

Returning Home: The Makings of a Repatriate Consciousness

“Like Sisyphus, the King of Corinth in Greek Mythology, who was punished in Hades by having to push a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down time after time, the Afro-American has been repeatedly disappointed in his ascent to freedom. In the African he recognizes a fellow Sisyphus. Pushing together they might just reach the hilltop, perhaps even the mountaintop of which Martin Luther King spoke so eloquently.”¹

Hope Steinman-Iacullo

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Ghana: History and Culture of the African Diaspora

Advisor: Dr. K.B. Maison

¹ Robert G. Weisbord. Ebony Kinship: Africa, Africans, and the Afro American. (London: Greenwood Press Inc, 1973), 220.

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“Repatriation: To restore or return to the country of birth, citizenship, or origin.”²

“I think a good deal in terms of the power of black people in the world...that’s why Africa means so much to me. As an American Negro, I was proud of Africa as one of those West Coast Chinese is proud of China. Now that doesn’t mean I’m going back to Africa, but spiritually I’ve been a part of Africa for a long time...If I could get a passport I’d just like to go to Ghana or Jamaica just to sit there for a few days and observe this black power.”³ – Paul Robeson

“...but it shall be the purpose of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to have established in Africa that brotherly co-operation which will make the interests of the African native and the American and West Indian Negro one and the same, that is to say we shall enter into a common partnership to build up Africa in the interests of our race.”⁴
– Marcus Garvey

Abstract:

The intention of my Independent Study Project was to learn more about what motivates some Afro Americans to repatriate here and/or return habitually and explore whether there were a diverse number of reasons and motivating factors. This aim and question was also put in a historical context. For instance, my research has shown that the Back to African movements of the past mostly aimed to be communal relocations, compared with the current condition of mostly individualistic moves. I also found that although not all of the participants in my project identified as followers of Garvey or Pan Africanism, they often still espoused ideals in line with the ideologies. I also wanted to

²“repatriation.” *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. 06 Dec. 2007. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/repatriation>>.

³ Carl T Rowan. “Has Paul Robeson Betrayed the Negro?” *Ebony Magazine*. October, 1957.

⁴ Compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey. *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. (London: Nelson Printers LTD, 1967), 52.

shed light on what happens after repatriation such as what the difficulties and benefits are because little has been written in this area. This answered the underlying question in all of my research which was whether descendants and members of the Diaspora can feel a sense of belonging in their ancestral homeland, or if cultural differences such as country of upbringing, socio-economic status, education level, occupation, language, etc. always posited them as outsider. In concluding my research, I found that all of the participants believed there was an intrinsic connection to their African brothers and sisters despite cultural differences existing, and that whatever divisions did occur were more the result of racism and Western white supremacy that aimed to disrupt black unity. Therefore, in many ways despite having to adjust to a new place, they each found the solace and personal goals they had been seeking out when repatriating.

“If Europe is home to the white man, if Asia is for the yellow man, then surely Africa is for the black man.”⁵ - Marcus Garvey

Introduction and Background:

The desire to return back to Africa has always been in existence. The call of the continent to its sons and daughters to return to its shores has always echoed in the minds of some of its descendents. When the mammoth ships of the European oppressors first left the beaches of the Gold Coast, some brave African men and women chose to jump overboard and face the tumultuous sea in the hopes of reaching their native soil. The mutinies and battles waged on slave ships or the resistance put forth along the way, is evidence that the call of home in many cases was worth facing even death.

In coming to Ghana I myself wondered “what is my connection to this place?” As a person of African ancestral descent, would I feel a pull, spiritual or physical, unexplainable to academia or the senses? Amidst my personal reflection I thought, what draws members of the Diaspora, more specifically what are commonly called Afro Americans⁶, to not only “return”⁷ to Ghana but to remain. What ideology, shift, event, emotion occurs that cultivates the feelings of wanting to stay? As Paul Robeson explains in the opening quote, many black people have a connection to and affection for Africa

⁵ Amy Jacques Garvey, “Divine Apportionment of Earth”, 25.

⁶ Not all of my respondents and interviewees identify as Afro/African Americans, or black as a racial, national, or ethnic identity. I use this terminology when speaking in the abstract throughout my paper as an umbrella term referring to all people of African descent living in the United States. It is the most common used and embraced term and for that reason I use it as an easily identifiable marker. However, I also use it with the knowledge that we as marginalized peoples must be involved in the shaping and formulation of our naming and identity. The act of self naming is a powerful one, one in which many of the repatriates I interviewed exercised. But because there is no one term that is applicable to all members of the Diaspora I opted to use the most generic and common terminology. Respect and attention is given however to the ways in which the men and women I spoke with choose to name themselves.

⁷ The term return in referring to repatriation is used instead of the concept of coming or visiting Africa intentionally. It highlights the fact that for most people in the Diaspora their ancestors never left willingly. They were stolen and stripped of their native language, custom, religion, and family by force and did not, like other ethnic groups in the United States, choose to emigrate. Return implies that for repatriates their lineage never chose to leave and that when they do go to Africa they are going back to a place that circumstance and oppression kept them and their ancestors from.

even without permanently settling or even visiting. What then makes some take the leap of faith in setting up a new life here in Ghana, and envisioning the brotherly connection that Marcus Garvey illuminates to?

The placement of Africa in the consciousness of people of African descent is an individualistic attribute. However, historically there has always been a questioning on the part of some Afro Americans as to where to posit themselves in relation to the continent. Countee Cullen muses in his poem “What is Africa to Me?”,

“What is Africa to me
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the bird’s of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?”⁸

This acknowledgment of ties to Africa has existed from the onset of the atrocity of the slave trade. Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, a Fulani Muslim slave trader who was captured during a dispute over the price of the people he had enslaved, was one of the first documented cases of an African returning to Africa. Transported on the slave ship *Arabella*, he ended up as chattel on a plantation in Maryland. A local lawyer recognized that the slave could speak and write Arabic and allowed the man to write a letter to his

⁸ Countee Cullen. *Color* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925), 36.

father who resided near Gambia. However, the letter ended up received by an English aristocrat who offered to pay for Diallo's freedom. The lawyer who had initially began communicating with Diallo helped to publish his story as a memoir. The memoir was received as an adventurous tale in some literary circles and as a result of the fame he received he was given the opportunity to go back to his native land. In 1734, Diallo returned to his family in Gambia where he lived out the remainder of his life.⁹

Diallo's return to Africa was a result of his social status as a slave raider and Muslim. His return was different from the migrations of later African Americans that followed because his priority was to be restored to his family. The exoduses and movements that would later come centered around the idea of returning to the continent of origin, knowledge of specific places of origin and lineage had already been disrupted by the oppressor.

The early Back to Africa Movement was a collaboration between abolitionists, freedmen and women, and white supremacists. Racism fueled a lot of the support in the establishment of Sierra Leone and Liberia, as whites in Britain and America were worried about the event of free Africans remaining in the country after their emancipation. British "humanitarians" worked for the establishment of Sierra Leone for free black Creoles. Although there were disruptions such as disease and issues of land use, it was eventually deemed a success by Britain and the British Imperial Court assumed responsibility. Between 1819 and 1828, 13,281 former slaves were brought there. Between 1828 and 1878 another 50,000 former slaves were released from slave ships onto Sierra Leone's

⁹ Kwame Anthony Appiah. "What was Africa to Them?" The New York Review. 27 September 2007, 42.

shores.¹⁰ However, besides being a xenophobic endeavor, Britain also saw its new colony as an “agency for the civilizing of Africa.”¹¹

In 1811 Paul Cuffe a black Massachusetts sea captain went to Sierra Leone. He became inspired by the idea of a nation for free men and women. He returned with 38 people to West Africa and continued to make such trips until his death. But prior to his death he began to become involved with the American Colonization Society which was a coalition of Quakers and Abolitionists formed in 1817. This group believed that people of African descent would never receive equitable treatment in America in the hands of the white man. The organization also believed that African descendents would make better missionaries to the populations of Africa, as they had race in common and might be more able to deal with the climate and malaria.¹² In two years they received a charter from the United States’ government for a free state in West Africa. Liberia was born as the first independent black republic in 1819. It was not a colony under governmental control like Sierra Leone because its creation was part of the anti colonial tide in America against the British. In Liberia’s charter it proudly declared, “there shall be no slavery in this republic.”¹³ However it should be noted that repatriates did have their share of hardships after settling and not all those that moved found the adjustment to be an easy one. Some arrived to discover that money had been mishandled and there was nothing to arrive to. Others found it hard to acclimate to such new conditions. One new Liberian colonist wrote to his mother in little Rock, Arkansas in 1896 that, “Something to eat is scarce over here...we came over in April 1895 and ever since we have been here we have been in a

¹⁰ George Padmore. Pan Africanism Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa.(London: Dennis Dobson, 1972), 36.

