminated in my self definition of being a Black-skinned obroni in the Motherland of Africa.

Much like Netty Carey's essay entry in "From California to Ghana," I wished to travel down the path less traveled and visit a country that was not Spain, France, London, or Brazil. "But I had a strong sense that I did not know how to be part of the solution, and I wasn't going to find the answer if I continued to look in the same places," (Carey 12). Prior to January of this year I had no idea or intention of traveling anywhere in the world, let alone West Africa. I was a soon-to-be college graduate with a spirit full of ambition and my eyes on the prize of achieving my dream career as a university professor. In fact, I had dedicated about six months before January strengthening networks, preparing for, and eventually completing my Teach for America (TFA) application. The blueprint was to become a teacher in the corps for two years, attend graduate school for my Master's degree in the subsequent two years, attain my Doctorate degree within the following six years, and then become at least a junior faculty professor at university-level by the time I was thirty-four years old. On a cold winter night in mid-December, just before UC Santa Barbara let out for Winter Break, my plan took an unanticipated turn for the worse. I opened my application review only to discover that I had not been chosen to continue forth with the TFA interview process. Needless to say, I was devastated. Becoming a TFA corps member was my first and last option at that point, considering that I had gone all-in and bypassed the graduate school application window. It took me nearly half a month just get my head back above water. Not until returning from Winter Break in the New Year did I learn that there was a silver lining around my dark cloud.

Even to this day, when family and friends ask me, "Why Ghana?," I momentarily reflect back upon the first time I strolled into the University of California, Santa Barbara's Education Abroad Program (UCSB-EAP) office. I had mainly performed this action on a whim, in addition to an "in passing" recommendation that one of my mentors had made. Not many words were exchanged with those around me in the office as I shuffled through a variety of colorful flyers detailing UCSB-EAP's available programs, as well as the countries in which they were offered. Suddenly one of the desk attendants flashed another flyer in front of my face that listed every available program and country being offered in the Fall of 2014.
Within an instant my eyes were hurriedly scanning over the word 'Ghana' and all the subsequent information that followed. Within another instant my heart and mind were communicating with me in unison to assure the remainder of my being that this was, in fact, a fateful decision. Just as I was set to perform an impromptu "Hallelujah" dance in the middle of the UCSB-EAP office, my brain overrode that action and I began questioning the desk attendant about what I needed to do in order to get where I needed to be. I do not mean to sound cliché, but the rest is truly history.

With that narrative in mind, it is now an ideal time to touch upon one of the initial observations I made upon arriving in Ghana. It can be referenced as: "same Black skin, different Black culture." Back in the United States, African-American culture is both a lifestyle and one of the most discussed topics in venues ranging from Twitter to the average American dining room table. For those who practice African-American culture as something of a "birthright," we know that what unites us all is the Black skin we possess and how we are viewed within society because of it. African-American culture itself arose from a dark past interlaced with narratives of adaptation and survival, forging cultural bonds that are stronger than titanium. Personally, I was born and raised practicing different aspects of African-American culture, so I know the Real McCoy when I see it. During the first week when our California group visited Accra Mall, we had ventured inside to eat lunch and our waitress dropped an item onto the floor from her overflowing bus tray. This item just so happened to land at the feet of a middle-aged Ghanaian father and his young son. As if it was second-nature, the father simply stepped over the item and kept walking without making so much as an apologetic gesture towards our struggling waitress. She was calm and reaction-less in a way that implied the father's action was not unprecedented. Amongst practitioners of Africa-American culture, if anybody, particularly a Black man, witnesses a Black woman struggling then it is his unspoken duty to provide her assistance. It is unclear whether or not the scene at Accra Mall was a common occurrence, but to this day I am still quite taken aback when I think of it.

With that I will move forward to my next observation, serving as somewhat of an opposition: "no need to second-guess another's generosity." Ghanaians being overly kind and friendly is a reputation that precedes them--representing part of the reason that I was so taken aback by the scene at Accra Mall--and already I have been placed in numerous situations where a complete stranger has come to my aid. Of course there are everyday examples such as a person of any nationality, ethnicity, or gender being able to approach any Ghanaian on the street and request help. Then there are more unique examples such as the time I got locked out of my room in the International Students Hostel (ISH) wearing nothing but a towel after showering. A completely random Ghanaian noticed my distress and proceeded to drive me all the way to the International Programmes Office (IPO) in order to retrieve my key. Even in African-American culture, depending on where you reside, acts of such genuine generosity are often unheard of. Upon witnessing the frequency at which "selfless" acts take place in Ghana, I am beginning to conclude that some "selfish" aspects in African-American culture may have derived from the European culture. Of course not every European/White person lacks generosity, but it can be said that their culture is notorious for a plethora of behaviors opposing selflessness. Additionally, Ghanaians appear to invest far more into a sense of community than a sense of competition.
This can be observed in everyday actions such as upperclassmen at the University of Ghana referring to themselves as being in there "third" and "final" years, as opposed to being juniors and seniors. I was recently informed by a University of Ghana student that this is done in order to make the lowerclassmen feel a sense of belonging.

With that in mind I present my next observation: "no unnatural hatred or fear of self." In America, per the result of a system of White superiority and Black degradation that has been ideologically rooted since the country's conception, African-Americans have been indirectly taught to "hate" themselves. Fortunately, these teachings no longer take place in public settings such as the American education system; however, the lessons now are broadcast far more subliminally. The devastating effects of Black self-loathing can be observed in instances such as when African-American women burn their scalp with cosmetic products in order to straighten their natural curls. Additionally, there are everyday occurrences of African-American men fighting and killing one another because subconsciously they have been taught to hate just the sight of Black skin. Another everyday occurrence takes place whenever a Black police officer acts outlandishly cruel towards African-Americans in order to impress their fellow White officers. Most of the aforementioned realities possess zero relevance in Ghana. Yes, even here there are aspects of Black self-loathing that came about as a result of oppressive British colonization and occupation; however, it has not been nearly as prevalent in Ghana as in the United States. A sense of pride and adoration for having skin kissed by the sun marinates in the Ghanaian atmosphere, allowing me to feel more and more at home with each passing moment. I have yet to feel threatened just by making eye contact with another Black male. I have yet to feel the need to toughen my appearance or restrain a smile around Ghanaians in order to avoid being taken advantage of. I have yet to offer someone my hand in an act of greeting only to be scoffed at, disrespected, or ignored altogether. This feeling carries the closest resemblance to complete freedom that I have ever felt. However, my journey to the Fetu Afahye Festival in Cape Coast enlightened me to the fact that African-Americans are not the only group that has suffered from the hands of miseducation and media brainwashing.

Have you ever had the feeling your presence is appreciated, but not as much as the person's standing next to you? That was my general sentiment for a majority of our weekend in Cape Coast. And, linking this with an array of experiences I have had in Accra, my feelings were given some legitimacy. Initially I rejected these notions due to my previous experiences with Ghanaians being incomparably pleasant. But seeing the way small Ghanaian boys and girls flocked to the White students in our travel group, or the exuberant smiles painted across the faces of Ghanaian elders when White students danced to the parade drums was slightly unsettling. Truthfully, I also found it quite interesting to see the Cape Coast locals express such joyousness in the presence of those whose skin was like that of their former colonial oppressors. However, I cannot express too much criticism seeing that African-Americans show similar behaviors in the United States. It can be argued that African-Americans have been programmed with a subconscious desire to satisfy Caucasians since plantation slavery, which also takes root in the principles of White supremacy and Black degradation.
Upon conversing with another international student who was here last semester, I was informed that oftentimes African-Americans are considered to be the Africans that "made it out." Although Black people in America are privileged enough to enjoy a few of the luxuries that accompany America's incomparable wealth, two hundred-plus years of race-based human enslavement was no small price to pay. It can be argued that purposeful miseducation has led both Africans here and in America to believe otherwise. On the contrary, certain scholars in the field of Black/Afrikan studies argue that African-Americans may adopt negative characteristics from Africa itself.

In her article, entitled *Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African-American Nationalism*, E. Frances White argues that America may not be fully to blame for corrupting African-American ideals. "In particular, it is the political memories of African gender relations and sexuality that act as models for African-American social relations ...," (White 73). The previous quote follows White's brief introduction to arguing that not all "real" African-Americans traditions were passed down through blood or practice. She continues on to argue through a feminist lens while viewing the damaging effects of misogyny in the Black community and where it may have originated. Personally, I disagree with the writer's minimization of America's own patriarchal and misogynistic traditions. Nevertheless, as important as it is to recognize my disgruntlements about not completely "fitting in," there is pride to be taken from the fact that Africans and African-Americans still have so much in common.

I came to Ghana with zero expectations, therefore leaving no room for disappointment. Aside from the cold showers that I am training myself to dread less and less every night, this experience has been nothing short of a dream come true. Once again, without a shadow of doubt, African-American culture holds a particularly special place in my heart. The observations, comparisons, and feedback written above are simply that. By no means do I intend to imply that Ghanaian culture is either better or worse than my own. Instead, Ghanaian culture has served as an inspiration knowing that African-American culture is rooted in something very real. My most recent trials and tribulations thus far in the Motherland have been discussed, but what about the looming triumph? In spite of all the natural beauty and sense of belonging that Ghana has to offer, this land will never be my true home. I, Terron Denée Wilkerson, am a proud, conscious, born and bred, American man of African descent. Not only do I possess extensive familial ties back in the United States, but also a seething desire to utilize the knowledge I am acquiring to aid in liberation for people of color in America, and all over the world. Fulfillment of this obligation precedes the triumph that several billions of oppressed human beings worldwide are so desperately in need of. Identifying as a Black-skinned obroni in Ghana is little more than a state of mind that has had no detrimental effect upon my time here. No longer does my Black skin serve as a visible curse that dictates me living a life of reservation based on the fear of having my life taken. Once I return to America, I plan to teach others how to do the same.
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Part Three – History, Culture, and Social Interaction
Unspoken Connections – by Christine Chu

Part 1: People

Unspoken connections. Understood relationships. Clicking with someone in a way that cannot be put into words. These are all ways in which people get along, people form friendships, people find love, and people become part of a community in an unspoken way. Ghana provides this underlying community feeling that does not have to be communicated between everyone.

I have always been a quieter girl, requiring more time to open up to people and make friends. I'm not one of those people who can tell their whole life story to people they just meet. I am not one of those people who can be myself in new settings. I need to know that I can trust a person before I can be myself. I need to feel that unspoken connection that will allow me to open up more and feel like I'm part of a community. Ghana’s cultural values and music are two factors teaching me to open up, trust others more, and to always feel that there is a community around for me no matter where I am.

After attending two classes of learning the Atenteben, a traditional Ghanaian flute, I realized how the flute and music in general has influenced me. When playing in an ensemble, such as an Atenteben ensemble, every single person has to be in sync with each other. If one person falls off rhythm, then that will affect the whole ensemble, possibly causing the whole ensemble to fall out of sync with each other. The ensemble is like a family or community where everyone must work together, build off of one another, listen to each other, and trust each other. If everyone is able to fulfill this, the ensemble will run smoothly with few slipups, as would a family.

During the Atenteben ensemble practice, I felt like I was part of a family. I could feel a deeper, unspoken connection with the other players. It is this connection I often feel with other musicians as we have to be in harmony with each other in order to play together. We have to trust each other and listen to each other in order to play together. Therefore, I already have clicked with the other Atenteben players through music, making it easier for me to open up to them and trust them. If the tempo was supposed to speed up, we all had to speed up together. If the volume level was supposed to increase, we all had to do so at the same rate. However, if we were unsuccessful, then some parts may be heard more clearly than others. For example, many times the bass part is important in keeping the beat, but if it is covered up by the other parts, the ensemble may be more prone to fall apart. We are able to communicate together as a group when we play our instruments together. Therefore, being a part of this Atenteben ensemble has provided me with a family that I can trust.

Similarly, when I was able to learn some simple drumming techniques and rhythms during our orientation dance class, I realized how essential the drum beat is to all the dancers. Not only did we have to be in sync with the other drummers, but we also had to be in sync with the dancers. The dancers were relying on us to keep a beat and we were relying on them to follow our beat. Additionally, we, drummers, were relying on and trusting each other to stay together. This deeper relationship created through music, rather than just through conversation, made me feel more at home.
I then saw how this unspoken communal feeling I felt in Ghanaian music was reflected in Ghanaian society. Right when I stepped outside from baggage claim to the lobby and waiting area of the airport, the first thing one of the student assistants did was give me and the rest of the students a hug. This surprised me at first as I did not know her or even her name. My first thought was “Why is she hugging me if we have never met or talked before?” But soon after, I realized it was Ghanaian culture, where everyone is part of a community. It does not matter if we do not know each other or if we are good friends, we are all connected and will cooperate as a family. There is no personal space in Ghana, but instead much more physical affection. Girls will be seen holding hands or hugging in public as will guys. This physical affection creates an immediate deeper level of understanding and relationship between people. It strengthens the bond that is made solely over conversation and creates a community, rather than individuals.

A similar experience happened at a school in Larabanga, a rural village in Northern Ghana. As soon as we got off the bus and walked over to the school yard, many children came running over to us, giving us hugs, holding our hands, and just wanting to touch us. Although we had never met them before, they acted like we were family. Just holding their hand made them happy. However, back home in California, when I would walk into a preschool or day care, many of the children would be scared or take a while before they would be more comfortable and affectionate. I would have to gain their trust first before they would trust me or play with me. This further demonstrates the unspoken communal relationship between people in Ghana.

Therefore, do relationships always have to be built on words? From my experiences so far, I would say no. Deeper relationships can be built through physical affection and unspoken connections. For example, I often buy fruit from the same stand in the night market (a market on campus that sells fruits and vegetables, local dishes, and some dorm supplies). The young girl that works there with her mother looks about twelve years old. She does not speak very much English and one day even asked me to help her pronounce a word in English. Because of this, we were not able to converse much, but instead built our friendship through smiling and waving to each other. One day, I went to buy some pineapple from her like usual, but this time she asked me if I wanted an orange with it. Since I was not sure what she was asking, I said “Yes” and gave her five Cedis, not knowing how much I was going to pay. She then gave me four Cedis back, charging me the price of only the pineapple and giving me a free orange. After this moment, I knew we had a special connection. Even though we were barely able to talk with each other due to a language barrier, we still had formed a deeper bond and understanding of each other. Therefore, communicating is not always about speaking out loud to others, but it also consists of a deeper unspoken connection.

