

Stars shine bright over the Gulf of Guinea as Sabina and I sit on wooden stools. She smiles patiently, awaiting my reply. Sabina is one of 600 Global Mamas “mamapreneurs,” a widowed seamstress with over 50 years of experience. Across from her, I piece together an explanation as she stitches together torn cloth. At last, I tell her that I chose to volunteer in Ghana because I want to learn about a new culture, share my own, and affect positive change. Wisely, she replies, “We work with fly-by-night foreigners. What will have changed when your volunteer time is over, Mr. Freeman?” I feel my face turn red at the prospect of being another *obroni* visiting Ghana for the first time with a spirit of voluntourism instead of a spirit of committed affection. Sabina places the cloth under her sewing machine. *Clunk .. clunk .. whirr.*

Since that night, I often think of Sabina. I often visit her, too, on my follow-up Notre Dame-funded trips to Cape Coast, her hometown. There I work with local NGOs exercising my Sociology and International Peace Studies education in conducting measurement-and-evaluation. “You’ve come back again,” Sabina will say, smiling sagaciously.

I come back again. And again. As of June, 2018, I will have come back to Ghana six times, fitting in but never belonging. Where do I belong? Where does a global citizen belong? In the many ways my identity challenges my work as an ‘outsider,’ as a foreign ‘other,’ it demands humility, service *with* and not *for*, and an ethic of listening for the myriad ways in which the US may learn from Ghana to live sustainably. To embrace local, circular economies. To eat a largely plant-based diet. To reduce capitalist excess. To live communally. To belong to one another, not to one object or another.

Where does a global citizen belong?

This question lingered over my second and third visits, during which I fundraised, co-designed, and co-constructed West Africa’s first external learning spaces (ELS) with SABRE, one of Britain’s largest charitable trusts; and co-purchased rural land for a sustainable bamboo school with Dzi Wopoano Nyi Foundation. SABRE’s follow-up revealed teachers required training and incentive to understand and use ELS’s. As for Bamboo School, the project has stalled for fear that many children may drop out or skip grades, an enrollment roadblock. *Why hadn’t we outsiders asked locals before intervening?*

Insects throb through the thicket as 650 adolescents sit under canopies, eyes glued to our four-person ASHI team. I spent this fifth visit to Ghana conducting interviews and compiling evidence-based best practices into our new curriculum. “Eti sen?” asks one emaciated adolescent. “I’m fine,” I reply softly. “Wofre wo den?” “Philomena.” I hand her the questionnaire. She *click click clicks* the pen several times, nervously. I glance down. Below the question “If pregnant, who fathered your child?” Philomena writes “ɔkyerɛkyerɛfo” - “teacher.” My heart sinks. She recounts coercive sex with headmasters and uncles. Overwhelming in

breadth and depth, these experiences starkly contrast my comparatively privileged, white, able-bodied experience. *If global citizenship entails living into a solidarity of shared identity, how does my body and self situated in a vast neocolonial legacy of 'development' and 'aid' 'help' someone like Philomena? Can I help someone like Philomena?*

That night, I traveled back feeling a familiar simmering anger. Our outreach programs were not going to help the majority of the 20 percent of Ghanaian teenagers who would become pregnant before age 21 - not when nearly 50 percent of those impregnating teenagers are adult men¹. And not when ASHI's government partners - all men - may be more more interested in throwing around these same statistics in rhetoric-filled media campaigns than they are in creating policies supplying high-caliber care for the mothers behind the numbers. As the bus drove on, I listened to the wheels *creeek*, lost in thought. *Is this my fight to fight? What is my role in embracing the possibility of peace and justice in a place in which I sometimes fit in, but have never belonged?*

Global citizenship is fraught with contradictions. My global citizenship requires listening as a code of ethics grounded in a humility of the 'guest,' a non-judgmental observance of what is happening here, now. My global citizenship requires elicitive actions toward justice, actions that draw upon local knowledge, practices, and time horizons in an effort to work *with* and not *for* Ghanaian communities. Most of all, my global citizenship requires an adjusted lifestyle upon each return home, a lifestyle predicated around lessons learned from abroad which highlight American greed, excess, and indecency. Thus, my global citizenship requires I purchase local, ethically sourced clothing, food, and toiletries or else be complicit in the exploitation of Ghanaian cocoa farmers, textile workers, and beauty product manufacturers. To consume vegan food options or else be complicit in the oppression of animals near and far and the waste of our Earth's precious minerals. To embrace a social justice that acknowledges geographic privileges of Global Northwesternness, on top of which are piled my whiteness, able body, masculinity, and youth. But why does my global citizenship require these things?

Because the same stars that shine bright over the Gulf of Guinea shine bright over the St. Joseph River. Because the same spirit that flows through Sabina flows through me. Because to live into the privilege of mobility in an age of global travel means returning to Notre Dame changed, transformed into a more mindful, compassionate, ethical, and globally conscious self. Toeing the tightrope of community with people of different identities has been a delicate, reflective experience aided and modeled by Notre Dame professors. And yes, I *am* one of the masters Lorde wrote about in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."² But in solidarity, in committed affection, in acknowledging my sociohistorical situatedness in interlocking systems of structural oppression and cultural violence against the 'other,' I am

¹ Freeman, Pete and Deborah Ackwonu. 2017. "Young Achievers Caucus Stakeholders Meeting."

² Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110- 114. 2007. Print.

humbly trying and failing and trying again to bridge toward understanding. Toward a 'reconfigured 'we.' Toward a beloved community³. Toward a global, pan-belongingness.

³ King, Martin Luther. 1957. "The Birth of a New Nation."