¹¹ George Padmore, 24.

¹² George Padmore, 44.

¹³ George Padmore, 51.

suffering condition and starving, and me for my part, I have never been in such a fix in my life.”¹⁴ However, many colonists continued to remain finding an escape from white tyrannical racism.

The greatest chapter in the history of Back to Africa Movements came with the advent of Garveyism and Pan Africanism. The father of Pan Africanism is credited as being Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams. He envisioned a conference in which descendants of Africa and African colonies would come together in solidarity. In unifying they would be able to uplift the black race and demand for autonomy on the part the African colonies. He organized the first Pan African Conference in London in 1900.¹⁵ His vision would be carried on by the great scholar and thinker of his time W.E.B. Du Bois. Between 1919 and 1945 he organized five Pan African conferences. He advocated the principles of “African nationalism, self determination, and self governance”.¹⁶ He explains his goals and intentions for Pan Africanism and the conference,

“Contacts of Negroes of different origin and nationality, which I had then and before at other congresses and the Races Congress, were most inspiring. My plans as they developed, had in them nothing spectacular nor revolutionary. If in decades or a century they resulted in such world organization of black men as would oppose a united front to European aggression, that certainty would not have been beyond my dream...and what I wanted to do was in the face of this power to sit down hand in hand with colored groups and across the council table to learn of each other, our condition, our aspirations, our chance for concerted

¹⁴ Savannah Tribune, March 1896.

¹⁵ George Padmore, 73.

¹⁶ George Padmore, 118.

thought and action out of this there might come...a chance for peaceful and accelerated development of black folk.”¹⁷

As one can glean from Du Bois’ words, Pan Africanism differed from the emerging Black Nationalism because it did not outright demand for repatriation. Yet it’s emphasis on racial pride and unification amongst all members of the Diaspora cultivated the kind of thinking that made one interested in returning to Africa. For those who caught this interest and spirit there was Marcus Garvey and the UNIA.

Marcus Garvey was born in Jamaica on August 17th, 1887. In his native country he watched with disdain as many of the upper classes were comprised of mixed race people and those with strictly African blood were relegated to the lower classes. He eventually moved to the United States as he realized his political ambitions were too big for his island of origin. In coming to the United States he established the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the African Communities Imperial League. It sought to embrace all men and women of African descent no matter what color, though he maintained a distaste for what he read as light skinned elitist leaders such as Du Bois. The organization promoted pride in culture, race, history, and advocated that there would be no racial harmony in the United States as long as the black man had no power to command such a respect. The way in which Afro Americans and others in the Diaspora could gain such power would be through nation building. As a result it heavily stressed that those who were willing and able should repatriate to Africa and contribute to building up an autonomous African nation there and restore what he saw as the continents former glory. In trying to encourage one’s pride in their roots he speaks of Africa’s accomplishments,

¹⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois. Dusk of Dawn (New York: Schoken Books, 1968) 274-275.

“Our race gave the first great civilization to the world; and for centuries Africa, our ancestral home, was the seat of learning; and when black men, who were only fit then for the company of gods were philosophers, artists, scientists, and men of vision and leadership, the people of other races were groping in savagery, darkness, and continental barbarism.”¹⁸

It was this rhetoric, that of promoting the image of Africa as blessed place, of telling the ordinary man that he came from greatness, and of educating him that he does have the agency to create racial uplift for himself and his people, that spoke to the masses. Unlike Du Bois and the other leading organizations of the day, Garvey spoke to the people, his speeches reached the illiterate, those in the urban ghettos, those of darker skin, and others who felt forgotten.¹⁹ It was the time of lynching, soldiers who had fought in the war returning home not as heroes but as second class citizens, and of outright racial animosity and Garvey argued for complete self determination from the white man including the economic. Garvey with a combination of circumstance and his own personal charisma was able to create one of the largest mass movements of people of African descent in history. By 1923 the UNIA claimed 6,000,000 members.²⁰

Though no other exponents of repatriation reached the height of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA, there were small groups that advocated for relocation in his movement’s aftermath. In 1935 the Second Italo-Abyssinian War occurred and Ethiopia was invaded by Mussolini. The events sparked a new interest in Africa and a passionate call to arms on the part of its descendents. As George Padmore explains, “The brutal rape of Ethiopia

¹⁸ Amy Jacques Garvey, 82.

¹⁹ Robert G. Weisbord. *Ebony Kinship: Africa, Africans, and the Afro American*. (London: Greenwood Press Inc, 1973), 57.

²⁰Ibid

combined with the cynical attitude of the Great Powers convinced Africans and peoples of African descent everywhere that black men had no rights which white men felt bound to respect.”²¹ Ebony Kinship furthers this notion by explaining that the attack “illuminated the nexus between Diaspora and continental blacks”.²² Some individuals continued to repatriate and suddenly two new groups emerged onto the scene. The first was the religion of Rastafarianism born out of the teachings of Garvey and Afrocentrism and the worship of Haile Selassie. Its followers felt that they were to be restored to the great kingdom of Ethiopia. As a result, followers made several attempts to repatriate there. Some were supported by the government although other requests for the ability to relocate and gain citizenship were denied by the government.²³ The Black or African Hebrew Israelites also felt motivated by religious teachings and what they saw as their ancestral lineage to return to Africa as well. There was a mass movement in 1967 on their part. However, their attempts also faced obstacles including the Liberian government’s attempt to strip them of citizenship because of what it saw as unwillingness to assimilate.²⁴

There have always been Back to Africa Movements in existence, though none was more gripping and far reaching than Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. However, for all of his dedicated followers, no extraordinary number of people actually repatriated. The majority remained in their countries including the United States, and worked with their new sense of racial pride towards hope and a fruitful future. Also, there were many trials

²¹ George Padmore, 146.

²² Robert G. Weisbord, 89.

²³ Robert G. Weisbord, 125.

²⁴ Ibid

and tribulations faced by repatriates and their movements including that their organizations were sometimes funded with a racist agenda in mind, a lack of government support both at “home” and abroad, lack of financial or land planning that resulted in the loss of people’s investment, a feeling of superiority over the “natives” felt by the repatriates, and a difficulty adjusting to a new country, culture, and climate. But, many did find joy and benefits afforded in Africa that they felt could not have been possible in the United States. Furthermore, Garvey’s ideology and the Pan African ideals of solidarity and autonomy did take root in many minds and continue to. Today we find those that are still willing and in want of repatriating, though it usually occurs on a more individualistic and less communal basis. What is it that compels and moves these modern repatriates to come to the shores of Africa, and how are they finding the consequences of their actions?

Methodology:

My paper aims to shed light on experiences of members of the African Diaspora that have repatriated to Ghana. Little is written in academic circles concerning the relationships of Africans to their brothers and sisters that are commonly referred to as Afro American. As a result of there being little discourse surrounding the issue, there is also not many resources that discuss those that wish to return to their ancestral homeland. One can find books that discuss the history of the establishment of the countries Sierra Leone and Liberia. There are also books that discuss the ideology and opinions of Marcus Garvey and speak of his Back to Africa movement. However, many of these books fail to explain what happens after relocation. What is the fate of the people that settle in Africa and do they find the aspects of life they were looking for and felt couldn't be afforded in the United States? The lack of contemporary information on those that returned to Africa made me particularly interested in the topic.

Most of the narratives we are presented with are ones of people immigrating to the United States. The dominant ideology is one where we are not encouraged to envision that there exists people, dissatisfied, who want to leave behind the "land of the free". As a result repatriation is seldom spoke of. It is only recently, when considering the breadth of history that the efforts of blacks in the Diaspora to fight for justice and their accomplishments have been acknowledged. The illusion that racism has subsided in the United States, that black people in the Diaspora have attained equal treatment and rights is an illusion upheld. This is allowed to perpetuate because racism has taken new forms that are able to slip under the radar. The conservative racism that preached a doctrine of complete racial separatism in its militant stance of xenophobia and the inferiority of

darker peoples was replaced with “liberal equalitarianism.”²⁵ This philosophy subscribed to the notion that race and color no longer mattered and was irrelevant.²⁶ To be color blind not only meant to ignore the color difference in public discourse but to believe that no one was treated or received differently because of race. Real racial consciousness was replaced with the goal of tolerance which ignored systemic oppression. Furthermore, the tolerant thread wore thin as increasing demands for equality and justice on the part of blacks in America were seen as volatile and an insight to violence.