Part 2: People and Environment

Unspoken connections. Understood relationships. Clicking with the environment in a way that cannot be put into words. These are all ways in which people get along with the environment, people befriend nature, people love the natural world, and people become part of nature in an unspoken way. Ghana provides a lush, green natural environment that needs to be conserved and protected.
What has happened to the relationship between people and the environment? Hundreds of years ago, humans understood how nature behaved and worked alongside nature, not trying to control or take it over. People felt this unspoken connection with nature. They knew when to use fire to fertilize soil; they knew when rain was coming; they knew when a drought was coming; they knew what types of plants to grow; they knew when to switch crops to keep the soil healthy; they knew which plants were poisonous; they knew which animals were harmful to their crops; they knew which organisms were essential for their crops. They had all this knowledge and used it to thrive alongside nature. How about now? This unspoken connection between people and the environment seems to be dwindling in all parts of the world. People no longer work with nature, but instead try to control it with an overpowering force. No longer is it an equal relationship. It is now humans trying to take control and overpower nature.

To me, one of the most appalling aspects of Ghana is the huge amount of trash, especially plastic, lying everywhere on the ground. When the student assistants took us to Madina Market, I was disgusted by the trash I was seeing and smelling everywhere. The drainage channels and sewers were covered in garbage to the point where the ground could not be seen. A man was working in the sewer with the garbage almost reaching up to his knees. Plastic bags were flying around in the wind. Plastic bags were embedded into the ground. The stench from piles of trash being burned filled the air. A stench from chemicals being dispersed into the atmosphere. A sight and smell of health problems.

The large amounts of trash can pose serious health risks. For example, trash can be a source of malaria and cholera. In the case of malaria, trash can build up significantly, leading to blocked drainage channels. This creates stagnant water which is the perfect breeding ground for malaria transmitting mosquitoes. This is exactly what I was seeing in Madina. The trash filled the drains which caused them to become clogged, creating stagnant water. In the case of cholera, poor sanitation will increase the risk of contracting it. Cholera can infect people through contaminated food and water. With trash filling drainage channels and the streets, chemicals can leach through to the groundwater, contaminating it and leading to water pollution. In addition, if families do not have the money to buy clean water or to wash their fruits and vegetables, they will have a higher chance of contracting cholera. Therefore, trash is also a major source of water pollution, especially during the rainy season. More chemicals will be leached into the groundwater during the rainy season, some reaching lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water. During floods, surface water will be contaminated. All this water pollution makes it even harder to provide clean water. In addition, trash is a source of air pollution, particularly due to burning trash. This releases chemicals into the atmosphere, polluting the air and harming people breathing in this air (Thompson).

In this way, people today are not as considerate of the environment and nature as in the past. All these actions of polluting with trash are selfishly performed by people to benefit themselves. The use of plastic bags is unnecessary in society, especially throwing them away after one use. The unspoken relationship with the environment is no longer an equal relationship. People act in a way that makes them seem above nature.
People do not have respect for nature anymore. The unspoken connection that used to exist between people and the environment is quickly shrinking. Although there are green movements beginning to take place and environmentalists trying to bring back this connection, many people still do not value or understand this relationship that is essential for humans to coexist with the environment.

On the positive side, there have been some attempts and proposals to help clean up the trash. One company, Zoomlion Ghana Limited, has been working hard on public awareness and educating people about waste management. They have created a waste management institute, providing and teaching people waste management skills. In addition, they have established Zoom Kids Sanitation Clubs in schools in the Volta Region in hopes that by educating children now, they will continue using their waste management skills as adults. This project looks promising as it seems like many Ghanaians do not intentionally pollute the environment. Instead, they do not realize and understand the impact trash can have on the environment. A proposal that has been made is called the Ghana-Polluter Pay Principle. Following this initiative, people would be required to pay for the waste that they produce. This would not only create the incentive to produce less trash, but would also help finance waste management. Another proposal, which would most likely be put into use only in the worst conditions, would be to prohibit the use of non-degradable plastics. This was suggested by John Dramani Mahama, the current President of Ghana. Although he stated that this may not be the best option, he believed that public safety should be given priority (Joey 2012).

In addition to these proposals, I feel that weekly house-to-house garbage collection in all neighborhoods needs to be better financed and employed. Currently, about 20% of the population, those in high income low density neighborhoods, receive this service. On the other hand, the other 80% of the population, mostly those who live in low-income areas, are supposed to receive a similar service. However, the service is variable, where sometimes garbage is collected after a week and other times it is collected after a month. In these neighborhoods, central containers are placed in certain areas where households are supposed to dump all of their garbage. Many times these containers overflow with garbage, instead contributing to pollution (Joey 2012). Therefore, I believe providing households with their own trash cans and improving garbage collection can make a huge difference in addition to the proposals mentioned above. These are some ways in which the relationship between people and the environment can be strengthened again. That unspoken connection can and needs to be brought back.

References


Adinkra Symbols: The Voice of the Past – by Janette Rico

Bound in the framework of a culture, a set of moral values and philosophies constitutes the behavioral expectations for individuals acting within a given society. In the case of Ghana, Adinkra symbols of the Akan people have maintained their moral significance since a time period predating the intrusive presence of colonialism. Although the origin of these symbols is uncertain, it is known that—at the very least—the symbols existed during the time of the Akan kingdoms, the earliest presumed to have been established in the 11th century as the Bonoman Kingdom. As J. K. Williams discusses in “The Language of Adinkra,” these symbols are “part of the culture and wisdom of dead Akan people, a link between living and the dead, the past and the present, today and tomorrow.” The word *adinkra* literally translates to “a message one gives to another when departing” (Williams). Through this interpretation, Adinkra symbols are the way through which ancestors speak to their contemporary descendants, imparting their wisdom that dates back in time for centuries.

Perceived as a source of wisdom from the past, Adinkra symbols signify moral and ethical lessons by which individuals in society should be living their life—somewhat of a theoretical behavior code for people within the Akan culture. Although the significance of Adinkra symbols has not been a topic of my conversation with Ghanaians, I observe that the values they represent emanate nearly undetectably from conversations that I have had. By understanding Adinkra philosophies that convey the importance of the past, the adaptability needed to endure life's challenges, and the necessity for society to maintain a peaceful coexistence, I have been able to observe my experiences in Ghana through the scope of values represented by Adinkra symbols. Despite their historical and cultural significance, I have observed that in contemporary Ghanaian society, the connotation through which the moral values, represented by the symbols, are interpreted varies from individual to individual in a wide range of perspectives. In reflecting on three different conversations, I have noted that the utilization and perception of Adinkra philosophies varies between individuals, ranging from wishing a value was applied more by society, to applying the value to oneself, and even to criticizing the result of society acting in accordance with a value.

**Sankɔfa (Positive Reversion)**

Proverb: “*Se wo were fi na wosan kɔfa a yennkyi*” (It is not taboo to return to take back what you forgot). Reminders of past events blend into the reality of the present, oftentimes becoming such an inherent part of contemporary society that the memories of the past are detached from everyday thought. The Adinkra symbol of *sankɔfa* represents how this phenomenon should be reversed; instead of individuals purely living in the present, the past should be perceived as a source of wisdom that offers potential advice for the future progression of a society.
This Asante philosophy is demonstrated through two different images: a stylized heart and a bird reaching behind toward an egg on its back. In the first case, the heart represents how the past should be received with an open mind that focuses on positive progression from history, despite the inhumane and atrocious connotations that oftentimes coincide with major events. The other side of the sankɔfa philosophy is symbolized by the image of the bird, emphasizing that although “sometimes people frown, ignore, and neglect their cultural heritage of importance,” there is “wisdom in acquiring knowledge from the past and improving on them” (Agbo 2). Particularly in the case of Ghana, where atrocious historical events such as slavery and colonialism have occurred, sankɔfa sends a moral message that forgiveness of the past and acquiring wisdom through reflection is fundamental for the sake of future progression. The Asante proverb associated with this symbol, “it is not taboo to return to take back what you forgot,” emphasizes that although the past may have been forgotten, it is never too late to revive its significance, demonstrating the fluid way in which the past and present influence the future collectively.

“We cannot forget our past. It is a part of our history, a part of everyone’s past. It doesn’t matter whether you are from Ghana or not, slavery is a part of your history and people cannot ignore that. That is why people need to come here and go back home and tell their friends. Remind them not to forget the past so that it does not happen again.”

-Our guide at Donkor Nsuo in Assin Manso

During our weekend trip to Cape Coast for the Fetu Afahye Festival, a group of us decided to travel to Assin Manso to visit Donkor Nsuo, otherwise known as the Slave River. We had previously toured the Elmina Slave Castle, during which we had learned about the atrocities committed upon those who were held captive within its dungeons. This is a location which marked the conclusion of the slave journey on the continent of Africa before they embarked on their trans-Atlantic crossing; the castle is commonly associated with being the ‘Mecca’ of the African Diaspora and, due to this, receives such a large volume of visitors that the experience itself has become, to a certain extent, commercialized to me. Prior to entering the Castle, hawkers were approaching our group of obroni as if they had just won the lottery. Determined to make a sale, one particular hawker began speaking to me and asking my name; little did I know that he intended to make a personalized seashell for me that I would feel obligated to purchase as I was leaving. After our tour came to an emotional end, the guide reminded us to visit the gift shops on our way out, a comment that seemed to take away from the authenticity of experiencing and understanding a place that symbolizes the forced removal of millions of Africans. Due to this bizarre dichotomy of historical significance and economic activity that I experienced in Elmina, I felt that I had not been able to fully grasp a part of history that was so influential to the course of the world.

In search of a more unadulterated experience to further my interpretation of the slave trade, I decided that visiting the Slave River would expose me to a portion of slave history that, in my opinion, is sometimes ignored in the shadow of the landmark slave castles that line the coast. The excruciating process which millions of Africans underwent to even arrive to the coastal trading castles is often condensed into a few sentences, and by actually visiting a relevant site to this journey, I anticipated a more wholesome perspective on the slave route prior to Atlantic crossing. Instantly upon meeting our tour guide, I could see the passion that he had for discussing the significance of the Slave River.
Animatedly, our guide delivered shocking facts about the harsh realities of the journey from more inland regions: fatigued and weak people would be left to die alongside the path, no food or water was given to them throughout their journey, and over 50% of those who began the journey to the coast, would never make it. When we came upon the portion of the river where the captives were given their last bath prior to arriving to the castles, the impact of these facts hit me. Africans, who had traversed over hundreds of miles with no nourishment or rest, were pushed into a narrow creek that flowed into the main river; our guide reported to our group that this was done in order to prevent slaves from running across the river or swimming downstream to escape. The fact that people endured astronomical amounts of inhumane treatment, and furthermore had their freedom beaten down to the point where they were unable to properly bathe, induced a unnerving wave of clarity to a part of history that now seems diluted in the manner in which it has previously been taught to me.

Our guide, upon finishing his rendition of facts associated with Donkor Nsuo, began to speak about the significance of a collective remembrance of the past (see quote above). He believed that, oftentimes, this part of the slave journey is overshadowed by places such as the Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle and wished that, instead of people discrediting the impact of the past, people would reflect on it to determine how the future could be improved. While he was explaining the relevance of the past on the present, I reflected on my own feelings of clarity that arose from visiting the Slave River; I realized if everyone experienced a moment such as I had, the horrendous past history of slavery would not repeat itself in the future. The philosophy that our guide was utilizing to comment on the necessity of using the past to gain wisdom reflects that which is presented through the symbol of sankɔfa: “progress is based on the right application of positive aspects of past values” (Agbo 2). In an institution such as slavery, one might find it hard to deduce positive attributes, but Adinkra philosophy teaches us to view the past without negative adulteration. Based on this interpretation of the sankɔfa philosophy, everyone should spread the word of what occurred at the Slave River for the sake of the future generations to avoid the same situations that their ancestors perpetrated and endured in the past.

By the guide appealing to us to spread what we had learned during his tour, he demonstrated a desire for the world to develop the identity of a common history so that all past atrocities, such as slavery, can be avoided. Through a collective mindset that applies past wisdom to promote a better future, the world can slowly progress toward a more world-conscious and unified mass. Through the conversation we had with the guide, I noticed the similarities that his mentality had with the philosophy of sankɔfa and how the Adinkra symbols invisibly emit from beliefs of individuals within Ghanaian society. In this particular case, our guide was criticizing how many people do not encompass this instilled Asante belief and wished that this philosophy would be more widely applied to the life of individuals in order to progress to a better, collective future.
**Aya (Defiance)**

The Adinkra symbol of *aya* moralizes defiance, which at first seems out of place in a society that thrives on community sentiment and unity such as that of Ghana. In this case, defiance is not synonymous with rebellion, instead it is an encouragement for “individuals and nations to be independent, self-reliant, and resourceful” in order to improve current conditions (Agbo 8). This defiance of difficulties inspires adaptability in any condition, as well as resilience to overcome any obstacle that one may be presented within life. Represented by the image of a fern—a plant that can sustain itself in difficult environments—*aya* symbolizes the ability to rise up in the face of adversity, no matter how futile circumstances may seem. The ability for individuals to demonstrate and embody this philosophy benefits the whole of society, for “the survival of mankind requires strong-will to face the challenges and vicissitudes of life” (Agbo 8).

“People need to realize that trash is a problem here. You walk in the street and you see piles of trash and they are just burning them. People need to come together to fix this because the government is not doing anything about it.”

-Victor, my friend (2014)

In the case of my friend, Victor, I have observed an unpremeditated use of the Adinkra philosophy of *aya*—unpremeditated by the fact that the philosophy seems inherent in his beliefs without an active attempt to apply it to his life. He oftentimes invites us over to his home in the bush to cook us authentic Ghanaian meals because, in his own words, “I want to show you how to cook Ghanaian dishes so that when you go home, you could show your friends that Ghanaians aren’t starving.” Through such a statement, Victor demonstrates his desire to upset a stereotype that is hindering the perception of African countries in the international context; this belief coincides with the philosophy that was applied to the statement quoted above—if you disagree with an institution or situation, act out against it to influence a positive change.

Inspired by the overwhelming amount of litter that he observes around his home and in the streets, Victor became very active in attempting to change the status quo in the perception of waste and the necessity to separate and dispose of it properly. He actively composts at 5 am nearly every morning and tends to a garden at the Night Market that is nourished by the same compost. This was a project that he collaborated on with previous study abroad students whom he had met, and he never misses a moment to discuss his efforts with new friends in order to recruit them, because he is very passionate and understands the necessity for group action to convert social conditions into something more favorable.
Through networking his ideas on waste separation, Victor has been able to link up with another independent working man, Malik, who was developing a documentary about the University and its disregard for a waste separation policy that it was supposed to enact the prior year. Malik began a widespread movement pushing for public waste separation and he recruited Victor to help him plan for a waste separation awareness walk. The goal is to attract a crowd of six thousand people, which may be possible due to the support and involvement of government officials and healthcare workers in the area.