Given the perpetuation of a white supremacist society in the United States coupled with the suppression of testimonies to the fact that some its former citizens seek solace elsewhere, there are little works done on the causes and effects of repatriation. Therefore, my research did not rely heavily on books and instead focused on personal testimonies. The one book that I was able to locate at the University of Cape Coast Library that focused exclusively on the history of relations between Africans and people in the Diaspora was the book Ebony Kinship by Robert G. Weisbord. It was the main book that I used that discussed contemporary repatriation movements. The rest of my books mostly discussed repatriation in a historical context, Liberia and Sierra Leone, Pan Africanism, and the ideology of Marcus Garvey.

Although I used books and article research to place my personal study within a historical framework, the way in which I collected data on repatriation in Ghana in the present day was by doing interviews. I decided to use Cape Coast as a case study on repatriation. I chose the location because devoting my time to one place would allow me to devote time to book research while also getting to time to meet and introduce myself to

²⁵ Bob Blauner. Black Lives, White Lives: Three Decades of Race relations in America (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), 42.

²⁶ Ibid

various different people who had different reasons for coming. Had I focused on different geographical locations I wouldn't have had enough time to meet different people in a community, gain their trust, discuss my project and see if they were interested. I would have had to interview whomever I met and ensuring that I had a diverse sample would have been secondary. Furthermore, Cape Coast is neither a small area nor a huge city capital like Accra. By staying in one place I was able to shed light on the very different reasons people return even within this one specific area of Ghana. Most of my data collection process was collecting life stories from people. These interviews were usually guided with a list of questions that I would ask them to answer. Most of the time, a question would just be a beginning point for a train of thought on the part of the interviewee. I would not interrupt them and allow for them to continue on whatever path they were on. In this way stories and experiences were communicated to me in a way that wasn't short bullet point answers to questions. I asked each of my participants how they would like to be identified as in whether by name or by being anonymous, and how they chose to identify their background i.e. what terminology they used to call themselves whether it be African, African American, Hebrew, etc.

In all, I conducted interviews with seven different participants. One of the interviews was with two people at the same time, a couple which had repatriated together. Another interview I conducted with Nana Opokuprempeh had to be done twice, as the initial three hour interview I had transcribed with him was lost when my purse was stolen. Two of the interviews were with Ghanaians involved in the tourist industry meant to give me insight into perceptions of how many Afro Americans come to Ghana both to stay and to visit, and Ghanaian views of Afro Americans and repatriation. All of the

interviews were done with the knowledge on the participant's side that I was recording them by pen in my notebook and was using the findings for a research project for my study abroad program but also for my University.

Choosing interviewees was a process that was a mixture of both chance and intention. I wanted to be able to ensure that the subjects of the interviews were diverse in characteristics such as age, gender, and profession. The first person that I interviewed was Nana Opokuprempeh. I had met him at a Rosh Hashanah service at Mabel's Table near Elmina. The initial conversations I had with him that day established him as someone that identified as a Garveyite. The next time I returned to the area by Mabel's Table and One Africa, I made contact with Nana again. He was able to introduce me to his friends Hasid and his wife Aaishah Levi. Through my visits to the area I also met Shabazz who in turn put me in contact with Mimi Igyan when hearing that I wanted to interview another woman. Within moments of each of my interviews I was able to determine that each person had come for different and unique reasons. Finding this out made me comfortable and confident in my initial sample size because it was diverse in terms of age, gender, reasons for coming, and location of residence in the Cape Coast region. Had each person told me they were a Garveyite for instance, I would have looked elsewhere for more people to interview to ensure that I had a range of perspectives represented.

The interviews that I did with the two Ghanaians were an attempt to introduce to my paper an outsider's perspective of repatriation coming from someone that lives in the country being discussed. The first man I spoke to was Kwame Nkrumah, a veteran tour guide at Cape Coast Castle. The second man I spoke with identified himself only as Dan

and was an administrator at the Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust, a group in charge of preserving and promoting the historic and tourist sites of Ghana. I chose these two men to speak to because their positions in the tourist industry meant that they could give their perspective on how many Afro Americans they believed to visit Ghana, their interactions with them, their views about such people repatriating, and what Ghana is and can do to attract more of a connection to its brothers and sisters in the Diaspora. The questions that I asked the two Ghanaian men are as follow:

- What is your name?
- What is your occupation?
- What do the names Nkrumah, Du Bois, and Garvey represent to you?
- What about the terms repatriation, Back to Africa, and Pan Africanism?
- Do you know of or have any relationships with African Americans?
- How do you see them reacting to sites of tourism, and the culture of Ghana in comparison to other “white” tourists?
- Do you feel misconceptions exist between African Americans and Ghanaians?
- How do you feel about more African Americans returning to live in Ghana?
- Do you see or feel a connection to blacks in the Diaspora?
- What do you expect of African Americans that move here?
- What do you feel they expect from you?
- Why do you believe that more African Americans in comparison to the number of “white” tourists don’t come to visit or live in Ghana?
- Do you feel that African Americans coming to live here contribute Ghanaian society?

The questions that I asked the repatriates are as follow:

- What is your name?
- What was your occupation at the time of your decision to move to Ghana?
- Where was the last place you resided for a significant period of time in the United States?
- When did you make your first visit to Africa, and more specifically Ghana? Why?
- When did the desire to first relocate come to you?
- What caused this desire?
- What was your family, friends, and community’s reaction to your decision to repatriate?
- What did you expect of repatriation?
- What did you feel was expected from you by Ghanaians?
- What did you expect from them?
- What do the names Nkrumah, Du Bois, and Garvey symbolize to you?

- What do the terms Pan Africanism, Back to Africa, and repatriation mean to you?
- Do you identify as a Garveyite?
- Do you feel that misconceptions exist between African Americans and Ghanaians?
- How do you feel Ghanaians view you?
- Do you live around other repatriates?
- Do you have many relationships to African Americans here?
- Do you speak any local languages?
- How does your knowledge or lack of knowledge of language hinder or advance your interactions?
- Did you integrate yourself into life in any of the following arenas: social, political, economic etc.? How so?
- Have you found opportunity in Ghana you feel was not afforded to you while living in the United States?
- Amy Jacques Garvey is paraphrased in Ebony Magazine as saying that had her husband lived on he would have seen Back to Africa as more of a spiritual movement, that African Americans making contributions in the United States would help Africa.²⁷ How do you respond to this statement?
- Do you see repatriation as more of a personal choice or a path that ought to be followed by most or all of the descendents of the African Diaspora?
- Do you feel that cultural differences such as language, country of origin or rearing, education level, socioeconomic positions etc will always posit you as an outsider?
- Have you had any struggles since repatriating?
- Do you ever feel like returning to the United States?
- Do you feel there is solidarity between Africans and members of the African Diaspora?
- What do you see as the United States' racial future?

It must also be noted that these questions are only the ones I prepared formally prior to the interviews. As each interview progressed, issues would arise particular to each individual as they retold their story. This might lead me to question them further on the specific topic.

All of the research in my paper was taken from the interviews that I conducted. Informal observations were not a major component of my work because I usually traveled to conduct the interviews specifically. Also, when I was in casual situations with repatriates I wanted not to be there as a research student but as an African American

²⁷ Lerone Bennett Jr. "The Ghost of Marcus Garvey: Interviews with Crusader's Two Wives" Ebony Magazine. March 1960, 59.

eager to learn and converse with others. I did not find it appropriate in cases such as sitting around a table with people I had just been introduced to, to be there for the purpose of consuming them and their experiences. For my own issues of ensuring that I had a space to just be me, I separated myself from my work in these moments.

The way in which I analyzed my data was by rereading my interviews as I had transcribed them in my ISP journal. After doing an initial reviewing I came up with the divisions that I would use to organize my paper based upon the themes that were reoccurring and seemed to be dominant. Then I mentally categorized which parts of my interviews belonged in which sections. I then took informal notes that compared and contrasted experiences of the interviewees. From these I would glean what were the conclusions that could be drawn from the differing and similar answers to my questions.

The main obstacle that I faced in conducting my ISP research was time. This was largely due to one incident that forced me to recollect all of the research I had done over a week's span of time. One night, I was mugged while leaving Mabel's Table near Elmina after conducting an interview with Nana. I was mildly injured but mostly shaken by the sudden and abrasive attack. Luckily I had no valuables in my purse however, it did contain my research notebook. When I lost the notebook I lost the three hour interview I had just conducted with Nana and transcribed, and the two interviews I had done with the Ghanaian men. Besides that, all of the notes and background information I had collected during many hours over the course of several days at the UCC library was lost as well. At first the stress of the incident made me need to take time out from traveling and to take care of my mental and physical self by not traveling alone to do interviews, having time to assess what had happen and how to go about recollecting my work etc. After taking a

few days to gather myself, I went back to the tedious task of recollecting the work I had already done. This was extremely frustrating however I knew that the information and details given in Nana's interview was vital to my report. I also knew that it was important to have book research and worth the time investment to go back and locate the same books. In the end, I was set back a full week because the week after the mugging had me redoing the work I had already accomplished.

The main obstacle in my work was the timeframe because I lost a full week to do new research. However, having now done seven interviews I am feeling confident that what I was able to accomplish in the time period was sufficient. I was able to take time out for mentally taking care of myself while also returning to do work in a timely fashion. Although my sample size is smaller than how I would have originally wanted it to be as a result of lost time, I feel that it is diverse and therefore serves the purpose of illuminating several different views, ideologies, and experiences.

It must also be considered that because of the small and specific community of repatriates in Cape Coast many of my interviewees knew each socially. However, I do not think this affected my research for each person relayed their own personal experiences to me and often addressed the fact that their reasons and choices differed from their peers. One problem that I encountered but completely understood was difficulty in finding people to talk to at first. When I first arrived at Mabel's Table to find people interested in talking to me I realized that the death of two elders in the community had recently occurred. As a result, people were busy with funeral preparation and subsequently exhausted after the process. I felt like I was imposing during an intensely personal and emotional time by advertising my project. I eventually realized that I was

not going to find many people in spaces when the community was gathered at once because they were spaces of mourning and celebrating the lives that had passed on. I understood and respected this and eventually overcame the problem of finding interviewees through personal contacts that I maintained with people such as Nana. He was able to alert me to others that might be interested and give me contact information. All in all I feel like I was able to adapt to the circumstances surrounding my research and was satisfied and content with the results of and breadth of my work.

Chapter I:

‘We as a People are constantly redefining ourselves’²⁸ The Power of Naming in Expressing Identity, Lineage, and an African Connection

Before beginning to even discuss repatriation I must touch upon the key subject of naming and identity in reference to my research. Up until this point, I have used the terminology black and Afro American to describe peoples of African and African ancestral descent who lived in the United States in my paper. This was because I found it necessary to use an umbrella term that encompassed many people and that is the most easily identifiable marker. However, one of the things I learned immediately in doing my research was that those words and labels could not be applied to everyone. They carried a weight, a connotation. In reading the speeches of Marcus Garvey I noticed his use of the word African, for instance a common slogan of the UNIA was “Africa for the Africans”. The word African in this context, encompassed all people of the Diaspora not just people born in the continent. It was meant to symbolize that ancestral ties to the same land meant that black people were all brothers and sisters; everyone had their roots in Africa before enslavement and was therefore connected by this common identity.

In speaking to my interviewees, I realized that the important question that I had to establish first was the ways in which they self identified. I did this with an awareness that too often marginalized peoples are named by others. Just like oppression is enacted upon certain bodies, labels are also placed upon said bodies often without consent. Therefore self naming is a powerful tool and a statement that debunks what others assume you are. In my interview with Shabazz on the question of how he chose to call and identify himself, he spoke of the fact that as African people, people were constantly renaming

²⁸ Shabazz, Interview by author, 28th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

them and defining them. However, it was an attempt to ensure that they are a people 'discombobulated from themselves'²⁹ in order to spread disunity.

Nana Kwabena Opokuprempeh in my first interview made it clear that he identified as an African or African born in America. This not only aligned him with the ideology of Marcus Garvey but also established him as a man that disassociated the "American" from himself. As he described to me in the interview, his people never willingly left they were taken to a different land and stripped of their heritage. I interpret this to mean that therefore assimilation could have never taken place and therefore the African was always posited as outsider, never encompassed in the American dream. He continued by saying that to call himself an African was to acknowledge that this was the land he and his ancestors were taken from, they did not choose to leave, and therefore he had rights to claim this as his land of origin.

My interview with Nana also established that he had a life long awareness of Africa and African culture. His connection and knowledge of cultural traditions and history extended to his own personal involvement with the Akan religion. I surmise that because of his identification with a culture including a religion that was practiced by his brothers across the ocean, he was able to see himself as part of an African identity. This is in contrast to the experience of Mimi Igyan who took no such label in identifying herself. In the exact opposite to Nana, Mimi recognized that there are things that are intrinsically American about her as a result of her being raised in that culture. As she explained to me in the interview, she felt she knew that she was American, too much in her explained otherwise. Her anxiety about time and her children's desire for Christmas presents were remnants of the materialism and stress of a fast paced consumerist United

²⁹ Shabazz, Interview by author, 28th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

States. She therefore feels comfortable with any label and is decidedly not caught up on what people choose to call her. Even the term oburoni (commonly used to mean white person) doesn't bother her as she explains that the more she finds about its origins, as she defines it 'someone from beyond the horizon'³⁰, the more she realizes how people might feel it is applicable to her.

In my interview with Hasid and Aaishah Levi they too identified themselves as something other than African American. They explained that in the United States people are conditioned to believe that they are "negro or colored" however there is 'no land or people called negro'³¹. It is a core belief of theirs that their nationality is African Hebrew Israelite and it is in this way that they express their identities. As they explained, their beliefs hold that Hebrew is a lineage. Such a revelation, they explained was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit upon their following of the Hebrew Israelites. They believe that Deuteronomy Chapter 28 in its descriptions of punishments handed down by God was referring to the Hebrew people who would then come to be known as African American. As they explained to me, the chapter describes a curse put upon the people such as, "you shall build an house and you shall not dwell therein, you shall plant a vineyard and shall not gather the grapes thereof."³² They see this as a description of the bondage that African peoples would face. Their identification with the term Hebrew, is taking what they see as the historically accurate name given to the black skinned peoples who would be the Egyptians and later comprise the tribes of Israel. Hebrews are the dark skinned people who wandered throughout Africa and would later be enslaved and brought to the

³⁰ Mimi Igyan, Interview by author, 3rd of December 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

³¹ Hasid and Aaishah Levi, Interview by author, 29th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

³² Hebrew Greek Study Bible, King James Version, Deuteronomy Chapter 28.

Americas. This ideology is one that they see as supported by passages in the Bible such as Deuteronomy Chapter 28. Therefore, African American is not an apt name for them because they feel that they are Hebrews, they never acquired the American because it was predestined for them all along to come to a foreign land as Hebrew people until their ultimate return to Zion.

A link to distinctly “American” traits in one’s past might cause someone to identify with the African American and believe there are differences that come about as a result of having to some degree assimilated. For instance, in Mimi’s narrative she mentions her past as a high school cheerleader, an activity that she saw as an American cultural marker. To the contrary, those with links to Africa from an early onset of youth, like Nana’s involvement with the UNIA at a young age and being taught African culture to the degree that he practiced the traditional religion, in many ways indoctrinated him to keep alive cultural links to the ancestral homeland. This makes it easier to dispel the “American” from his identity in favor of realizing that he is more similar than different from his African brethren. If he is a practitioner of African culture and Africa is where his genealogical roots lie, then surely it is easier for him to identify himself as an African. In the case of Aaishah and Hasid they felt that it was not so much that there were no differences between people in the Diaspora and Africans living in Ghana today, but more a function of accurately naming one’s historical lineage. The Hebrew people as they believe is supported by the Bible, are the same people that would eventually migrate, be captured, enslaved, and sent to the United States and eventually be termed African American. In naming themselves Hebrew I interpret it as a recognition of the fact that the Hebrew Israelite faith sees such a relocation of blacks in the United States as only

transitory. As they explained to me, the Bible supports that Hebrews are to be restored and return to their original land. Therefore that lineage was not something given up, but disrupted in a relocation that the Bible says is temporary.