Together, Victor and Malik apply the philosophy of *aya* to their own lives through their opposition to the waste situation in Ghana, acting resourceful and independently to influence positive change in the system and consequentially gaining a following of people passionate to promote similar change. Victor demonstrates the ability to adapt in the face of unfavorable conditions and, through strong will and endurance, actively acts to influence a positive alteration to the current waste situation. If everyone applies *aya* philosophy to their own life and attempts to stand up against societal structures that they do not agree with, individuals in society can slowly help in the development of a more agreeable societal existence for all.

*Bi-nnka-bi (Harmony)*

Proverb: “Obi nnka obi” (Bite not one another)

*In a society whose core foundation is set upon the concept of collectivity and community, the philosophy behind harmony seems logical. The Adinkra symbol, bi-nnka-bi, represents the collective moral value that peaceful coexistence is necessary in order to avoid conflict between people or groups. The proverb associated with this symbol translates to “bite not one another,” utilizing the use of equalizing phrases, such as “one another” to describe the active bodies that could cause conflict. The proverb does not differentiate between those who may have started a dispute by saying “bite not your enemy” or “bite not the dissenter;” instead, the moral message emphasizes the necessity to keep the peace, regardless of which party is culpable. The visual representation of this symbol is a circular figure that has misshapen curved teeth emerging from its edges. The teeth, which face different directions, never intersect, and the continuity of the circle is maintained. This symbolizes how coexistence is possible, despite different opinions and perspectives, because society is bound together by the common goal to perpetuate peace. Strife and tension “cause provocation and retaliation from victims. The result is violence in the community” (Agbo 3). In order to maintain community cohesiveness, peaceful coexistence is the utmost goal and is attempted to be preserved by any means.*

“Ghanaians would rather have peace than rebel against someone that they didn't vote for. They want to avoid violence.”

-George, my Ghanaian friend and fellow University of Ghana student (2014)
In a conversation that I had at Coffee Cue with George, my conception of peace within Ghanaian culture was altered through his criticism of the ineffectiveness of applying the philosophy of bi-nnka-bi to society. There are numerous examples of how peace is beneficial to Ghanaian culture; for instance, the religious tolerance and coexistence that is seen when adjacent communities are predominantly comprised of different majority religions, particularly Islam and Christianity. Even during festivals, every religion is recognized and allowed to partake in its own methods of prayer, demonstrating the sentiment of peace that is presented through bi-nnka-bi. Ghanaians are inherently peaceful because of such values that are upheld within society, but at what price should this peace be kept?

In discussing the previous presidential election in Ghana, George expressed his frustration with the passiveness that he felt some Ghanaians exhibited during a controversial and contested election that required a Supreme Court decision to reach resolution. He thinks that the reason for the collective passiveness is that the community would rather avoid confrontation than possibly induce a violent political rebellion. In attempting to maintain harmony, he felt that Ghanaians did not carry their grievances as far as they should have. Through his understanding that the society decides to act peacefully as a collective, George criticizes this mentality for being an unproductive way to approach politics. By questioning the effectiveness of the philosophy of bi-nnka-bi, George maintains a critical perspective of the collective desire for harmony, instead entertaining ideas that society should not act in accordance with this for the sake of social justice and future progression.

Conclusion
The Adinkra symbols, although a major foundation in the philosophy and belief systems in Ghana, are not necessarily applied consciously or invariably. Individuals within a society often act in ways that resonate with certain symbols, but it stands more as a loose moral code rather than a strict one. Due to this, Ghanaian society seems to be a mixture of varying levels of application of the philosophies behind the Adinkra symbols, all of which remain relevant and influential despite the manner in which they are applied. In my experiences so far in Ghana, I have been able to observe inklings of Adinkra philosophies within conversations that I have held with different individuals. In each case, Akan philosophy was perceived differently. When visiting the Slave River, our guide demonstrated frustration with the fact that no one acted in accordance with the sankɔfa belief of appreciating a collective past, and compelled us to spread the word about the importance of our history. In a different application of Adinkra philosophy, Victor embodies the belief of aya in his resourcefulness and individual effort to raise awareness of the waste situation in Ghana and how it needs to change. In an entirely inverse perspective, George criticizes the basis of the Adinkra philosophy of bi-nnka-bi, claiming that the community-wide attempt to maintain harmony is counterintuitive in situations that perpetuate unfavorable positions, such as what occurred with the 2012 presidential election. Through my observations of how Adinkra symbols influence society, I have witnessed that, although their philosophies are inherent in a community mindset, individuals interpret them, apply them, and criticize them differently. In this way, individuals within Ghanaian society can choose whether or not they agree with certain Adinkra wisdom, deciding to apply them circumstantially for the sake of positive communal progression.
References


3. Friends Interviews (Victor, Malik, George) University of Ghana-Legon, Fall 2014.

Learning About the World from Ghana – by Eden Loi

For now, I’ll ignore the idea of retrospective self confirming biases and instead continue to feel like this amazing journey is due to the realization of my inner voice — the one that called me here in such a spontaneous, unexpected way. Studying abroad had always been part of the plan, but like many other decisions in life that seem to have already been made for me, I never put much thought into it. I planned to just do it, to jump through another hoop mindlessly and hopefully come back with some cool souvenirs and pictures and stories. But one weekend night some time before the Education Abroad Program (EAP) applications were submitted, I decided to stay in instead of going out to party or socialize. It is no surprise that because of this decision I became very introspective and deep, and began to examine this next big step I was headed toward. At that time I wanted to go to Hong Kong for a year. Part of the reason to do so was motivated by both of my siblings' decisions to, post graduation, move to Taiwan. Their motives trickled down to me and became my diluted desire to “get in touch with my roots” and “connect with my culture”. But these reasons were more like empty answers that I prepared so I could respond to friends and family when they asked where I was going. I certainly have an interest in the culture from which I come, and a desire to learn more— but as I sat there thinking about it, the simple fact hit me that I just did not want to study abroad in an Asian country. I remember sitting on my bed holding an EAP brochure with all the different programs, suddenly struck by the realization that I had the absurd opportunity to study and live in any of these countries. I was just holding this book of countries in my hand, able to pick wherever I wanted. I didn't want to waste this opportunity with empty reasons. I wanted to be drawn somewhere. And as I was looking at Hong Kong’s page I made the decision that I would not study there, and would instead search through the brochure until I found a place that called to me. No reason to follow footsteps or travel to a popular destination if it didn’t call to me. I was about to start from the beginning of the book, but the first page I turned back caught my eye; I decided then that I would spend a semester in Ghana.

It has been more than a month since I arrived here and I feel like I've come to a place that is meant for me. I keep a check on myself and keep in mind that I may just be in the honeymoon stage, but so far any inconveniences or feelings of estrangement have never really affected me past being amusingly frustrating. Instead, I find myself in situations that make me smile, that remind me of why I chose to come here— walking down the street having children yell, greeting and waving at me, smiling and dancing back as an old lady I don't know boogies toward me, genuinely relaxing at a restaurant or outdoor place with no worries on my mind, watching Ghanaians light up and laugh when they hear me speaking my limited and overplayed repertoire of Twi. I love these moments. It’s a nice change from certain aspects of my life in Southern California that I came to know too well and grew sick of. I am not surrounded by money and people who only need that, not surrounded by students who seem guided by sex and alcohol, not surrounded by people too “busy” to take proper care of themselves and others. Figuratively, coming here has been a breath of fresh air. As it goes with new experiences, I have made a lot of observations and conclusions about these new things. A disclaimer: these are observations made from my personal, limited experience. The conclusions I have made from them, naturally, are influenced by my own perspectives and attitudes.

1This is where I choose to overlook my own hindsight biases. I’m mainly talking about not having any deep feelings of regret or bitterness about my decision to come here. There were definitely periods of diarrhea that were not amusing.
“Sharing is Caring”
When I first heard a Ghanaian tell me this, we were bargaining and I thought no more of it than him trying to get a higher price from me. Maybe it was. But I have heard it several more times since then, and seen it in action. I often hear Ghanaians tell me, “In our country, we like to say 'sharing is caring.’” I’m thinking of several occasions where I have seen this in action. At the Cape Coast Festival I saw a young child with torn clothes and shoes dig into his pockets, pulling out the few Pesewas he had to donate them to a costumed child who was collecting money for the Festival. A friend of mine bought me a drink as we were sitting and chatting. The next day he apologized that he could not again, because he made no money that day and had nothing to spend. I've seen how “sharing” extends past the realm of material goods. People are willing to share their time with you — which I think is infinitely more valuable than money. Strangers at shops will leave their duties and even other customers to chat with you and welcome you to Ghana. People will explain how to get to places and will walk with you and show you if you seem confused. Several times I have been surprised at how far I end up walking with a stranger showing me where to go. And in addition to time, many Ghanaians are ready to share their space with you as well. An invitation to dinner, to a village or a home, comes quickly and earnestly. Physical space, too. People you have just met (or haven’t) will touch you or rest on you. There is a pervading sense of care between people here. I’m not saying it's one giant family here, because Accra is still a city and people are still off doing their own business — but there still is a subtle sense of “we’re in this together” going on.

Face to Face
I think the sense of community is maintained partly because of the many vendors and the many necessary face to face transactions that happen throughout the day. A previous exchange student in Ghana commented on the lonely aisles of giant grocery stores and minimum conversation between customer and service in America. The scary thing is that now, often times in the states, transactions are shifting from little interaction to none with things like automatic cash registers and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) kiosks, companies with telephone lines that direct you to a service robot, online delivery everywhere — drive thru pharmacies. This is the opposite dynamic from the Ghanaian transactions that I have experienced. In Ghana I can often see and talk with the creator of the product, bargain and joke with them. It is human to human interaction. I do not see who makes my products in America, and I definitely cannot talk or bargain with them. The transaction is a lot more lifeless. When I bargain with a person, I have to consider their profit as well as my discount. It is social and cooperative. If I never know where my product comes from and I have no say about the price, I feel like I am being tyrannized. In California, there is also little face to face interaction outside the realm of trading, just between people on the street. I am rarely asked questions and I rarely ask them. No need to ask for directions when I have a Global Positioning System (GPS) on my phone, no need really to ask for anything when I have Internet service following me.
Ghana, of course, has smart phones and mobile Internet services, but it has not caused the same degree of social isolation in people as it does in America, because in America there are a host of other factors that support the isolation. It sometimes seems like the whole way of life in America is pulling us away from face to face interaction. And the effects of the lonely aisles, online shopping, and robots were apparent when I first came to Ghana. I felt so awkward after the initial “Hello, how are you?” not sure what to do with my body, my eyes, when the Ghanaian who greeted me continued to stand and stare at me. I felt like, “What else do you want from me?” It turns out they wanted to actually talk, which, it also turns out, is not that hard to do if both people are interested and paying attention. Face to face is nice, and better than face to phone.

The Biggest Barrier

Naturally, the biggest barrier between people comes from either or both sides putting walls up. I have noticed that some exchange students seem like they need to be extremely careful of people and situations in Ghana. I think this becomes a problem when precaution is overdone and turns into paranoia or distrust. It is natural to be apprehensive and uncomfortable when first encountering the hospitality and openness of Ghanaians. I am not used to a stranger inviting me to their home for dinner and to meet their family. I am not used to barely meeting someone and exchanging numbers, and then being called by them soon after we part. I need to remind myself to dive into it. I would rather walk into something a little blind than to close my eyes and stay where I am at. Here is where my argument really hinges on my own personal experience, because I am a male and probably have had good fortune with what I’ve gotten into here. Sometimes—not often— but sometimes, I hear some exchange students talking about creepy or sketchy Ghanaians or situations that really do not sound too bad at all. I think this reservation of doubt is the biggest barrier because it creates, however subtle, an ‘us’ and ‘them’ perspective. There is a tricky balance between precaution and paranoia, because often you do not know if you let your guard down too much until it is too late. The opposite danger, however, is a lot less obvious. You will never really know if you played it too safe, if you distrusted another group of people too much, if you let your doubts and worries prevent you from having life changing experiences and bonds with people. And it is a very difficult balance because the unlimited potential of benefit also has the opposite side of an unlimited potential for harm. But for me, when I walk alone through Ghana—when I meet people and trust their intentions—I find the best experiences. Trust is a two way street—Ghanaians, like anyone else, can sense reservation and apprehension within people. It is even more obvious when one chooses to only travel in groups, with other exchange students, or when one accepts a Ghanaian invitation wearing a huge feeling of doubt and anxiety. If a person trying to host someone or show someone around senses distrust, it is hard for them to completely ignore it without reciprocating that feeling of doubt in some way. And then the Ghanaians might develop a sense of distrust for Americans, or Californians, or other exchange students, assuming that they all are exclusive and stand-offish.

I am not suggesting that everyone should roam around alone and go along with every stranger they encounter. More so I am arguing that we should investigate the validity of our doubts and understand their impact. We should recognize how they can influence how and when trust and curiosity can be reciprocated.
Oh, Ghana

Compared to many other African countries, Ghana has a stable government and a good economy. It is safer and more developed than the unfortunate image that many outsiders to Africa often perceive of an African country. Because of the difference between how the many of the countries on the African continent are perceived and how Ghana actually is, many Ghanaians try to distinguish themselves from other African countries, or to specifically praise or criticize Ghana. Ghanaians will ask me if it is my first time in Africa—when I say yes, they are always sure to tell me that Ghana is especially safe, and will try to make me feel comfortable. They often say, “We Ghanaians love peace.” Yet aside from the attempts to defend Ghana, it is clear that there is not widespread, glowing pride for the country. It is interesting to notice the subtle and not so subtle ways in which they respond to me being in Africa. Often there is a knowing amusement in their eyes, almost like they are teasing me by asking the question. Most are surprised when I say I love it— a few people have told me to wait and see how that changes, or have pointed out that I am merely visiting, and have a choice of when to leave.

I was sitting and talking with a lady in Osu who owns a small shop where she sells jewelry. She told me she was working and arranging to move to Holland. I asked why she wanted to move and she looked at her small baby sleeping on the floor in the back of the cramped shack, her two kids sitting on the ground nearby, and made that disapproving tsk sound with her tongue. “Ghana is no good. Our people suffer.” The next day I was in the shop of another lady on Zongo Lane in Accra. She told me how she used to live in the Bronx, and moved back because it was too hard to work and pay for the bills there. She said she liked it in her shop where she could work, relax, and be with her people. She told me, “People don’t know what America is like. They think you can move there and you will be rich.” Before I left, her son came out and half-jokingly reminded me to throw him in my suitcase when I went back to California.