Chapter II:

‘I heard the call of Africa in my mother’s stomach’³³ Reasons for Returning

In a historical context many repatriate movements have had a communal basis, an attempt to have groups of people relocate at one time. Prior to the Back to Africa movement of Garvey, each of the attempts usually had a single motivating factor. Whether it was the wish of white racists to purge blacks from the fabric of the United States, using repatriating blacks as “agency for the civilizing of Africa”³⁴, or fulfilling religious prophecy in the case of the Rastafarians, the moves occurred as a group and/or as part of a larger movement. However, my research shows that the current state of repatriation is to the contrary. Repatriates are coming on an individual basis and for distinct reasons. The narratives that I was told by the interviewees suggests that the motivating factors in their journeys, the point at which they decided to come, the ways in which different periods of their life and/or ideology contributed to the desire to return to Africa, were all specific to each of their life experiences and stories. However, some common themes can begin to be seen.

A. Escaping Fear and Escaping Stress:

Mimi Igyan first came to Ghana when she was 16 years old with her step father who was Ghanaian. Having this connection meant that she already had a prior knowledge

³³ Nana Kwabena Opokuprempeh, Interview by author, 21st of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

³⁴ George Padmore, 24.

of the culture, as she described the ‘sissing, the snapping’³⁵, were not new to her. She described Ghana at that time at almost a pristine place different from her native home of Atlanta. As she developed into an adult her fond memories of Ghana remained with her. It was finally the turning point of having her children that pushed her to make the move for good. In September of 2006, Mimi now in her 30s made the transition and moved to Ghana.

Mimi is unique in my case study as when she decided to make the transition to move to Ghana, she was not only making a choice that she believed would better her life, but a decision that she believed would better the lives of her four children. Therefore, her decision to repatriate was responsible for the repatriation of her sons and daughters. Although absent from her narrative as a motivating force for coming, it should be noted that her mother also had had a desire to live in Ghana and had even attempted to live in the country as a Peace Corps volunteer. Her move at the time was only prevented because the Corps stopped accepting families. Mimi’s mother now lives in Ghana as well and is starting a coalition of grandmothers interested in sending their grandchildren who are caught up in the juvenile detention system in the United States to Ghana in order to see the bigger picture and through education and hard work turn their lives around.

For Mimi, in comparison to my other case studies, the move was not wholly based on political ideology or spiritual motivations and beliefs. For her the turning point and marker was the birth of her children. What had been pushing her to desire to relocate up until that point was wanting to escape the stress and rat race of the United States. She saw the consumer and materialistic culture as a competitive one in which people often worked their whole lives without having a moment to enjoy the fruits of their labor. The reasons

³⁵ Mimi Igyan, Interview by author, 3rd of December 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

she wanted to come were also economic. Although she had enjoyed a career in television production in Atlanta she believed that Ghana was a more welcoming environment to starting up business endeavors. The market was less competitive and it was less expensive to begin to start one's own enterprise because of the costly overhead that was necessary in the United States. She could also afford to send her children to private school, something that she did not have access to in the United States.

Currently, after being here for little over a year, she owns a home and is now in the process of creating a matchmaking website to link African Americans with Ghanaians. She is also continuing to work in the entertainment field by judging and aiding in the creation of a musical talent competition for Ghanaian youth that ends in a record contract. Furthermore, her family had had and continues to operate a herbal nutrient company. Being in Ghana allows them to continue that business while abroad and they now own a farm here harvesting Moringa, a native plant with essential nutrients that can aid in healing malnourished children.

For Mimi it was the birth of her children that motivated her thoughts of repatriation to actually come into fruition. It was no longer just about her wanting to escape the stress of the United States or the increasing afflictions in her community of Atlanta. It was wanting to do what was best for them, bringing them to a place where they were free to play and be children without being under the constant auspices of a parent's watchful eye. It was also the belief that money could go a longer way in Ghana and provide more business and educational opportunities and thus a better life for her family.

Shabazz is a repatriate that first came to the continent of Africa not with a visit to Ghana but to Senegal. He had won the local McDonalds Back to Africa Alex Haley Roots competition which sent him to Senegal as first prize in 1994. Upon making that trip he knew that he wanted to permanently reside in Africa. He was motivated by several factors a large one of which was his interest in herbal medicine. His interest in holistic medicine led him to want to leave the United States, or Snakes as he calls it, and escape the medical industrial complex. He wanted to go to where the herbal roots came from and saw the way in which medicine affected people in the states as detrimental.

A knowledge of fear and power also contributed to cultivating feelings of wanting to repatriate. As he explained to me, he believes that fear is a motivating force in this world. One of the ways in which it motivated him was by making him want to escape what he sees as the larger “diabolical plan”³⁶ that exists. This plan is the way in which people in power purposefully orchestrate power structures to keep certain people oppressed. I believe one example of one such structure that he illuminated to is the prison industrial complex which targets people of color and is a modern day system to enslave them, disenfranchise them, and use them as cheap labor. Growing up in Brooklyn, New York in a neighborhood plagued by racism and violence, police brutality, discrimination in employment ,the prison system, gang violence, and prostitution, he also saw the way in which systemic oppression affected things at the base level and caused these problems.

Seeing this diabolical plan made him want to escape it as much as one could escape systemic racism and oppression. I interpret his move to be in part, a way of leaving the belly of the beast, especially because he revealed to me that he largely felt it

³⁶ Shabazz, Interview by author, 28th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

was almost impossible in the current state of things to positively affect these systems. His belief that there are still some people in the world that are untouched by the evil forces of consumption, greed and materialism made him also romanticize Ghana in his mind. In many ways he believed that there was still a possibility of finding those with good intentions, a genuine heart and interest, and divine love. He believes this is more likely to be found outside of the United “Snakes”, in people that are untouched by the negative ideals and ideas the United States espouses. Shabazz chose Ghana as the place that he would repatriate to because he believed it was the “umbilical cord to the continent”³⁷. He believed that Ghana seemed like the country most receptive towards repatriates and it called to him spiritually. He was also moved by a desire to live in a land of darkness, a place where black and brown skinned people were not detested as such but comprised to norm and majority. In this space he explained to me, he would feel more comfortable embracing his African side. Interestingly, similar to Mimi, his family also resided in Ghana and ran the restaurant and lodge One Africa, yet that was not a factor in his decision to come to Ghana permanently.

Now close to 50 years old, Shabazz had left behind a career in the Hip hop industry in the United States when he repatriated in 1997. However he continues to be involved with media and has a radio show that he does in Ghana. He is also continuing to pursue the herbal sciences and is part owner of One Africa. He is now married to two Ghanaian women and is raising his children in the area.

B. The Personal is the Political: Political Ideology and the Shaping of a Repatriate Consciousness

As a youth, Shabazz would hear words such as prejudice in his classroom and question his teachers about such conditions and how they could ever be rectified. They

³⁷ Shabazz, Interview by author, 28th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

would have no answers as to solve such a systemic problem. To this day he still believes that it is almost impossible to change the system without it changing you first. Even people attempting to make positive change, he explains, don't even realize the ways in which they are infected with and affected by the United States' materialism, consumerism, and false ideals. Therefore, to him the extent of his political motivations in repatriating to Ghana was a desire to escape the oppressive hegemony as much as he could, as opposed to a desire to change the system per say from the outside.

Whereas some repatriates are working actively toward the cause of attaining citizenship and subsequent rights in Ghana, others see it as a move that is purely political and nothing they deem necessary. Hasid and Aaishah explained to me in the interview that because they never consciously accepted citizenship in the United States and nor did their people, they are not a citizen of the country. Their ancestral ties to the continent of Africa and their lineage and nationality as Hebrew people in their eyes means they already have citizenship and a right to the land in Ghana, though it might not be a legal contract with the Ghanaian government. This belief on their part that it is an unnecessary fight for them to personally pursue citizenship comes out of their ideology of to a larger degree, wishing to remain politically disengaged on the larger levels. As Hasid explained, he refuses to join the system or engage with it for it will change the person. He goes on to say that those that believe they can both spiritually and politically affect things in Ghana or from Ghana often lose sight of the spiritual. Aaishah continues by saying that 'no man can serve two masters.'³⁸ In essence, in order for them to build the righteous kingdom from Ghana that they wish to aid in its creation, they can not be consumed with aiming to change the government and serving man, in this case the corrupt politicians.

³⁸ Aaishah Levi, Interview by author, 29th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

Whereas Hasid and Aaishah's move to Ghana was a spiritual journey for them, for my other interviewee the move to Ghana culminated from a lifelong commitment to the political ideology of Marcus Garvey. Nana Kwabena Opokuprempeh identifies as a second generation Garveyite. His story is a case study on the way in which political ideology can shape a repatriate consciousness as well as the current way that Garveyism is still alive in the minds of some repatriates.

Nana Kwabena Opokuprempeh was born the year that Ethiopia was invaded by Italy and was given the name Selassie by his parents. His parents were involved with the United Negro Improvement Association, the organizational arm of Garvey and his movement. Both his father and his maternal uncle were president of Brooklyn divisions of the UNIA. As he explains, his family's very foundations were in some ways attributed to the UNIA and its vision. His father's family was from Jamaica and his mother's family was from Trinidad, two groups of Africans in the Diaspora that historically did not get along. However, they found a connection in the age of Garveyism, a movement that Nana explains as being a bridge that brought together people you often wouldn't find in the same room together, such as the light and dark skinned. Nana grew up in a household that was Africa conscious. The history of Africa's glorious past was always being discussed and the achievements of the continent and its people were praised. This all contributed to making Nana take great pride and interest in his race and history. He became involved with the UNIA at a young age as a youth member of the council. He showed such interest that soon his uncle made him the first assistant to the President General of the UNIA. The position required that he undergo further education in the teachings of Garvey and the organization's principles. He began to identify with the ideology and saw Garvey's

colleagues such as Du Bois as espousing the white man's philosophy of the talented tenth. Nana believed as Garvey did, that willing and able Africans in the Diaspora should return to the land of their ancestors and contribute to its nation building.

Nana explains that the desire to first repatriate came to him when he 'heard the call of Africa in his mother's stomach.'³⁹ In 1975 he went to Ghana with a three pronged mission. He chose Ghana because of his involvement in the Akan religion but also because of its historical importance as one of the major doors through which enslaved peoples were taken. Furthermore, he liked the fact that in Ghana one could still find remnants of the traditional culture that existed prior to colonization. His mission to Ghana in 1975 was to seek out the culture, have Marcus Garvey deified in the Akan religion, and see the Asante ruler about land that had been allocated to the UNIA in prior years as gratitude for their part in curing a sickness that was afflicting Asante cows. He returned to the United States with a knowledge that he would one day live there permanently.

Nana made eight trips between 1975 and the time that he eventually repatriated in February of 2007. The impetus that finally made him come to Ghana for good was his age. He explained that his wife is afflicted with dementia now, and he wanted to bring her to a place where she could receive proper care. He felt that this was something that would be more affordable and accessible in Ghana. A Ghanaian woman who he has taken as an adopted daughter now is responsible for the care of his wife. Nana explained to me that it is a unique situation, one that could only happen within the context of Ghana, that people that help in the household are taken in not as simply employees but as members of the

³⁹ Nana Kwabena Opokuprempeh, Interview by author, 21st of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

family. Furthermore, he and his wife wanted to be able to die in their old age in a place of their choosing, and that is Ghana.

The impetus for Nana's move after many years may have been he and his wife's age, however what planted the desire to repatriate in his mind was a political consciousness that developed in his youth. A follower of Garvey, he believes that Africans in America built the United States and therefore have experience building nations. If all of that black energy and power could be united and harnessed in Africa, then a stronger continent and stronger countries could be made. Nana believes that Nkrumah was a positive leader for Ghana who believed in the ideals of Garvey such as African unity and not bowing to white influence. Therefore, on these foundations a strong and united Africa could be built. As he explained, in his youth 'one would say they didn't have a Chinaman's chance, you would never hear that now.'⁴⁰ The difference is that a strong country has been built and therefore Chinese people everywhere have benefited from the backing of that power. As Nana believes, every people has a nation and for black people that place is the continent of Africa, in order for there to be a strong black man everywhere, there must be a strong and proud Africa. It is his desire to do his part in this nation building that has propelled him in many ways to repatriate.

**C. "I will take you one of a city and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion"⁴¹:
Spiritual Reflection and Meditation in the Repatriate Experience**

Whereas Nana's repatriate consciousness was developed in many ways as a result of political alignment and the ideology of Garvey, in other narratives I received from interviewees, there was a spiritual nature to their experiences in coming to the conclusion that repatriation was the right path for them. Furthermore, I think it is important to note

⁴⁰ Nana Kwabena Opokuprempeh, Interview by author, 21st of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

⁴¹ Hebrew Greek Study Bible, King James Version, Jeremiah 4 Verse 14.

the way in which the spiritual, what is usually dismissed by the academic canon as being irrational and not legitimate, influenced the development of repatriate consciousness. I argue that the spiritual is just as significant as numerous other impetuses for returning to Africa and must be recognized. Whether it came up as the reason for people repatriating, such as the beliefs of Hasid and Aaishah, or the way in which the spiritual was mentioned as a connection to the ancestral homeland, or as mysterious roadblocks in one's way to repatriation, it is all of importance.

Spirituality and beliefs play a key role in some people's decision to repatriate. However, even if it was not the main force that drove someone's desire to come to Ghana, it was a bridge that offered a feeling of connectedness to the land. For instance, Nana's practicing of the Akan religion was a way that he kept alive the traditions and beliefs of his ancestors and of Ghanaians, even while he was still residing in the United States. This offered him a feeling of solidarity with his African brothers and sisters overseas. In my interview with Shabazz he mentioned feeling drawn to Africa and more specifically Ghana because of its location as a blessed place in his mind. He went on to explain this as his feeling that the geographical location of Ghana in terms of tectonic plates and its abundance of water and sunshine, made it a place with all of the necessary components of energy and life force. Shabazz also mentioned that upon the approaching date of his repatriation he felt that a spiritual thing had occurred. He identified this as a series of coincidences that resulted in hardships that needed to be overcome in order to repatriate. He felt these things were put in his way in order to test his desire and commitment to moving to Ghana. These things included only one of his friends being able to assist him in packing, the metal shipping container holding all of his possessions

sliding through a driveway and gates and getting stuck in the mud, having to wait for a crane to be called to assist him in getting it, the police believing he had stolen the moving van and looking for him, etc. This series of inconveniences added up to a tremendous stress at the time of his moving that made it seem at times that he wasn't going to be able to go through with it. However, it was his drive and patience, as well as knowledge that he was being tested, that allowed him to overcome it and accomplish what he needed to get done.

Hasid and Aaishah Levi's story begins with what Aaishah explains was a knowledge in her youth that she was drawn to Africa. Each of them had made trips separately and together to Ghana and felt compelled by something to do so. They are now in the process of finalizing the construction of their house in Moree and will hopefully move into it in August or September of 2008. They see their future home as being a communal space to be used to ease the transition of other African Hebrew Israelites who plan on repatriating.

It was the resonance of the African Hebrew Israelite faith that pulled them to want to repatriate and feel that it was their destiny. As Hasid explains, in the scriptures it dictates that the Hebrew people are to wander and be scattered for 400 years. However, they are eventually to return home and it is only there that they can find solace and righteousness. They see being Hebrew as their lineage, they are descendents of Jacob who would be chosen by God and renamed Israel. His twelve sons would then carry on what are referred to as the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribes would be scattered and

whereas some went towards Europe others migrated downwards in Africa.⁴² Of the Hebrews that migrated downward in Africa, many were sold into slavery which as Hasid and Aaishah relayed to me was preordained in Deuteronomy Chapter 28 when God lists the curses that will plague the people including “you shall build an house and you shall not dwell therein, you shall plant a vineyard and shall not gather the grapes thereof.”⁴³ They see Africa as their ancestral homeland, the land in which their Hebrew ancestors lived prior to being enslaved. Furthermore, it is their belief that God ordered that one day the people will return from the foreign land, which they identify as the United States or Babylon to their homeland, Africa. This land, Babylon, would be so corrupt that the only way to do what was right was to return to the land of origin and build a righteous kingdom there. This would fulfill what was predestined as a coming home to Zion. Hasid and Aaishah believe that this is the work they are doing. They have returned home as the Bible commanded and are wanting to spread the values of righteousness such as divine love and truth to other people. They came to Ghana because they saw it as the point of departure for a vast majority of enslaved people. They also believe that just as the Bible says the land that people will return to will have remnants of the past, Ghana is a country that too has signs of culture as it existed prior to colonization. Therefore the journey to repatriation for Hasid and Aaishah was a spiritual one in which they felt compelled by their beliefs, their lineage, and God to return home.

⁴² This historical information is based upon conversations with Hasid and Aaishah in which they explained their beliefs to me and showed me various passages in the Bible that supported their statements. I am explaining the Hebrew Israelites as they had been explained to me in my interview.