I think that because of Ghana’s hopeful future and their connectedness with the rest of the world, Ghanaians can see that they are closer than many other African countries to being a well developed and successful country. But they can also see that they are not there yet. If you see a fruit hanging but cannot reach it, you will be more upset about your unsatisfied hunger than if you see no fruit at all. From what I have picked up, that is how a lot of Ghanaians feel about their country. But there is still a sense of affection for what the country has done for itself and where it has come from, and even a love for the characteristic inconvenience of the country. The most representative moment of a Ghanaian reacting to Ghana came from a tro-tro ride when the driver pulled over in the middle of the street to argue with another car. Two policemen came to try and settle the dispute, but they ended up just standing there looking confused as each driver scolded them and argued for their own cause. This fiasco lasted for a few minutes as horns everywhere were blaring, even though traffic beyond the holdup was only moving at a crawl. A lady made her tsk sound, rested her face against her hand and chuckled as she muttered “Oh, Ghana.”
Conclusions
I remember sitting in the International Programs Office one day during a discussion with other Californian students. This was while the start of the semester was still delayed due to Ebola screenings and professors were on strike. Class had not started yet, but I suddenly realized that during the past few weeks I had learned more about the world than I ever had before. I remember sitting there and praying—and at that time I didn't pray—asking God to make the rest of the semester, and ideally the rest of my life, as educational and enlightening as those first weeks had been. I feel so grateful and satisfied with my decision to come to Ghana. I feel blessed about the calling that I followed.
Proverbial Power: Akan Oratory and Ghanaian Nationalism – by Christopher M. Meyer

Abstract
This paper aims to examine and analyze the effects of Akan oratory and proverbial knowledge on Ghanaian nationalism and national identity. Using an anthropological approach, I look at how oratory in Akan society has been highly valued and that the use of proverbs is a sign of wisdom, in particular with stage performers in Ghanaian Party Concert Theater; moreover, I argue that the performing arts becomes a stage for more than just entertainment for Ghanaians, but becomes a political stage for ideologies to come into action as well as inform and discuss issues and problems people face living in a developing country. Additionally, I further the idea that despite the vast linguistic diversity found in Ghana, multilingualism becomes a form of unification as opposed to division within a multi-ethnic state.

Ghana is just one of many African countries where its citizens utilize the power of performance to unify themselves and form consolidated national identities. Music and theatre become mediums with which everyday people can voice their opinions and explore new and novel ways with navigating through the politics of the state. Ghanaian party concert theatre is a unique method of communicating the problems and issues Ghanaians face by bringing these concerns and disputes to center stage and acting them out. While the most distinctive part of concert party theatre is the incorporation of black face by Black Ghanaian performers, what makes this type of performance so invaluable in forming a national identity is the incorporation of language and oratory; more importantly the rich proverbs found in Akan storytelling, or anansesem, effectively reflect and address the common problems Ghanaians face every day, both as part of a British colony and as a post-colonial state. A mastery of traditional Akan proverbs is an art form on its own that can bring people together regardless of their ethnic, religious, or even linguistic differences because the meaning behind them can be felt and understood by all Ghanaians. I aim to highlight the power of these maxims by examining a proverb that I believe embodies a great deal of the Ghanaian experience living in a developing nation and resonates with the ways Ghanaians navigate and mobilize through the hardships and challenges of an impoverished country.

In her ethnography of this creative and imaginative use of theatre arts, Catherine Cole emphasizes how language becomes an invaluable tool in understanding how this process occurs. Language is key to understanding how concert theatre is able to so successfully bring Ghanaians together despite their ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences because their diversity brings them together. “The most important active expression of my budding knowledge about Akan culture was through language...like many African languages, Akan is proverbial and highly idiomatic. Deep knowledge of the language comes from a lifetime of experience” (Cole 2001: 10). She highlights the importance of how language creates a commonality among both performers and audience alike. The actors on stage are using the language to perform and act out cultural knowledge and wisdom that helps solve or alleviate the stresses of living under British rule or the economic disparities existent in a newly formed independent African country.
The Akan language is the most commonly and most broadly spoken of the Ghanaian national languages, upwards of 60% of the population speak it on a day to day basis. It is most widely spoken within the southern regions of Ghana, along the Atlantic Coast. This area houses the two most popular destinations for concert theatre performers: Accra and Sekondi, port cities that help bring new people into the world of concert theatre. While traditional Ghanaian party concert theatre is performed in Akan, also known as Twi or Fante (the most common dialects), performers like Bob Johnson, for instance, also spoke from the stage in Hausa, Ewe, and Ga—even English became a staple. As mentioned earlier before, nationalism within Ghana is formed not by homogeneity of language, but heterogeneity. Multilingualism helps unite people by forming a multi-ethnic identity because they share a common land. By speaking in different languages, the people can come together and collectively analyze, \textit{mpaepaemu}, the problems of people and society with a view to suggesting answers (Cole 2001: 11). Multilingualism allows people to converse and share ideas regardless of their ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic background. Ghanaians often express their solidarity by communicating in a language that often is not their mother tongue, thus demonstrating that African languages can have a unifying effect of its speakers. I have seen students at the International Student Hostel who both speak perfect English, yet choose to have their discussion in the Ga language, even though one might not even be of Ga ethnicity.

Cole argues that by incorporating African languages, blending imported characters with homegrown tricksters, and taking their shows on the road, pioneer actors of the 1930’s made concerts a genuinely popular and profitable form (Cole 2001: 78). She is underlining how Ghanaian performers like Bob Johnson and musicians like Kakaitu used innovative and ingenious ways to carve a life for themselves by performing concert theatre by being perpetually connected to a wide variety of inspirations and inventions found both within and outside of Ghana. \textit{Taarab} and concert theatre performers alike compose their acts and music through accessing varying cultures and languages to assemble a multi-faceted identity.

Oratory skills and storytelling have long been viewed as highly prized skills within Ghanaian society (Yankah 1995: 45). In fact, there is a special place in Ghana for people who can artistically—poetically—articulate and communicate for themselves and others, namely the village chief. Akan philosophy, wisdom, \textit{nyansa}, becomes enacted through creative performance, without knowledge, there is no action; language is the root of all wisdom as it takes a wise person to use language to communicate their insight. Concert theatre is just a resourceful use of oratory and storytelling being used to entertain as well as empower an audience. The resourcefulness of these performers gets embodied in the proverbs they employ in their performances. One such proverb that so perfectly exemplifies concert theatre and the positive messages it gives to the audience is \textit{Ohia ma wodwene} or “Use your gumption.” This Akan proverb, as Cole contends:

“A discourse on power that illuminates how subaltern individuals assert their agency and autonomy within a hierarchically organized social order...the proverb connotes a very particular type of mental acuity...it’s essentially about performance, how individuals use a whole range of embodied skills and knowledge, from verbal wit and vocal intonation... to negotiate the challenges of performance on stage and everyday life” (Cole 2001: 81).
Ohia ma wodwene literally translates to “Poverty makes you think,” it is very much the Akan version of the English idiom “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Cole's analysis of this Akan proverb illuminates how both concert performers as well as their audience had to be creative with what very few resources they had to make a life for themselves. “It can be read as a discourse on how the weak work within an order established by the strong” (Cole 2001: 83); the confines and constraints of colonial and post-colonial Ghana shape one's creativity and one must be creative in forming action and thought. The performers utilized the railroad networks established by the British to traverse the country and bring their stage with them, literally, across the nation. They would follow wherever workers needed entertainment, such as the gold mines or cocoa plantations found throughout the country. This form of transportation allowed them to use their gumptions in a unique way, much like how Ghanaian concert theatre is itself a product of ohia ma wodwene. The very act of using black face to turn racism on its head is a marvelous and ingenious way of, “If you got lemons, make lemonade.” Cole continues that, “Pioneer actors used their 'gumption' to transform the concert party, a colonial school diversion, into a full-time profession;” she's underlining how these performers first used concert theatre as a way for people to find joy and happiness in the often dismal conditions of being under British rule, but were able to imaginatively mold it into a way of making a living.

During our trip to Bojo Beach I had asked one of our Ghanaian student assistants about the aforementioned proverb and he explained that it is an old philosophy that speaks to the resourcefulness of Ghanaians. I have often seen how Ghanaians find any and all possible ways of making a life for themselves. A good example of this innovative mentality would be the hawkers on the roads. Since they don't have a store or stand from where they can sell their goods, be it plantain chips, phone credit, or pen and paper, they have to find a way to get their product to customers. The lack of a “proper” place of business enables these vendors to think of alternative ways of selling their product, such as going to busy streets and intersections and selling water sachets to parched motorists and commuters.

While the saying has its roots in cultural tradition, its applicability to modern Ghanaian society becomes clearer with the country facing many challenges as a developing nation. In the grip of neo-colonialism, Ghana strains to dictate its own future. With the flow of foreign and development aid further indebting the country to both governments and NGO's on the international stage, Ghana is struggling to find new ways of moving around these constraints. The act of using one's gumption in light of these circumstances is what the proverb seeks to accomplish. As Dr. Walls elucidated in lecture (7/31), “Pan-Africanism and African unity are seen as solutions to ending the West's hold on the continent”; in a way, while these are discourses that have been in academic and political spheres for some time, they are both forms of using gumption. The abridgement of African unity can be a form of necessity that can be felt by more than just Ghanaians, for it creates a need to think of a way to gap the divisions among African countries.

Ohia ma wodwene is just one of many proverbs spoken among Akanophones in Ghana, but how does the message get across to people who do not speak Akan-Twi? At the end of each show, the performers will speak directly to the audience and translate the meaning behind such proverbs so every person understands.
This mix of languages with a single positive message helps solidify a national identity among citizens of Ghana. Proverbs speak to the minds and hearts of those who are familiar with their deeper meanings, yet even those who have never encountered these idioms can still resonate with them. These adages act as a doorway into the morals and sensibilities of a society to gain insight into their social and cultural organizations. Learning about these powerful sayings has enabled me to access new forms of knowledge and philosophy that can better help me traverse through my own challenges. It allows you to broaden your horizon and provides you with a way of perceiving any given situation, good or bad. In sum, proverbs used in Ghanaian party concert theatre serve as a platform with which any and every one can congregate and interact with one another.

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Pits and Pebbles: The Benefits of Learning and Playing the Strategy Game Oware as a Method of Cultural Integration – by Michael Sandoval

When studying in the field of history and looking towards the remnants of past civilizations and cultures of a region, there exist different mediums as to which these stories are able to be told. The most common sources of primary evidence are usually depicted through mediums like artwork (paintings, sculptures, crafts etc.) and architectural structures (buildings, temples, tombs, castles, palaces etc.) in attempting to better portray or understand the past. One aspect of a culture that I feel is of great significance in representation of a culture is the common strategy game of the region. For example, in our current existence in what is known commonly as the “Western World” (usually referring to the United States and Western European countries) many in our society are taught the game of Chess at a young age yet we never truly play again until well into adulthood. In East Asia the strategy game is Go. In Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean countries, the game of preference is Backgammon. Two aspects that allow for commonalities of these games are; first their ability to exist in a society and be passed down from generation to generation for centuries (if not millennium) and second, is their power in connecting two individuals to a test of mental alertness and critical thinking that can allow for shaping friendships and/or rivalries with fellow members of that society. In my time spent in Ghana, there have been tremendous results of adjustment to the culture and lifestyle through learning and avidly playing the game Oware. As a game that has transcended centuries, Oware stands as a strong platform of Ghanaian culture that predates European presence and is a game that many locals have played at some point in life. The following will explain the history of this game and how I, a student from halfway around the world, was able to learn this game to better understand the culture of Ghana.

Before explaining the rules and forms of play of Oware, one should understand how far into the past this game has been around. According to the Oware Society (2014), the history of Oware and other similar games fall into the category of gaming known as “Pit and Pebble games”. They are said to predate to the days of ancient societies prior to the Roman Empire. There exists archeological evidence in Athens, Egypt, as well as in Mesopotamia that all depict carvings of rows of pits in the ground and paintings that represent the game being played (the Oware Society). Although there is no consensus on the exact origin of the game, many experts agree that the true origins must have begun in Africa and knowledge likely spread through North Africa into the Mediterranean ports to eventually spread through the Middle East and portions of Europe. The pit and pebble games also found their way to the Western Hemisphere through a dark period of history known as the Transatlantic Slave Trade (1471-1810). This “forced movement” of millions of Africans into the Americas resulted in an African Diaspora which brought and maintained many aspects of their culture from Africa.

Now we will examine the historical origins of Oware in Ghana. Although styles of “pit and pebble” games historically have a similar origin, over 300 different official variations have existed with differences in numbers of pebbles, pits, and even turn movement.
In Ghana, the game comes from the Akan people and the mighty Asante Empire (one of the largest West African states prior to European contact). It is believed to have been played in the region as early as the 12th century. The game’s origin is unclear, but it has been said that the game formed from legend that stated that in order for a man and women to play the game forever they chose to get married; “Warri” being the Twi word for marriage (The Oware Society 2). The game was usually played by royalty and was often regarded as a game of kings by the Asante, in fact it is known that Oware was a standard aspect of the coronation ceremony of the new king where he was obligated to show his abilities as a creative thinker and decision maker by successfully defeating the elders who were well experienced in the game (Oware Society 3). These early origins, and the many variations that followed, served tremendously as an educational as well as social tool in African society. The former through the passing of knowledge from the old generation to the young, as well as the integration into school systems and the latter as a focal point for people to meet and pass time allowing for spectators and new challengers (Oware Society 3).

There are two main styles of playing Oware in Ghana (nam-nam and abapa). The children’s game is known as Nam-Nam, an Asante Twi word meaning “to roam” due to the main feature of the player’s transferring of stones continuously around the board in a turn. This game is usually taught to children at a young age and implemented in primary schools, but it is acceptably played by persons of any age. The adult version is referred to as Abapa, meaning “the good stone” in Twi, which was the game that was played historically as part of the coronation ceremonies of the Asante and is the game played in the ranks and tournament circuits to this day.

Some basic rules to understand these games are to know the board, movement and objective of the game. The game of nam-nam is played on a board consisting of 2 rows of 6 holes each with 4 pebbles. The board is split in two “territories” or 1 row of 6 holes on the player's side which each are able to pull beads from and keep. Movement is done by picking up ALL pebbles from ONE pit and dropping a stone in each sequential pit (movement is always counter-clockwise or right to left, also showing a strong aspect of Ghanaian culture) until the last stone drops into an empty pit. In the process players are slowly building stone piles in their pits and pebbles are earned when a set of 4 pebbles emerges on the player’s territory and game is won by the player who has the most sets of 4 pebbles.