⁴³ Hebrew Greek Study Bible, King James Version, Deuteronomy Chapter 28.

**Chapter III: ‘The world doesn’t promote an African familial reunion’:
Difficulties in the Experience of Repatriation**

Returning to the African continent and to Ghana can be an enriching experience that in many ways can fulfill the life long dreams of repatriates. However, like with any major transition in life, there is an adjustment that must take place and that can be difficult. There are also other obstacles that the repatriates enumerated on. These obstacles can be governmental affairs, interactions with Ghanaians, or language barriers to name a few. Although these difficulties do not lessen the importance and impact of their decision to repatriate, they do posit themselves as things one must get acclimated to upon returning to Africa.

In first visiting Ghana, Hasid and Aaishah described being in a dream state, believing the country to be ‘pure, untouched.’⁴⁴ However, when the dream state ends, one realizes that Ghana has been affected by it’s history of colonization as well as “Western”⁴⁵ ideals through globalization that position many African Americans as others. The foremost way in which unity between Ghanaians and repatriates was disrupted was through economics. All of my interviewees described being perceived as having wealth because they came from the United States. Therefore, they were constantly asked for money. As Mimi explained, many Ghanaians didn’t understand that she had to give up almost everything to come, her possessions and assets. Hasid, Aaishah, and Shabazz all explained feeling that they had to be skeptical of the warm greetings and interests in friendship they did receive because occasionally there were ulterior motives on the part

⁴⁴ Hasid and Aaishah Levi, Interview by author, 29th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

⁴⁵ I use quotations when using the word Western because I realize that the ideologies that often permeate the world and are believed to be “Western” come from a very specific and elite class in the United States. The ideology of capitalistic consumerism and materialism are the same ideals that oppress many communities of color and the working class. However, many of these people also reside in the West, therefore I want to acknowledge that this term is not accurate in positing itself as being an ideology applicable to all people in the Western Hemisphere.

of Ghanaians, such as hope of financial gain. Although this hurts, the interviewees explained that they realized it was a remnant of colonization. As Hasid explained, black people preyed on each other because of the oppression bearing down on all of them. Shabazz also holds the belief that deception manifested itself as a means of survival after the culture had been corrupted by the greed of the oppressor.

Often when Ghanaians learn that the repatriates are Afro Americans that have relocated and not simply visiting, they react with surprise. As Nana explains, many of them couldn't conceive of why a person would leave a so called rich country such as the United States. However, Mimi expresses that this bewilders her. She expresses that she wishes that people would stop seeing material objects as the marker of success and happiness. Instead, she sees living in Ghana as a paradise, a place free of the fast paced pressure of the United States. A place where one can, as she explains, 'nap in the market place while on the job, whereas working at Walmart in the United States a nap would result in getting fired'⁴⁶. Aaishah agrees, and points to a passage in the Bible that is a parable that describes a place that is paradise but had people begging for gold and silver. This want of the material is based on "Western notions" material goods being and making someone valuable. For Mimi, her oldest son had a hard adjustment precisely because he had to leave behind his life material objects that he had been indoctrinated in the United States to believe were of importance to his youth.

Nana relays to me that some people feel threatened because they are economically linked to the white man and wouldn't want to jeopardize that relationship by establishing solidarity with Africans in the Diaspora. This is the way that many of the repatriates conceived of the Ghanaian government. Mimi expressed similar thoughts of the

⁴⁶ Mimi Igyan, Interview by author, 3rd of December 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

government having its hand in European pockets instead of working to allocate funds to better things for Ghanaians such as closed gutters or safer roads. Hasid points to outside pressures such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as reenslaving people. The cooperation of the Ghanaian government with these forces is what keeps people in poverty he explains to me. For this reason the government has not been as hospitable as it claims to be toward the repatriate community and people thinking of returning. Shabazz tells me about the Joseph Project created by the Ghanaian government with the intention of drawing and attracting blacks in the Diaspora. However, the program he tells me is only lip service. It does nothing to provide citizenship or the rights and benefits afforded with citizenship to the repatriates. Instead, the repatriates I interviewed have temporary or tourist visas that must continuously be extended. Nana also gave insight into the fact that it cost \$12,000 over a period of several years for permanent residence. Dual citizenship is not set up and he does not know of anyone that has it. As a result, none of the repatriates can vote or be able to remain in their homeland of choice without the hassle of having to go through government bureaucracy to renew their visas. Besides the stresses put on repatriates by the Ghanaian government, many older repatriates such as Nana must deal with the difficulty of receiving retirement pensions or social security. Often banks in the United States have red tape put up that makes the receiving of money on Nana's part in Ghana a slow and drawn out process. Furthermore, the bank puts a freeze on money transfers that are more than \$10,000 at a time.

Mimi said that although she knew that Ghanaians would expect her as an American to have money, she was surprised by the cold shoulder she often received. She

felt that she was treated as a foreigner even when in many cases if she didn't open her mouth someone might take her as a Ghanaian. She sees this in contrast to the way that white visitors and tourists are received. She believes that black people are taken advantage of in ways that Ghanaians are afraid to treat whites. I believe that one might interpret this as being a remnant of colonialism. If economically one's survival is tied into tourism and if what they have been indoctrinated to emulate is the wealth and success of white Europeans and Westerners, then the white body will be read in a more valuable way. Shabazz also attributes the suspicion on the part of Ghanaians to be jealousy and resentment. It is their fear of losing land and/or jobs to African Americans that makes them see them as a threat. Nana explains this as a rational fear as the nation of Liberia was created on a caste system whereas repatriates were held in higher esteem than native Liberians. He went on to say that occasionally he felt that Ghanaians viewed repatriates and Africans in America as being arrogant or defensive because they are more likely to ask questions or make inquiries. Mimi argues though that she is not surprised much by the lack of unity, for there is no solidarity anywhere amongst black people. I believe this to be a result of the larger structures positioning us against each other to compete for the very little resources people of color are dealt under these oppressive systems. Instead of looking to debunk and dismantle larger structures, it is easier to focus on one's survival in daily life. This often means competing and seeing your brother as said competition. Shabazz speaks to this point in saying that African peoples, including those in the Diaspora have a 'tribal thing.'⁴⁷ This thing is the way in which blacks differentiate and divide from each other whether it be because of ethnic group, nation, or borough of residence in New York City.

⁴⁷ Shabazz, Interview by author, 28th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

The remnants of colonialism extend to the level at which repatriates are looked upon. For instance, Nana says that he and others feel frustrated by being called oburoni. He believes that it shows a lack of knowledge of history on the part of Ghanaians. Aaishah feels similarly frustrated. She explains that she often tries to communicate to women that call her 'white lady' that it is not only an inaccurate term but a hurtful one. She also feels a negative reaction to her hair being dreadlocked. This she explains is because Ghana is currently a place caught up in a foreign and white standard i.e. the taking of Christian and not traditional names, or the relaxing of natural African hair. Shabazz explains that he believes that religion has been one of the biggest propagators of this ideology. For instance, he says, people are forgetting how to do libations, something that is an integral part in Ghanaian culture, because of the teaching against it by the Christian churches.

The two Ghanaian men involved in the tourism industry that I spoke with supported with their words many of the claims made by the repatriates. For instance, although the tour guide Kwame Nkrumah at Cape Coast Castle, views repatriates as his brothers and sisters in the Diaspora, and sees the way in which they are moved by learning about the atrocities at the Castle, he still feels a disconnect. This is evident when he tells me that he believes that blacks in the United States do not like to work or attend school and as a result large numbers are incarcerated. These negative stereotypes he holds of Afro Americans are the result of a successful propaganda campaign on the part of the United States to hide the fact that systemic racism and inequality still exists in the United States. Kwame Nkrumah is in part believing the negative stereotypes of lazy and uneducated Afro Americans, stereotypes that have been applied to Africans for centuries.

However, Nkrumah also mentions another reason for a disconnect between Africans and Afro Americans. He explains that he believes that many Afro Americans come to the Castle and leave blaming Ghanaians or more specifically the Asante people for enslaving their ancestors. Such a sentiment was only mentioned by one interviewee, Nana, who said that slavery was allowed in some ways to happen because of what he feels was a kowtowing to white interests. Dan of the Ghana Heritage Conservation Fund also felt that blacks in the Diaspora were closed off to their African brothers and sisters. However, he attributed this less to anger over slavery and more to blacks in the Diaspora denying they have roots and ties to Africa. He explains that it is whites that show a greater interest in him and that when they promise to send something or start an organization they carry through with the plans, unlike their black counterparts. His feeling of alienation from repatriates might be a result of a mutual hesitance, with repatriates having to be skeptical about who is genuine in their interest.