Apaba differs slightly in movement and objective although the board is still set the same initially. The main differences to note are that the turn ends when the last pebble is dropped in the pit regardless of if there are pebbles present meaning that there is no “roaming” that appears in the other game. The objective and scoring is also achieved by dropping the LAST bead into an Opponent’s pit that has either 1 or 2 pebbles in it. The first player to collect 25 pebbles wins. Although seemingly very basic, the game can be played with extensive use of strategy and tactics that can test even the most experienced players.
Prior to my arrival into Ghana I was worried as to how I would engage and interact with local people. From the moment I sat on the plane and attempted (and failed miserably I might add) to engage in small talk with the Ghanaian sitting next to me. I knew I needed new strategies. I was already uneasy about who I was and what I represented visiting Ghana for the next ten months. In my mind, I had two options to help make this transition into Ghanaian culture less difficult. The first option was music, and the second option was learning and playing a local strategy game. As stated earlier, Chess was one of the strategy games that was largely represented in Western societies. I had learned previously that having a chess board on me was a great means to meet new people. When I went to college I thought of bringing a chess board on the first week of lectures hoping others would be willing to sit down and play a round. I figured it would possibly be a more effective method of adapting and meeting people than sitting and staring at my phone, surrounding myself with the same contacts and social media that I was used to experiencing on a daily basis. Needless to say, when I had the board I was pleasantly surprised to see that students would often sit down to join in a game. Before the game would start, it was an almost unanimous utterance by my opponents when they would say, “I used to play a lot when I was little” or “I know how the pieces move but I haven’t played in forever.” In the process of that first week of school, I had played maybe 10 or more games: some with people that I got to know a little – the more “serious“ thinkers focused solely on the game while others told me more about their experiences with chess and their plans for college. I even met two people who would end up becoming my closest friends at school in the process. What I learned from that week was that games had the potential to be a great ice breaker to help meet people. I took this plan to Ghana.

So, I brought a chess board with me to Ghana. Although I did meet and get to know some other international students by playing chess, I found that there were not many Ghanaians who played the game where I was hanging out. However, I continued to believe that a strategy game was a good way to better integrate into a culture. I had heard previously of a strategy game that was particular to Ghana (thank you YouTube) so I decided to find myself an Oware board as soon as possible. In the lovely city of Kumasi (the Capitol City of the Asante Region and conveniently the same location the game was created) I was quickly able to find an Oware game, hand carved and quality made. And within 10 minutes of purchase, I was already learning the game. I learned nam-nam from one of our Ghanaian student assistants and friends who proceeded to teach me the basics. He also delivered six brutal and consecutive beat downs. After the losses and immense drop in self-esteem (my opponent enjoyed his fair share of “smack talk” throughout our games), I sought to teach as many of my fellow California study abroad students as were interested. The entire rest of the weekend involved playing this game so much that my fingers would be black from the paint on the board. It grew to a near obsession for some of us in the group as we would play each other in almost any location and at all hours. In the process. I was having the same results as that of my first week of college where I brought the chess board. I saw myself befriending people in the program I never had the chance to speak to prior. When I first purchased the Oware board, nam-nam was most commonly played, especially within the California group. I soon found myself learning and playing Abapa, the more advanced style, when I returned to campus.
Abapa was learned in a more centralized environment and it was through learning this variation I had more success at getting to know the Ghanaians and what this game means to their culture. As stated earlier, for me music was another instrument for cultural integration to Ghanaian society (no pun intended). As it turns out, it was my drum instructor and his friends who were the ones to teach me Abapa. When I learned this game I had already been playing nam-nam for quite some time, already growing comfortable with this version. My instructor explained to me that I was playing the children’s game and insisted I learn Abapa. After a practice round, we had our first serious round and I actually managed to beat him. In an instant some of the other drummers began to join and observe. Once we started playing our second game I began hearing some utterances in Twi by his colleagues. As the game continued I consistently heard chatter from the drummers pointing at the game, reacting positively or negatively based on the moves made. After I won the second game the common phrase became, “Ay! Okay, now I beat the Obroni!” (Meaning ‘from over seas’ this is a common phrase to call Americans and Westerners in general). I was amazed to see the game bring everyone together: the spectators were actively talking to the players and to each other, people began making jokes, some started poking fun at the defeated, “Oh!” and “Ayeee!” was being uttered sporadically. I had felt at that moment that this game had so much more potential than I had imagined, I was very grateful that I decided to learn this game.

Playing Oware I found so much more benefit than I could have imagined. Since learning nam-nam in Kumasi I have taught nearly everyone in the University of California and California State programs (and the ones who haven’t learned yet definitely will soon enough -- got to love mob mentality!) We play on an almost daily basis and it is so much fun to have a person come up and make impromptu challenges which almost always entices more people to join. The disease of this game has even spread to international students in other programs as well, and I’ve had a couple of students tell me they bought boards to show people when they go back home. In the local context I have found that many are aware of Oware and are more than willing to play if asked politely. I found it comical that the same phrases people were uttering to me before my chess matches in college in the US were being said by the Ghanaians almost verbatim.

The impact and importance of these strategy games are profound. There is definite reason why these games are passed from generation to generation. In strategy games in general, often the element of luck is taken out entirely. Each player is in complete control of his/her actions and thus has the freedom to win and succeed, just as much as they have the freedom to fail. In a potential move there are elements of offense and defense that can map out different objectives and motives of the player in that moment. Critical thinking is being consistently tested with the movement of the pebbles allowing for immense variation of outcomes thus forcing the player to act decisively and effectively in the moment to find the ideal move to progress in the game and win. There are many benefits that can come from learning and playing these strategy games. However, for me personally, I feel having games like these in an academic setting such as a University can be beneficial to anyone that is willing to play because it provides a means to find common ground with another person. Something I have learned is even possible in an environment where it can be almost impossible to communicate to the person through conventional means; sometimes it is simply as easy as saying, “Let’s Play!”
References


Editor’s Note: Oware is also called Mancala in other parts of Africa. It is believed to be a game that has been played for more than 7,000 years on the African continent.
Walking through Cape Coast was very festive and vibrant. People were dressed up in costumes and original African garments. Some people were even covered in mud and on stilts. There were so many masqueraders, clowns, acrobats, and performers joining the procession and all of them were dancing for the crowd. But if you pay them too much attention then they will expect you to tip them some money. There is almost always a catch. However, that does not stop the fun. Children are running everywhere you go. On every street you look up there is loud music and groups of people dancing. The aroma of food fills the air. On every street there is a vendor making kebobs, fish and other local dishes. As I get closer to the music I join the crowd and dance. Whether you can dance or not, the temptation is irresistible. The music pulls you into the crowd and gets you in a dancing mood. The people continue to dance so there are no awkward feelings. I dance and laugh. Then I continue walking through the fun-filled streets. Next, the chiefs come through the crowd on their palanquins, waving and dancing while exhausted looking men are carrying the palanquins on their heads and bouncing them to the rhythm of the drums that are right behind them. During this whole event people forget about their problems, people live freely as they come into another year at the Cape Coast festival or Fetu Afahye.

Fetu Afahye is a festival celebrated by the chiefs and people of Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. The origin of the Fetu Afahye dates back to the Fetu Kingdom of the 17th century (Bruner, 2005; 120). Fetu Afahye is celebrated by the Oguaa people of Cape Coast. It is celebrated annually every September. In the past, there was an outbreak of disease which killed many people. Therefore, the festival is celebrated to keep the town clean and to commemorate a bumper harvest from the sea as well as performing rituals to thank the seventy-seven gods of the Oguaa Traditional Area. According to the Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly, “The festival is also used as a calendar for the farming seasons of the Oguaa Traditional Area and this particular phenomenon is also referred to as ‘Afahyia’, meaning a loop of seasons.” In this paper I will examine the importance and history of the Cape Coast Festival in the Ghanaian Culture and the relevance I believe it will continue to have, along with my personal experiences.

To begin with, the preparation for the Festival occurs in the last week of August and the actual celebration follows on the 1st of September. The chiefs of the Oguaa Traditional Area set aside Wednesday for receiving and welcoming citizens of Cape Coast. This particular day is also characterized by drumming and dancing from the Asafo Company with an accompanying feast. It is also noted as a day of socialization and resolution of issues (Bruner, 2005; 120). “A religious ceremony is held Thursday night in front of the Nana Paprata shrine with accompanying rituals and dancing to summon spirits of the ancestors to enable the priests and priestesses to foretell future events” according to the Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly. The ceremony usually lasts until the next morning. The main aim of this ceremony is to cleanse the Oguaa Traditional Area of any bad spirits. During the same period, a bull is always used to purify the town. Prior to this purification, the bull is sent to Nana Tabir’s shrine to cleanse the bull for sacrifice on the ultimate day. The bull is later sacrificed at Paparatum (Ghanaweb.com).
During my experience the bull was being held at Cape Coast Castle. Originally, I thought one of the reasons of the Festival had something to do with the Africans that were taken into slavery, but this is not a specific reason for the Festival. Indirectly, however, the celebration is a homecoming like Thanksgiving, so Africans from the Diaspora whose ancestors passed through these castles and the entire world is invited and welcomed! The Cape Coast Castle is built on site of the initial Tabir shrine so the bull is held there until it was walked to the location of the sacrifice.

I talked to many people in the street to see what they liked or knew about the Festival. I was truly surprised to learn that some people did not acknowledge or know what had happened to the people in the past and they were celebrating the Festival without knowing the exact reasons. I also asked some local people what they thought about the daily life that goes on around the Cape Coast Castle and they did not have much knowledge about the Castle or the people that were forced inside of it, they were only there trying to make money by selling merchandise to the visiting foreigners.

However, the Festival serves many functions for the people. According to “Culture on Tour” by Edward Bruner, “It is a libation to the seventy-seven Oguaa gods for the harvest from the earth to the sea, an opportunity for spiritual renewal for the community, a display of the traditional social organization, a period for renovation of the shrines, a time of family reunion, and a period of carnival and merrymaking” (121). For a week there is singing, drumming, and dancing in the streets of Cape Coast. I wonder how many people actually know and understand that a piece of the Festival is to honor deities. For the younger generations, I doubt that they are celebrating for the same reasons. As time goes by, I expect the veneration of deities will be of less and less of significance for those who attend the Festival. Also, with the community being poor and not having much funding, it is clear that outside sources (largely businesses and companies) play a significant role in financing the Festival. I wonder how long they will continue to fund it and what are they getting in return. Eventually, things will change and Cape Coast may begin to modernize and lose the true meaning behind the festival.

The Festival is important for many reasons. For one, it teaches people about their history. Socially, it serves as a reunion of family members, and loved ones. At this time, quarrels and misunderstandings are settled. It also gives the people a chance to assess the efficiency of their chiefs. Many citizens who left the town long ago return to see whether the traditional rulers have implemented development projects agreed upon. Culturally, the rich cultural heritage of the people is usually being manifested during festivals. It also strengthens all to play their roles as good citizens. It provides a forum where the chief must be more effective, morally upright, and accountable to the people.

In the future, I think people may have less understanding about the actual historical meaning of the Cape Coast festival. Undoubtedly, people will still continue to celebrate, however it may be for a new meaning that would still include: unity, bonding and merrymaking.
I do not believe that the younger generation understands the full meaning of what it is to serve seventy-seven gods. Times have changed since the beginning of the Festival and the majority of the people are currently believers of Christianity or Islam; therefore there may be less people attending the Festival in the future or there will have to be some major changes within the Festival concerning the rituals. According to Professor Kuupole from University of Cape Coast who was interviewed for Business Ghana.com, “In Ghana, the celebration of traditional festivals plays a crucial role in protecting our cultural identity and also serves as a tool for educating young ones for accelerated development.”

To summarize, the significance of the Festival lies in the fact that each festival is celebrated by a community to mark the change of seasons, the worship of gods or the blessings of the Creator, and the way forward. Thus, by celebrating, this knowledge and tradition can be better passed on to the next generation. However, as time passes, many things lose the full meaning. Take Christmas in America for example; Christmas used to be the festival of singing carols, dressing up the Christmas tree, making sweets and giving away generous gifts, and rejoicing over Christ’s birth. Christmas used to be the time when old friends would meet and celebrate. But today, the spirit of Christmas seems to have been lost.

Singing carols, humming hymns, homemade sweets and church service have all become the past, as many of us would rather text each other and stay home and watch reality TV than celebrate the season with passion. Some fear that festivals are becoming an occasion of extravagant and ostentatious show, but festivals in Ghana are a symbol of traditional and cultural values. If efforts are not taken to preserve them, we might lose some of their unique identity and meanings.

All in all, from my own personal experience the Cape Coast Festival was very colorful and there was a procession of chiefs on their palanquins, drumming, dancing and firing of guns. There was a very large crowd, mainly the youth and thousands of people including foreigners from all over the country and outside the country that travelled to witness the Festival. This festival seems to have an effect of creating pride in peoples’ cultural heritage and spiritual affinity. I think the relevance of Cape Coast Festival in Ghana today would be to keep the community together by showing unity and to keep the culture and beliefs strong. The culture was very strong and with modernization and the influence of Christianity, many traditional ways may be transformed into something new or forgotten altogether. The festival is a way to help people remember their traditional heritage and build unity that can provide empowerment.

In conclusion, the Fetu Afayhe is a lively event and the unity it provides is wonderful. People from different parts of the world experience the event with the local residents. It is a good way to be welcomed into Africa for a first-time visitor. The Festival is full of unity and the chiefs come out to celebrate along with the priest and priestesses. It can provide a full view of much of Ghana’s traditional culture all in one week of activities. During that week one can see members of a community come together like they were never apart. The meaning of the Festival may be different for many people.
The original meaning is a fact of history, but today and in the future many people may have different reasons for celebrating. It can be a time for forgiveness and the welcoming of relatives that have not been around all year. For the children, it can be the best time of the year for them because it is fun and full of action with excitement everywhere; and they get to enjoy every minute of it. Even if people do not know or understand the historical reason for the Festival and it loses some of the traditional meanings as new generations emerge, it will still produce the same impact overall. People will still gather around, as it is the place to be in September. As long as there is funding, I believe the event will continue. Even with Christianity now being the major religion, the event has essentially remained the same. I believe Fetu Afahye will always stand out among the many festivals in Ghana, and it will continue to have some purpose for everyone who participates, even if those purposes change or are different.

References


Culture and its Counterparts – by Rebecca Heron

“Culture is... a concept that defies definition” (Awedoba, 25). My idea of what I thought culture was has changed dramatically in the few weeks that I have been in Ghana. When I think of culture, I think of the “culture days” that I had all throughout elementary and middle school. I was under the impression that culture was mostly the food you ate and the clothes you wore. I absolutely loved “culture day” because I loved all the food that everyone would bring in – couscous, fried plantains, samosas, and enchiladas... sugar cookies? I never knew what to bring because I've never really identified with a culture, with my own culture, with whatever it was. I would always ask my parents what I could bring to represent my culture, and I always got the same response – sugar cookies. “Because you make them for Santa, and that’s part of your culture, isn’t it?” I’m fairly certain that my parents never knew what to bring to “culture day”, either.

Now that I’m living and breathing in a culture that’s very different from mine, I’m starting to look within myself and define my own culture. Culture is much more than food and clothing, even though those are important aspects. The American culture seems to be based on economy, government, knowledge, national pride, status... a lot of impersonal things, if you ask me. From my experience, the Ghanaian culture prides itself on religion, ways of everyday life, clothes, organizations, transportation, language, and things of that nature. That’s not to say that both cultures do not have aspects of each of those topics. However, I believe that the main focus of a culture says a lot about a nation. “It is not so much that the various definitions [of culture] are wrong; rather the problem lies in the polysemous nature of the concept which has more than one meaning and in fact means different things to different people” (Awedoba, 25).

The most common idea of culture is in reference to the arts: music, theater arts, literature, and the overall appreciation of the arts. The arts, however, are just one aspect of the all-encompassing theme of culture. In places like Italy, Rome, Venice, and France, it is safe to say that arts such as paintings, music, dramas, and plays are very much so at the center of their culture. In Ghana there is plenty of art ranging from street murals to painted canvases, beaded bracelets and everything in between. Music is widely abundant and at the heart of every Ghanaian. Dance is a way of life and babies are born with rhythm in their soul. When you think of Venice, Italy, your mind probably is not so quick to associate it with Ghana, Africa. Nevertheless, when you think critically about the culture of each place, it is fascinating to realize just how similar they are.

Respect, family, and status: three key features of the Ghanaian culture that seem to be a focal point. Respect is very important in Ghana – especially for the elders. Family is also very important – and it is not limited to blood relatives. “We need each other” (Prof. Irene K. Odotei, 2014). We are all brothers and sisters and we all share the same Earth. We are all human; however we are born into different statuses. The village, culture, profession, and religion that you are born into all help shape you as a person. For the most part, if your father weaves Kente cloth, you will also weave Kente for a profession. If your parents own a farm, you will probably work on that farm. Then there are those who are born into chieftaincy. Chieftaincy holds a much higher status than fishermen, no doubt. However it is mostly understood that all walks of life are just as important as the next. A person’s quality of life is often impacted by what social status they have.
Somebody brought up a point that was so simple it was profound; those who do not have much do not need much. Families that are used to going to a well, retrieving water, sleeping on the ground with a single blanket, not eating when the ocean does not provide... those families can be perfectly happy. Quite honestly, they might even be happier than the majority of American families. They do not know what they do not have, and they do not need anything more than what they do have. Most of the time, everybody wants the new next best thing and I think it can kill the soul in America. Learning to be happy with what you have is such an important ability to have.

Knowledge and education are important for personal and economic growth. For those without access to formal education, knowledge is passed on from generation to generation. Knowledge is not the measurement of how many textbooks you have read. Knowledge is possessing the skills that you need for your daily life. In the Ghanaian culture, it is important for women to know how to carry their babies on their back. I have seen many young girls carrying dolls on their back – acquiring the knowledge of how to do so from their mothers and aunties. Young men learn how to fish, work on the farm, and carry loads on their heads. All of these skills are learned from their fathers and uncles. Even without education through school systems, young girls and boys are still able to attain knowledge through culture.

The economy is driven by the variety of people who perform all tasks harmoniously. There cannot be a successful economy without diversity. From the businessman to the lady selling plantain chips – all people with all jobs and abilities are needed to create a working system. The economy in the states is driven by ambitious and financially driven professionals in suits and ties, trying to advance themselves above the rest of their colleagues. This is not “good” or “bad”, it’s just different than what I’ve experienced in Ghana. But I guess that no matter where you go there will always be people who only care about reaching the top. I just have not experienced any of that quite yet in Ghana. So far the economy in Ghana, at least at a local level that I can see, seems as though everybody is working together. Taxi drivers tell each other the current “obroni” rates, people selling things on the street look out for each other if someone wants a water sachet instead of bread, and people just help each other out in general. These services are what keep the economy running. In the United States there are also visible signs of a growing economy but it presents itself in different ways. I work at a real estate office so I help people rent commercial land and start up their business. More and more independent businesses are starting and are able to keep their feet on the ground for longer than usual which shows progress. There is also an increase in the purchasing of local produce instead of imported produce which is good for the local community and environment. Economic growth is happening everywhere and in different ways – there is no cookie cutter version of productive economic growth.

In Ghana, many products are produced and sold locally which is good for the people of Ghana. In the US, we import a lot of goods so that they’re cheaper, and it ends up hurting our economy in the long run. In Ghana, a good majority of people wear local fabrics and clothes that are sewn by a seamstress right in their neighborhood. There are also plenty of people who buy their clothes from the malls. For example, the Accra Mall is very similar to any other mall that I have been to in the US. That is where the newest and next best clothing and fashion accessories are coming into style are sold.
I cannot find any census-like statistics, but although many people wear clothes from the Mall, many people also wear unique shirts, pants, and dresses that were made by a seamstress. There are definitely those people in the states who have clothes made for them, or even make their own clothes, but it’s not nearly as common. Wearing handmade clothing here is a lot more common and, as a result, is always in style. I look forward to wearing my bold-print handmade pants when I get back to the States.

In America, it is especially popular right now to wear clothing that represents the American flag. On any given day, many people are proud to be American and proud to represent our country, but on the Fourth of July, we are especially full of American pride. Every family celebrates differently; generally we wear the colors of our flag, barbeque steaks, go to independence parades, and watch fireworks. July Fourth is a time for everyone to be patriotic and proud of the place we call home. I assume that the anniversary of Kwame Nkrumah’s birthday this upcoming September 21st will be very similar – a time for all Ghanaians to celebrate the life of their first president, their rich history and beautiful homeland. I have been privileged to experience a few different celebrations such as the Cape Coast celebration and a corn festival for a local village, but I’m excited to see how the whole country comes together to celebrate his birthday or Founder’s Day.

One of my favorite parts of being in Ghana for ten months is being able to really live and breathe the ways of life. I am learning valuable life skills that seem so simple; I’ve just never been introduced to them. Washing clothes, for example. Throughout my life I have been fortunate enough to have a washing machine and drier, and I’ve never learned the proper way of washing clothes by hand. My mom didn’t have the luxury of a washing machine when she was growing up, so she used to fill up her bath tub with water and wash her clothes there. That makes me wonder why she did not pass down the skill, but I guess she figured I would never need it. Now, however, I’m proud to say that I have not taken advantage of the laundry services on campus – I am washing everything by hand. It is a little more time consuming than I am used to, but I love thinking about how much water and energy I am saving. It also gives me a greater appreciation of the clothes that I have.

When I think about the differences in the ways of life here and back home, I realize how they are actually quite similar. Bargaining for food, cold showers, and tro-tro rides are all second nature to me now. It’s no different than … okay, I have not really bargained for food before. But, cold showers? Just like taking a shower after my brother when he uses all the hot water. Tro-tros? Big Blue Bus system. There is really not much of a difference. The diet here is not quite the same and I am trying to develop a love for kenkey, but that will come with time. I have already become a huge advocate for jollof rice with “tomato sauce” and gari. Living on campus and having student leaders to help ease us in to the transitions of daily life has been immensely helpful. It has been relatively smooth sailing ever since the jet lag wore off.

So, what is culture? Now I know that culture is so much more than the food you bring to “culture day” in school. Culture is what you breathe. It is in your food, clothing, schools, churches, kitchens, bedrooms, and museums. It is the attitudes you have and the values you were raised on. Culture has no textbook definition. Culture is as unique as each tro-tro that passes by. Culture... culture is.
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Part Four – Health and Wellness
When I made the decision to study abroad and began to research program options, there were many things I took into consideration. Which program offered the academic opportunities I was interested in? Where could I go that would challenge me, take me out of my comfort zone, and help me to grow? What obstacles was I willing to tackle, and what perspectives were missing from my life? Never once did I consider whether or not I would be able to exist physically in the country; as an able bodied individual, this is not an obstacle that I needed to consider. Normally, I’m hyper aware of physical barriers within infrastructure. I grew up watching my mother battle Multiple Sclerosis, and understand what it is like to constantly be surveying an environment for the path of least resistance: stairs, long walks, even raised curbs can become a hindrance to someone with a physical disability. Despite having grown up in this environment, I did not take mobility into account when choosing to study abroad in Ghana. It was not until I arrived, and began to observe the ways in which infrastructure can truly affect mobility, that I again began to consider and appreciate all of the ways in which society controls what individuals can and cannot accomplish, thus solidifying what might otherwise be seen as normal human variation into the categories of “able” and “disabled”.

Understanding disability and its implications is a complex topic, especially in regards to countries considered to have an underdeveloped or developing infrastructure. Ghana is no exception: although there are conversations and movements taking place surrounding the health infrastructure that exists regarding disability, it is deeply intertwined with complex social issues. The term “disability” encompasses an array of biological, psychological, and sociological implications and consequences. When attempting to understand the impact of physical or mental disabilities on the lives of individuals, it is impossible to untangle these three spheres of influence. Disability is more than simply one's ability to perform functions; the concept is shaped “through the actions of society erecting barriers and structures” (Baffoe, 2013, p.188) that limit actions, therefore disallowing some individuals from participating “normally” in society. In addition, there are perceptions that vary widely across society regarding the rights and impact of a disabled population, which play a role in determining how an individual sees themselves and their own potential, creating a lasting psychological impact.

The World Health Organization (WHO) categorizes disabilities three separate ways: impairments, which refers to a “problem in body function or structure activities limitation”, activity limitations, which are suggested by “difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action”, and participation restriction, which covers “problem[s] experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations” (World Health Organization, 2014). By these definitions alone, it is clear that disabilities expand beyond the physical. Each category requires some type of interaction with infrastructure, the community, or normalized behavior expectations in order for the trait to be considered a disability.

In order to understand how infrastructures dictate and define disability within Ghana, it is crucial to understand the ways they currently exist. Firstly, there are physical infrastructure barriers. Most streets are lined with open gutters, generally a foot or more across and several feet deep and often filled with mud, trash, and even sewage.
These make travel difficult for the able-bodied population and nearly impossible for anyone wheelchair bound or sight impaired. In addition, there are very few buildings equipped with ramps or elevators, making access difficult. A student at the University of Ghana, Legon reported that unless someone was available to carry him upstairs, he would sometimes not be able to attend classes (Baffoe, 2013, p.194). In addition, the main form of public transportation is a system of tro-tros, or van-like busses that travel various routes to specific locations. These tro-tros, while relatively inexpensive and functional, are not conducive to anyone who must use a wheelchair. By limiting access to resources like public transportation and education, people with physical disabilities have their potential severely stunted. This can lead to an increased risk for low income and poverty, as job opportunities are significantly decreased.

The Government of Ghana has adopted a human rights initiative that addresses several of these issues and attempts to provide solutions. For example, a physically disabled person may import a vehicle that suits his or her specific needs (Persons With Disabilities Act, Section 24). While this would enable a disabled person to travel as needed, it first requires that they have enough money to import a specially made vehicle. Unfortunately, the high correlation between disability and poverty due to the reduced ability to work and access to education creates a situation in which laws like these serve very few within the population. In addition, the Persons With Disabilities Act (2006) details a policy that allows for businesses who employ a person with disabilities to receive “special incentives”, and states that persons with disabilities who are on a job search list for longer than two years will receive either training, tools and materials, or a loan to start a business (Sections 9-15). While each of these poses a potential solution, they require a high level of personal participation and collaboration on behalf of businesses, individuals, and the government. In a country currently dealing with the threat of the Ebola Virus, a Cholera outbreak, and insufficient funding to meet some of the basic needs of the majority of citizens, it seems understandable that well intentioned programs like these are not executed to their full potential.

Another form that disability can take in society is difficulty in learning or in social environments. Often categorized as “mental disabilities”, these span a large range of mild learning challenges to a complete inability to function on one’s own, and the requirement of a lifetime of care. In order to serve these individuals, the government has made provisions for infrastructure surrounding their care and development, in many cases, these come in the form of separate schools. Although the government provides some funding for schools set up to teach those with disabilities, they are not numerous enough or located widely enough to serve the population of children needing special instruction (Global Campaign for Education, 2014). Regular schools are ill-equipped to handle even the most basic needs of many of these children, thus creating another barrier to access. By integrating special needs students into the general schools, more students would have access to education. In addition, integrating students allows for discussion and empathy surrounding disabled students, and may help reduce the mystery and stigma surrounding illness in the community.

In addition to infrastructures, disability can be defined by local sociologies and cultural attitudes. In Ghana, religion plays a big role in understanding the disabled. While the majority of the country identifies as Christian or Muslim, traditional religions and beliefs are not only still practiced, but
many traditional customs and ideas have been interwoven with the colonial ideas to create a very unique culture. Within these traditional beliefs are ideas regarding physical, mental and social handicaps. For example, there are traditional beliefs that disabilities, both physical and mental, are either demons or signs of a “warped or evil spirit” (Agyei-Mensah, 2014, p.205). There is also a belief that disabilities are punishment from the Gods, or atonement for the sins of one’s family or ancestors. Some beliefs blame the mothers of disabled children, suggesting that the child is a punishment from the Gods for an action she committed that angered them. These stigmas create an environment that is hardly conducive to living successfully with a disability; there is little desire to associate with children or families thought to have brought the evils upon themselves. Although many claim to have abandoned the traditional beliefs in favor of other religion or western scientific views, the cultural stigma remains strong. In addition, the growth of new religions such as Christianity have in some cases lessened the perpetuation of this type of stigma, but in other cases provided a different avenue through which to deal with it. For example, many families of disabled people choose to send their children to prayer camps instead of medical facilities or schools. At these prayer camps, which are much cheaper and often easier for rural populations to access, patients are often forced to endure treatments that include fasting, isolation, and even beatings at the hand of the nurses or attendants (IRIN News, 2014). The Ghanaian government has made attempts at addressing some of the problems and stigma surrounding mental illness, but legislation such as the 2012 Mental Health Act only address the formal, government run side of mental health; the private sector and social stigma are much harder for the government to shape.