In terms of language barriers both Shabazz and Nana having a working knowledge of local language that makes their social interactions easier and makes them more able to navigate through the day to day. Both of them have family members who are fluent and this is a great help, for Shabazz his wives and his children are Fante, and for Nana, his adopted daughter and nephew are Fante as well. For Hasid and Aaishah not knowing the language has only been a minor disruption because they are able to communicate either in English or pick up on cues to understand what is being said. For Mimi, the main drawback of not being fluent in any local language is that it hinders her interactions with older women in the community, many of whom do not speak English.

Surprisingly none of my interviewees mentioned things such as adjustment to climate, threat of malaria or not having constant access to clean water or electricity as major obstacles. The only time it was spoken of was on the part of Mimi who said that these things were not difficulties but adjustments that had to be made. The reaction on the part of repatriates to these adjustments is in major contrast to the ways in which their friends, families, and communities felt upon hearing they planned on repatriating. For many, people in their life knew that it was in their future to do so, though each interviewee had at least someone close to them express displeasure in their decision. These people often highlighted the exact concerns that the repatriates did not mention as obstacles in my interview.

Chapter IV: The Joys of Returning Home: A Conclusion

The joys of returning home for each repatriate is different and specific to each of their reasons for returning home. However, all of them found benefits they felt could not have been afforded to them in the United States as a result of their race and the sociopolitical climate there. Being in Ghana offered a new start for many of the repatriates, a place where they could build the lives that they had envisioned for themselves.

For Shabazz being in Ghana means being in a continent that brought the world developments in science and mathematics. Living here is the ability to embrace that which is African which he seemingly identifies as a higher spiritual plane, an intuition, a knowledge of herbs and medicine, of ancient knowledge. He feels that because of its position in the world as well as its resources, Ghana is a blessed land where he feels its

energy. He gets to follow his interest in herbal medicine and study the science in the place where the roots and herbs come from firsthand. Ghana is also an escape from the fear he felt in Brooklyn, the violence and systemic oppression that plagued his and so many other psyches. In this space he feels more able to better know himself and heal the ways in which he feels he might have been 'infected by the sickness of the West.'⁴⁸ In that way he can make real change. Lastly, Shabazz sees repatriation as the beginning of the reunification of the African family, of African people and their brothers and sisters in the Diaspora coming together and forming a united front. This is similar to the way in which Mimi views the weekly meetings held by Nana that teach both Ghanaians and repatriates Africana Studies. She sees the meetings as a way for the gap between the two groups to be bridged. In learning about a shared and common past, Africans and their brothers and sisters in the Diaspora can be brought together and learn from one and another.

For Mimi being in Ghana also gives her economic opportunity that she did not have in the United States. Here it is easier for her to start her own business. She can pursue her interests and make a career out of it. This contributes to the lessening of stress and a happiness on her part. Similarly, in Ghana, Nana can afford to get the proper care for his wife. He can afford to have someone live with them and help her. Furthermore, it is a more personal type of care unique to Ghana he explains, he has taken in the woman as his adopted daughter and she has been integrated into the family. He and his wife can also afford a comfortable life here, not worried and plagued by constant bills or banks, and they can also afford to eat in a nutritious manner that would have been expensive in the United States.

⁴⁸ Shabazz, Interview by author, 28th of November 2007, Ghana, notes, possession of author.

Like Nana, for Mimi, Ghana is a place where she can escape the stresses and pressures of life in the United States. Instead of being caught up in the material she can now teach her children what is really of importance. Instead in Ghana, she is able to focus more on the fruits of her labor and enjoying and getting something out of life rather than being competing. Ghana also offered a space for her to raise her children in a relatively safer environment than her home of Atlanta. Here they can attend private school and play without her needing to keep a constant eye on them. As she explains, they can be children in Ghana.

For Hasid and Aaishah returning to Ghana is the fulfilling of prophecy. They are playing their part in creating God's kingdom. By returning to their ancestral homeland it is the beginning of restoring a people to their place of origin. Although no place is untouched by the evil of Babylon they explain, they are now outside the belly of the beast. It is also the only way in which their faith teaches a righteous kingdom can be built. They believe that they can not live righteously within the context of the United States and what it stands for, by being outside of that system they can help others to see the path. There is more of a hope in Ghana for meeting those that are sincere with open hearts. Shabazz agrees in saying that Ghana is a more likely place to find those that are genuine in their divine love and interest, to be amongst black people on a large scale level and feel the love, respect, and power that radiates from that.

In the building of their new home Hasid and Aaishah are in a position to build their home and open it to their brothers and sisters in the Diaspora who share similar beliefs. In this way they are playing a part in a creation of a larger family and systems of support. For Mimi such a space exists in One Africa. Mimi explains that she sees One

Africa and the repatriates that frequent there as a safe place. It serves as a center for a community which she feels understands her. In many ways they have become her extended family and her support in Ghana. Aaishah and Hasid want their home to be a communal space, a bridge for people who wish to move from the United States to Ghana. The joy they receive from being in Ghana is knowing that they can take part in the building of a better, more spiritual, and more loving world and God's kingdom.

Hasid and Aaishah are in a place in which the remnants of culture prior to colonization can be seen. For instance libations are part of the traditions of both Ghanaians and African Hebrew Israelites. This was the reason that Nana also chose to come to Ghana. It was because it was a land where he could still feel and see the culture in some aspects as it had been before it was diluted and polluted by the oppressor.

For Nana, repatriating to Ghana was the culmination of a life time's interest in Africa, its history, culture and people. Living here has allowed him to exercise the principles of universal African unity that he had espoused even in his early years as a member of the UNIA. Many of the repatriates Nana explains, contribute to Ghanaian society by opening up businesses or by supporting their brothers and sisters. He mentions one repatriate woman who opened up a school for Ghanaian children, all of the people that he has taken in as extended family, and other repatriates who help financially support Ghanaians in sending their children to school. By being here Nana feels like he can contribute to making connections with his African brothers and sisters while building a strong African continent that will empower the African man throughout the world.

Although there are difficulties faced by repatriates I believe them to be a result of colonization and spreading through globalization, “Western” ideals of greed, materialism, success, and beauty standards. However, in each person’s narrative, one could hear a hope that things could be turned around. Whereas each interviewee felt that the United States had no hope for a harmonious future, nor hope for equality and justice for the members of the Diaspora living there, they felt by returning to their ancestral homeland they could have a better future. I believe that if Ghana is the land that each of my interviewees feel they belong in, connections can be made across barriers with Ghanaians to bridge divisions put in place by internalized racism and economics. It is through the building of an actual brotherhood and sisterhood in the land that the repatriates and their ancestors never intended to leave, that a powerful and righteous Africa can rise up and better the position of the African no matter where he is. I believe that the bridging of this gap will come through the aims of the repatriates and their Ghanaian brethren to create a better place for Ghanaians and others in the Diaspora, through education, human connection, economic support and involvement, conscious raising, herbal medicine, or building a kingdom based upon principles of love and respect. Cultural differences and divisions can be dismantled with time and labor through genuine relationships, learning from each other, and thus undoing the remnants of colonialism that continue to exist in people’s minds. It is through learning our shared past and history of oppression, the struggle of our people no matter where they reside, and the strength of our contributions to civilization when the oppressors never intended for us to survive, that true solidarity based upon pride and mutual respect can be built between brothers and sisters in the Diaspora.

Suggestions for Further Study:

This project was a labor of love for me. Although I had to spend time recollecting my data after my initial research notebook had been lost in a mugging, the extensive hours I spent doing research in UCC's library and collecting personal narratives was extremely rewarding. It was extremely meaningful for me to make connections with the people I interviewed, to learn our shared history through their words, to see what moved them to return home. It opened my eyes to a whole breadth of knowledge and experiences that I previously knew little about. One of my fondest memories of Ghana will be my interactions and conversations with the people I interviewed. Talking to other members of the African Diaspora helped me to process and meditate on my own experience here and the things I was feeling. I suggest learning about repatriation for anyone of African descent. I would also suggest for anyone that plans on taking up a similar project that they possibly attempt to find repatriates in an area that do not know nor socialize closely with other repatriates. This might make for an interesting case study. Also, although books on the contemporary repatriate movements are hard to find reading Ebony Kinship: Africa, Africans, and the Afro American by Robert G. Weisbord is an excellent primer.

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