Despite these obstacles, it cannot be said that there is no support or understanding for people with disabilities in Ghana. There are numerous NGOs, some dedicated to specific diseases, such as Cerebral Palsy, Alzheimer’s Disease, and Autism, and others dedicated to caretakers of the disabled. There are non profit schools privately created for children with disabilities, such as New Horizon Special School, created by Mrs. Salome Francois for her daughter. New Horizon and schools like it provide a safe, strength based learning environment for children to learn, as well as a place for adults to harness talents, learn new skills and develop trades that will allow them to support themselves financially. There continues to be increasing support for the disabled community, both through government legislation and through the work of educated Ghanaians and those who are passionate about the rights of their family and friends. As the country continues to make strides in infrastructure, it is imperative that the government keep this vulnerable population in mind. There is great potential within the disabled population: under the right social constructions, one of these potentials is to be thriving, contributing members of the community.

Often times when I walk around campus and the general Accra area, I think about my mom. I think about her as I hop over gutters. I think about her as I climb stairs in the heat and humidity. I think about how hard it would be for her to exist in a place like Ghana, simply because of a physical disability. When I consider how many people she has positively affected in her work as a physical therapist, and everything she has been able to do for me and my family, even while battling Multiple Sclerosis, I am convinced that disabilities need not define someone’s life.
Although this battle dictates some choices that must be made, and can sometimes provide frustrating limitations, the disabled community in Ghana has much to offer their country. As the infrastructure surrounding access, treatment and cultural acceptance continues to grow in Ghana, there will be rewards in the form of an entire group of people, previously excluded and relegated to a life of poverty, contributing to the productivity of their families, community, and country.

References


HIV/AIDS Stigmatization on the MSM community in Ghana – by Mandy Zenda

Africa is a pivotal center for research and medical attention due to its high rates of reported HIV/AIDS cases. Ghana, specifically, a country with an estimated 25.37 million people, has a recorded 2012 population of 240,000 people living with HIV/AIDS (Population Reference Bureau, 2012). Now add to this number the number of unreported cases that fall through the cracks every year due to discrimination, which stems not only from friends and family of the individual, but also from the medical professionals who fail to understand the importance of emotional empathy when dealing with cases of sensitive nature. This paper will serve to detail the risks faced by members of the Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) community in Ghana, due to social and political stigmas about homosexuality and HIV/AIDS that prevent effective and accessible health care services from reaching at risk communities.

In order to begin understanding the stigmatization placed on the MSM community, some background on their lifestyle and beliefs are important to ascertain. Men who have sex with men consist of a predominantly underground community of homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual men, who due to fear of social rejection and ridicule, are forced to keep their sexual activities private. The term MSM was constructed in the 1990’s as a means to classify the sexual activities of men, regardless of their social identities. Epidemiologists determined the need to study individuals based on behavioral category subsets, as a result of HIV/AIDS research and prevention methods targeting sexual minority groups, becoming more prevalent. A few general facts about MSM identities and partner preferences, obtained from an online informational report from the AIDSTAR-One website on Reaching MSM in Ghana with HIV and AIDS Interventions, states that the prevalence rate of HIV in the MSM population for the following ages are approximately: 15.3% for MSM ages 18-19, 19.4% for ages 20-24, 37.3% for ages 25-29, and 50% for ages 30 and above (Clemmons, 2009). Analyzing this data shows that the older MSM population is more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection, but it is important not to discount the fact that the youth are not too far behind in numbers. When it comes to social preferences of partner types, 31% of MSM identify themselves as “gay or “homosexual” while 61% identify as “bi-sexual” and have had multiple concurrent partners in the past year (Clemmons, 2009). Due to the taboo nature of discussing topics of sexuality, especially in Ghana, men who have sex with men have fallen victim to the lack of information on safe sex practices that are generally reserved and aimed towards educating the heterosexual population. Two key aspects that link MSM with higher rates of HIV infections and transmission are the type of sexual behaviors they engage in, and the level of access to knowledge they have in regards to the risks they face. Having multiple sexual partners in the MSM community consecutively makes an individual more prone to transmitting HIV than individuals who have a broader network of partners to choose from. When you account for the lack of information available to these at risk groups, the numbers go up.
Ghana's MSM population is overwhelmingly misguided and misinformed on topics of safe sexual practices. A majority of the time, the information that is relayed back and forth in this community comes from the people from within the social group. Considering the lack of governmental programs aimed towards MSM, the information that circulates tends to be based more on what has been traditionally practiced than on what should be practiced. The use of condoms is a critical issue that must be stressed during any discussion of HIV/AIDS prevention. Surprisingly, the general beliefs about condom usage in the MSM community typically disregard their importance and necessity because of a belief that performing anal or oral sex acts are safer than penile-vaginal intercourse performed by heterosexual partners. Due to this misconception, men who have sex with men become victim to high levels of HIV infections and are among the most at risk populations for transmission. According to the Ghana AIDS Commission, “findings show that MSM, though perceived to constitute a small proportion of the male population in Ghana, contributed significantly to the spread of HIV” (Ghana AIDS Commission, 2012). A key factor that has delayed the development of necessary public health programs that could be targeting at risk communities is the high degree of political opposition that results in the denial of the occurrence of homosexual activity in Ghana.

Beliefs about the unnatural state of same sex unions have fueled homophobic fears in African socio-political affairs. Many organizations and NGO’s refrain from supporting HIV/AIDS prevention and control groups, who include minority at risk groups like MSM in their targeted populations, because they fear the negative social ramifications of involving themselves with such controversial and socially unacceptable issues. There is increasing pressure and harassment aimed towards political party members to ensure that stigmatized groups like MSM continue to be harassed and ostracized. Comments from the former President of Ghana, Prof. John Atta-Mills, serve as a painfully recent reminder of the degree to which anti-homosexual attitudes are ingrained in the foundation of Ghana’s domestic policies.

“During introduction of the party standard-bearer nominee, the incumbent president, Prof. John Atta-Mills, references were made to a reported “surge” in homosexual activity, particularly in Western and Central Regions of Ghana. When President Atta-Mills took the microphone, he picked up on the comments made in his introduction, making homophobic comments in his acceptance speech, calling for the identification, arrest, detention, prosecution and deportation of “known homosexuals” in the country. Meanwhile, audience members added fuel to the fire, invoking verses from Leviticus and calling for death for homosexuals instead of just imprisonment or deportation. The President made no attempt to correct the mob” (Dupree, 2012).

This harsh reality of political and social injustice towards individuals of nontraditional sexual orientation is what forces the MSM population to keep their identities and activities hidden. The unfortunate consequence of this is that it creates a system of fear for people who most need the resources to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. If men who have sex with men have no confidence in the support of professionals who are supposed to be helping them, then the whole institution of preventative health care falls through the cracks.
The foundation for any functioning health or social service program rests on its ability to provide accessible, and effective care to those in need. The moment an individual no longer feels safe enough to approach a government sanctioned health care facility to request information or aid, is the moment not only the institution has failed, but the working professionals have failed in their duty to serve. Ghana, like most of the world, has a culture of rejecting things that do not conform to the social norms or go against traditionally held ways of life and beliefs. This holds especially true in Ghana when it comes to punishing individuals who fail to comply with the “Ghanaian” way of doing things. The reason why MSM groups are so under the radar in Ghana is because of this fear they have from prosecution and criminalization by society. Homosexuality is so condemned and fought against in the society, that even the simple act of going to a clinic to get an HIV test done could be perceived as a life-threatening act for an individual. Privacy and patient confidentiality are pillars of safe and effective health care systems, and once that confidence is breached, there is no more hope in the sanctity of the service. There are many instances when MSM are victimized from the moment they enter a medical clinic. Everything from whispers from the gossiping receptionists, to the incriminating stares from fellow patients, creates a tone of hostility towards the individual unfortunate enough to be identified as a non-heterosexual male. A key step in preventing the transmission of HIV is first finding out if you have it. This is crucial for the MSM community to understand, because since most members feel too threatened to ask for medical help, they put themselves and their partners at risk of contracting their infections as well. Top down political reform is crucial in implementing programs that are more sensitive to these at risk populations. Professionals need to be trained on how to create a more caring and objective environment that welcomes people of all backgrounds, so as to ensure that no individual feels they are excluded from health care services. A step towards realizing the significance of implementing this reform is understanding that HIV/AIDS, if left untreated in anyone, will affect not only that person, but also anyone else that has shared the same partner. MSM identify in many different ways, and a large number of them engage in heterosexual activities with women along with men. As long as this community continues to grow, and the information tunnel remains narrow, the more people that are at risk of contracting HIV.

The men who have sex with men population of Ghana is a highly stigmatized group of individuals, who live in an area of Africa that holds very traditional and conservative views on what is socially acceptable. They are considered an at risk population for HIV/AIDS infections, due to the nature of their sexual activities and low profile lifestyles, that inhibit them from openly asking for and obtaining efficient health care options. There are great efforts being made in the political spectrum of Ghanaian politics to keep this community out of sight and service and to enforce laws that criminalize “unnatural carnal knowledge.” Although progress has been made in creating more equal institutions for the distribution of services to MSM, there is still a fundamental lack of understanding of how to professionally approach situations in which the traditional values of the local people are being challenged. Regardless of how long an individual has been in the medical profession, if they are confronted with a person who is a member of MSM requesting information on safe sex practices and alternative methods such as anal or oral sex, that doctor or nurse, subconsciously or not, is going to display some discomfort or judgment towards that person, due to the unfamiliar nature of the encounter. Knowing this, and fearing that they could be not only judged, but also criminalized, if not physically abused because of their disclosure, MSM tend to reject these programs and facilities before they themselves are rejected.
The more this population remains uninformed about the risks of HIV, the more at risk they become. Until it becomes socially permissible for a person who engages in non-traditional sex acts and behaviors to do so, Ghana will see the HIV epidemic continue to increase. Shoving populations like MSM into the dark corners of a room does not eliminate the problem. Education, acceptance, and reform must be accomplished first and foremost, before the world can start taking the necessary steps to defeating the issue of sexually transmitted diseases, among all at risk populations.

References:

A Look At The Harmful Side of Culture – by Kim Rabii

Leave it to me to wait till the last minute to fill out my study abroad application. Switching back and forth between which country I want to apply to until it is almost too late. Finding out all the information I need and the documents that must be filled in order to apply when it is practically too late. Running around campus struggling to get all the paperwork done and signed before it is too late. Biking furiously all over Santa Cruz to find a place that will have passport pictures ready the same day I take them because I need them before it is too late. All this only to come to Ghana and realize that despite the rushed application process I coincidentally signed myself up for an internship with an organization that I can really see myself loving. The application process was all a blur but I remember part of the paperwork requiring you to claim where or through which organization you would like to volunteer, intern, or do research in. Being as completely clueless as I was at the time of applying, I simply looked up how to get involved in the healthcare field near Accra and stumbled on the West Africa AIDS Foundation. Sure working with HIV and AIDS patients sounded great to me, so just like that I put the organization down on the sheet of paper and continued with my rushed application, considering my main goal was merely turning it in on time and having the chance to go to Ghana.

I hadn't even thought about that part of the application again until I arrived. Something tells me that it was all meant to be or just a bizarre case of luck because a few mornings before I found out that Auntie Rose, the Resident Director of the California Program, had set up the internship for me, we happened to have a wellness breakfast with Dr. Naa and I specifically made it a point to introduce myself to her and ask about her work because I thought it would be wonderful to get involved. She was so friendly and easy going that afterwards I thought it would be ideal to be able to work for her in her clinic. Of course, whether it was fate or fortune, a couple mornings later Auntie Rose met with the group and reminded us of the paperwork we turned in regarding the volunteer, internship, or research work we wanted to complete while here. I had no recollection of what I had put on that paper but was pleasingly shocked to find out that I had said I wanted to work with Dr. Naa’s AIDS foundation and that it was all ready for me to begin. I was shocked, yet thrilled at the same time.

So here I am one week later and having visited the clinic a few times, I have learned more specifically what Dr. Naa’s work consists of and realized that this could be a great environment for me. I find the work that she does and the progress that the foundation and clinic have made so inspiring since it is a small organization, and yet it has a great impact on various regions in Ghana. Not only does the clinic manage to deal with HIV/AIDS patients confidentially, but it works with patients with other illnesses as well, making sure they receive proper medication and receive referrals when needed. With the internship being so accommodating, I get to job shadow the nurses while simultaneously helping with the West Africa AIDS Foundation (WAAF), which focuses on implementing intervention programs and providing proper care throughout Ghana in order to win the battle against HIV and AIDS. Because of my interest in the medical field I am eager to gain hands-on experience, especially with people who suffer from HIV/AIDS because it is an opportunity that would be rare to find back in the U.S.
The first day of my internship Dr. Naa shared with me some of the most unbelievable stories about homosexual patients of HIV and AIDS who find it exceedingly difficult to seek treatment at places other than her clinic. They place a label on homosexual patients of HIV/AIDS to be MSM or FSW, which stands for males who have sex with males and females who have sex with women. This label seems to be more culturally accepted than homosexual, gay, queer, and etc. Yet, due to their homosexuality, these patients are often shunned from clinics and refused help. Hearing this led me to further research the issue and hold an interview with Dr. Naa because although Ghana is seen as a more “developed” country in Africa, the stigma still exists against homosexuality and is an aspect that inhibits the society from developing.

Dr. Naa informed me that the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has been lowered to only around 1.5% currently in Ghana. However, the rate of infection among the homosexual population is 17%, which has lowered recently from 25%. Since Ghanaians, generally, relate HIV and AIDS infections to immoral sexual activity and promiscuity, due to their religious and traditional beliefs, people who are infected are often avoided and considered immoral citizens who are a disgrace to their culture. Not only are people with HIV or AIDS neglected from a society but homosexuals in general are harassed for being openly gay. If this wasn’t bad enough, families who are related to victims of HIV/AIDS are also stigmatized, which often leads to family members rejecting their own relatives in order to avoid judgments from their communities. All these complications lead to victims of HIV and AIDS being terrified to seek help. These prejudices and practices have left Ghana with a silent and ignored population. This issue impacts how the nation develops and the relationships among its citizens.

Stigmas have existed for centuries and are so intensely believed by societies that it is exceedingly difficult to alter the mindset of people regarding the stigma or to eliminate the stigma overall. It is especially common in places that hold a powerful relationship to their culture and traditions, like many African societies. People who often differ from the cultural norm, due to a certain attribute, are considered to have a social stigma that is highly disapproved of by the fellow members of their society. This outlook leads to discrimination and overgeneralizations of groups of people. The stigmas are usually affixed as well, which leaves no room for change and willingness to learn about the specific situation or traits held by the stigmatized person (Keba Africa). It is clear that stigmas are harmful to a society because they create outcasts and stereotypes. People with HIV/AIDS often are afraid to receive treatment due to violence, loss of rights, or isolation that sometimes increases when others know of their condition. Rather than dealing with stigmas as issues stemming from cultural customs, they are simply pushed aside and left unattended and unresolved. This leaves a potentially manageable illness to be one of death and destruction instead. With stigmas being so deeply rooted in a culture it takes considerable effort and willingness to overcome them, which in Ghana is hard to accomplish when homosexuality is involved.

Although I strongly believe that culture is vital when trying to aid a country in developing, this aspect of Ghanaian culture is hindering development and causing a lack of growth as a nation. As Awedoba claims in his text “Culture and Development in Africa,” culture should never be looked at as static, it is always changing and that is what further allows a nation to develop.
Since culture is essentially manmade there is no means of determining what is truly right or wrong. It is deviance Awedoba proposes that can sometimes prove the rule in a culture and people who perform these deviances are the ones who initiate change (32). He specifically focuses on religion in the culture as well and states that, “there is no doubt that not all is well with the way religious functionaries operate in Africa today” (10) meaning that there are aspects of religion, like the denial of homosexuality, that can be looked at as flawed and harmful. Yes culture should be respected and maintained, but sometimes it is necessary to push traditions in an unfamiliar way and question the assorted beliefs surrounding it. People who stray away from cultural norms and expectations are the people who can aid with the progression of a nation. Otherwise, a society could be forever stuck in their old ways while the world around them is enhancing. Discrepancy is what allows room for growth in a society. Culture is constantly changing and for that reason people’s mindsets and beliefs should sometimes change alongside it.

Throughout orientation I have really grown to love and appreciate Ghanaian culture and feel it such a vital part of the nation that should never be lost no matter what Western country tries to push their ways of development onto the society. Although I do believe that the culture should be preserved, I also believe that it is vital to be willing to allow some cultural customs to amend. It is only natural that change will happen, but it is resistance that keeps development from happening. Being a biology student who is interested in the medical field, I can see how the mistreatment of homosexuals within the health care field is a small yet significant part of Ghanaian culture that impedes development. If people are left struggling with HIV/AIDS and are not gaining the proper medical attention due to a cultural belief, that will only preserve the HIV/AIDS epidemic and result in copious deaths, which can be disastrous to a nation. The invalid notions behind HIV and AIDS are based on assumptions that are highly false and a mere idea of past perceptions. Unnecessary deaths lead to loss of productive human resources, puts economic strain on families and institutions ranging from healthcare systems, industries and government.

People need to be informed about HIV and AIDS in order to rid the taboo that the disease is a form of punishment from God or that homosexuals are to be rejected for acting immorally or that carriers of the disease should simply be ignored in order to stop the spreading. It needs to be looked at much more seriously by the people of a society as a biological infection that requires medical attention. People need to learn that it is not an illness within homosexuals but one that can be found in any individual from children to elders, straight to gay people, men to women. People need to be aware that anyone is at risk of HIV and AIDS because it is not a disease transferred only through same sex intercourse, but also via needles, open wounds, breast milk, heterosexual sex, and other various methods.

If the Ghanaian society could be educated with this information at an early age the stigmas and taboos could slowly fade and the cultural norm would be altered in order to progress. As we often hear, “The youth are the future,” and as Awedoba says, “Culture is learnt.” For that reason I believe it would be beneficial to have more outreach programs that focus on teaching kids in a school setting about the background and prevention of HIV/AIDS.
If it could be mandatory to implement the education of HIV/AIDS in elementary schools, people would be more knowledgeable about the illness and hopefully more understanding to victims of the disease.

Along with education, I believe that training on how to treat patients of MSM or FSW fairly and confidentially in clinics should be mandatory for all health care providers. According to Dr. Naa, there are few places that have had training, but even at these places not all the staff members have been trained since nurses and doctors come and go as time passes. She specifically mentioned that often times a gay patient will be ignored by untrained nurses and will yell for the trained nurses to come deal with “their” patient because they don't want to catch anything or have to put up with the issue. Another example she mentioned is that places that lack training will simply hold the bible over the patients head and pray because they believe that is the only valid treatment they need. It is situations like these that many in the homosexual community try to avoid and by doing so they do not receive medical attention. For that reason there should be a training course or system that is enforced when new employees join a clinic.

At Dr. Naa’s International Health Care Center, which consists of a well-trained staff, they stress the importance of having trust with their patients. They believe that creating a trustful relationship with patients is the first necessary step for treatment. If more clinics were trained to acquire this mentality the lack in healthcare for homosexuals with HIV/AIDS would largely diminish.

Lastly, the media should be used as it is an excellent tool to spread HIV/AIDS awareness and information as well. With media having such a large impact in modern society, small steps towards publicizing the HIV/AIDS issue can quickly grow and influence mass amounts of people. The more the people hear about the issue and the realities behind it, the easier it will become to eventually eliminate the stigmas and taboos that stem from lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

Through my internship I hope I can learn more about the struggle patients with HIV/AIDS face and use that to support and spread the education about HIV/AIDS in Ghana. Now that I look back on the application process I realize that what started out as a hurried and uncertain application has turned into an inspiring and eye-opening situation. I always tell myself to stop my troublesome procrastination problem and learn from my lessons, but this time I think I can say thank you to my horrible habit because I am not sure I would be here without this flaw.

References
Addressing a Cholera Outbreak – by Jenna Gruffy

As of September 2014, the cholera outbreak in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana is still going strong and has been labeled the worst outbreak in Ghanaian history. According to numerous local newspapers, hospital beds, hallways and parking lots are packed with cholera patients as are plastic chairs and makeshift beds. Back home in Berkeley, California, there have been a number of outbreaks of various bacteria but they are quickly contained. When I hear of one mentioned in the news, I never personally worry because the outbreaks are generally resolved almost immediately. This cholera outbreak in Ghana started more than a year ago, in September 2013. So far, there have been more than 5,000 reported cases, 67 reported deaths and it's still rampant in five of Ghana's ten regions. At home, I can trust the system, but here, due to the lack of resources, even with all hands on deck the risks of contagion and spread of disease are not adequately controlled. With this background, and after talking to the Director of the University of California Education Abroad Program in Ghana, I was inspired to seek out resources and help with educational outreach in some of the poorer local communities. Further, while working on this paper, I have done additional background research to understand the disease, its role within the wider cultural context in Ghana, and have begun to put together an outreach program that will help combat the spread of cholera through education and the disbursement of sanitary implements. At first, I was in disbelief that simply as a college student, I could start a mini-outreach program but I soon realized this is not only realistic, but fairly easy.

What is Cholera?
Cholera is an intestinal infection caused by ingesting food or water that has been contaminated by the bacteria Vibrio Cholerae. It has a short incubation period of less than 5 days and produces an enterotoxin that causes vomiting and "rice water diarrhea" which consists of profuse amounts of clear, painless watery diarrhea. In its extreme manifestation, cholera is one of the most rapidly fatal infectious illnesses known. Within 3–4 hours of onset of symptoms, a previously healthy person may become severely dehydrated and if not treated may die within 24 hours (World Health Organization, 2014).

How is it Treated?
Fortunately, because cholera is caused by a bacteria, it can be treated with a full round of antibiotics. In addition, because the infection causes severe dehydration, rehydration therapy with electrolyte filled drinking water and/or sub-Q fluids is an essential part of the treatment. If one shows signs of cholera, they should immediately begin drinking safe electrolyte-filled water (8 teaspoons of sugar and half a teaspoon of salt per liter of water) and promptly go to the nearest health clinic.

Prevention
At this point in time, the key to further prevention is mass education and the creation of an environment and cultural attitude where citizens will go the extra mile to wash their hands with soap and stay clean to ensure safety for themselves and their community. Cholera can be prevented by purifying water, preparing safe food, washing hands well with soap, and keeping toilets and washrooms clean.
Unfiltered water can be cleaned by filtering water through a cloth and then performing one of the two following treatments. One can add 5ml of bleach to 20-25 liters of water and let sit for at least 30 minutes, or boil the water for at least one minute at a rolling boil.

Food can be cleaned by washing, peeling or cooking. Fruits and vegetables with thin skins should either be completely peeled or washed with a vinegar, bleach or iodine solution. All food that is cooked should be piping hot, not just warm, to ensure that any bacteria is completely killed. Leftover foods should be stored in a clean, cool place and fully re-heated if appropriate. Any street food should be vended away from the gutters, covered when left sitting, and handled with gloves or clean cooking utensils.

Hand-washing is extremely important in preventing cholera. Hands should be washed frequently with clean water, soap or ash, especially after using the washroom, changing a baby's diaper, handling trash or coming in close contact with human waste. Maintaining a clean washroom is essential as cholera is often spread by the fecal-oral route. Keeping the toilet seat cleaned and the door closed will help decrease the spread of germs and flies. Educational outreach on all of these prevention methods is essential as people taking responsibility for their own health is the most effective means of preventing infection.

**Issues with Prevention**

In epidemic prone regions like Ghana, cholera outbreaks have been linked to multiple environmental and socio-economic causes. Unfortunately some aspects of Ghanaian culture, the reality of poverty, the lack of resources and the country’s economic status are making it difficult to end this outbreak.

Improving infrastructure has long been known as a critical component for the successful prevention and eradication of communicable diseases like cholera. Cholera can spread rapidly in areas with no safe disposal of human waste like in some areas of Accra. Ghana continues to struggle with waste management in general. There are many designated dumping sites and trash is burned throughout the country. However, dumping sites are overfilling and closing in Accra, forcing people to find other places to dump their waste, so that many people just litter in the streets and gutters (Ibrahim, 2014).

Another factor that further complicates the eradication of Cholera is the heavy rain. While the rain is not itself responsible, it does a thorough job of polluting the gutters and water sources with waste-contaminated runoff. This can be clearly seen when correlating rainfall with severity of outbreak (Alexandrova, 2012).

Although Ghana does have a relatively successful water system in the Accra region available to the more affluent segment of the population, it is still not always safe. Attention was just brought to public health workers because pipe-born water was coming into contact with contaminated runoff, so even the "safe and filtered" water cannot always be trusted (Sackey, 2014). Inspection of water quality needs to be addressed and improved. Those without pipe-born water are receiving water from a variety of sources including streams, wells and ponds, which are often very polluted.
Another problematic aspect with the spread of Cholera has to do with the cultural customs in Ghana. Ghanaians tend to be very friendly, warm and physically affectionate in social settings. The issue with this is the physical contact as it is a gateway for the bacteria to be transferred to another host. The Cholera Vibrios can survive and multiply outside the human body and spread rapidly (World Health Organization, 2014). Since tapping, touching, hugging and hand shaking is a part of everyday communication and interaction, one can encourage minimal touching.

Yet another means of contagion can be found on the streets of Ghana. The hard-working but poor food vendors working to make ends meet do not have extra money to pay for gloves, tongs, plate covers and other sanitary implements. They are unlikely to be motivated to invest in these without having had a first-hand experience of the effects of Cholera. In addition, selling food next to the gutters is not sanitary. Gutter contents can splash, the wind can pick up particles from the gutter and flies can land in the gutter and then on the food in a matter of seconds. Gutters line the streets and if a vendor has a profitable business, they are unlikely to move away from such highly trafficked areas.

The specific contagion issue with Cholera relates back to the issue of development. Ghana has had one of Africa’s leading economies for years yet is still struggling to be self-sustaining and to build and maintain the most basic necessary infrastructure. There seems to be a vicious cyclical theme with respect to foreign aid and power dynamics of other countries partnering with Ghana. Instead of focusing on the most crucial needs which many consider to be basic infrastructure: education and health care, the donor countries get wrapped up in policy-based lending and westernizing the Ghanaian Culture (Dzorgbo, 2012). In Westernizing Ghana, the import-exports gap continues to grow, making it harder and harder for Ghana to achieve self-sustainability. The rapid urbanization of Ghana is great in some respects, but detrimental in others. While urbanization in Ghana is not a new phenomenon, the current rate of uncontrolled and unplanned urbanization has given rise to excess waste being produced, so much so that these wastes have exceeded the capacity of city authorities to collect and dispose of them safely and efficiently. Like mentioned above, this places the responsibility of waste disposal on the citizens who have no guidance or resources for a solution. In addition, ineffective urban governance has also been an issue. Sometimes too much of the budget is spent on luxuries when water, drainage and waste disposal systems are still sub-par.

Another significant aspect of resolving the epidemic is addressing the attitudes of the Ghanaian citizens. Changes will be needed to redirect the thinking and perspective of the general population regarding their perception of waste. In order for this to be successful, the participation and partnership of the private sector, civil society and public agencies in the management of waste in Accra will be needed. This type of good governance depends on leadership that uses power in a way that ensures resources are used to bring about positive change in the attitudes of people.
At this point in time, Cholera is spreading like wildfire and the focus needs to be on immediate prevention. Development is a lengthy process filled with many goals that will help maintain a healthy, educated and clean society but for now, the reality of the outbreak is harsh and immediate attention is needed. Ghana needs increased medical supplies, experienced medical personal and a way to accommodate more patients. It is heartbreaking to think about the difference in action between a bacterial outbreak in the U.S. and an outbreak in Accra. Dr. Naa Vanderpuye, the director of the West African Aids Foundation said it well: "Why are there so few in the front line? Worldwide there need to be more aggressive attacks from those who have the expertise to assist the few here who are trying. And let us, in country, intensify our efforts and ensure we have adequate infection control measures. We should be able to do this but it needs commitment, dedication and genuine concern." This statement applies to the future as well. In general, Ghana needs an improved capacity of health facilities such as trained staff, extra emergency beds, stock of medicines, rehydration and overall emergency outbreak plans. For now, community awareness needs to be increased, and information has to be adapted to suit all local traditions, customs, languages and for illiterate people. The addition of infrastructure and education about the prevention of disease serves not only in the fight against this Cholera outbreak, but is an investment in all communicable disease prevention and control going forward.

My plan is to make posters in English, Twi and Ga, centered on drawings of the do's and don'ts off staying clean and Cholera-free so that the information is available to as many people as possible. In addition, I am going to set up a "Go Fund Me" webpage to ask for donations for hand sanitizer, gloves, tongs and water sashays. I have also recruited several other students to help me work on a short performance that again, goes over the do's and don'ts of food, water and health safety. At this point in time, even small outreach attempts like the one I have described above can help spark a web of information that can save lives.

References:
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