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Traditional, Transitional, and Contemporary Approaches to Textile Printing in Ghana

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Traditional, Transitional, and Contemporary Approaches to Textile Printing in Ghana

Le’Ecia Farmer
(The Evergreen State College)

Project Advisor: Dr. Richmond T. Ackam
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi

Program Director: Dr. Olayemi Tinuoye

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Abstract
Title: Traditional, Transitional, and Contemporary Approaches to Textile Printing in Ghana

Author: Le’Ecia Farmer (leeciafarmer@gmail.com; The Evergreen State College)

Objectives:
● to learn the practical methods involved in traditional, transitional, and contemporary design and textile printing in Ghana
● to gain an understanding of the history and social aspects of printed textiles, design, and symbols.

Methodology: My methodology involved interviews, participatory research, observation, and literature research. I interviewed a traditional Adinkra printer, a Teaching Assistant and previous textile design student, a screen technician at KNUST and a screen technician at Ntonso.

Findings: I collected information about processes involved in traditional, transitional, and contemporary design and printing. I learned that the method of printing traditional Adinkra at Ntonso village where stamps and natural dye derived from the Badie tree are used. A transitional method incorporates the use of a hand screen, and compared to contemporary screen printing, they follow the same processes with slight differences in methodology.

Conclusion: Because of the high rate of production of screen printing in the transitional method, the traditional method of stamping has declined substantially. The main remaining printer at Ntonso, firmly believes in the superior quality of the traditionally printed cloth, so there is a constant demand for it, but the rate of production is slow. I appreciated learning many practical skills of design and printing, but faced challenges in being able to experiment or express my artistic style fully. I learned that many designers are concerned more with marketability and mass appeal than artistic expression which makes sense in a country where textiles are its third top industry.
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Methodology

I conducted my research in the Kumasi area for 27 days. I stayed in Ejisu with my host family and another SIT student. Most of my research and practical learning took place at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi where I learned about design and screen printing. I also made two visits to Ntonso to learn about Adinkra printing and Adinkra Duro.

To conduct my project, I implemented various research techniques. I visited the College of Arts Library at KNUST and read through student theses in subjects of textiles ranging from Adinkra, Ghanaian textile printing, and Ghanaian textile design.

I interviewed Gabriel Boakye at Ntonso on the processes of Adinkra and Adinkra Duro, as well as observed the different stages of processing the Badie bark for dyeing and stamping. I participated in the printing process by stamping my own kente strip and fabric with Adinkra symbols. I observed Kofi Gyebi implementing hand screen printing into traditional Adinkra printing, and I tried my own hand at screen printing at Ntonso.

With the design stage, I learned the elements and principles of textile design from KNUST teaching assistant, Sarkodie Bismark. I observed and looked through student designs, and I developed and created my own hand painted and computer constructed designs.

I observed the screen stretching process with Jeremiah “Pastor Jerry,” and I observed and participated in the screen coating and screen developing processes. With screen printing, I both observed and participated.
Introduction

Textiles are as important today as they were when they first emerged. Besides functionality, they are a means of communication - conveying meaning and symbolizing beliefs. There are various types of textiles that all have a role in how we navigate our existence socially and physically. In Ghana, cloth is commonly woven, dyed, and printed and color and symbols have a substantial role.

I chose to focus this study on printed fabric in Ghana rather than on dyed or woven fabric because of its prevalence in the marketplace, its widespread acceptance by Ghanaians of various backgrounds, its growing use in contemporary fashion and art, and the implications of its relationship to Western textile mills in Ghana.

As a student of art and of the African diaspora, my main objectives of this study were to learn the practical methods involved in design and textile printing in Ghana and to gain an understanding of the history and social aspects of printed textiles, design, and symbols. I also wanted to make an analysis about the implications of the European control of textile companies in Ghana amidst neo-colonialism, but I was not able to travel to Accra like I had planned to visit textile mills there or interview local Ghanaian owned printing companies or members of society about the effects of colonialism on Ghanaian textiles.

I studied traditional, transitional, and contemporary forms of Ghanaian textile printing. The traditional textile printing form that I studied was Adinkra because of its rich history and its popularity in use. Therefore, the transitional method I studied was a form of Adinkra printing that incorporates both traditional and contemporary elements of design and printing. Although there are many contemporary forms of printing ranging
from roller printing to engraved copperplate printing, I chose to focus on screen printing because of its commonness and because I would have had to go to a textile mill to learn about any other method in which the research might have been less hands on.

All images of my work and learning are located at the end of this text, with descriptions of the works located in the “List of Figures” on page ii.
“A Study of the Textile Printing Industry” in Ghana a thesis by Robert Ahene Nunoo done in 1980 was a helpful resource for learning about the technical and practical aspects of textile printing. The comparison between European and African textile design was useful in terms of the technical characteristics of each, but it lacked analysis on a social level. I appreciated that Nunoo outlined some problems traditional Adinkra craftsmen may face and did not look to mechanization as a cure-all solution. Overall, the thesis was expansive and thorough in terms of printing styles, techniques, and equipment. I would suggest it for anyone focusing more on technical aspects of printing.

“Patterns and Designs in Contemporary Ghanaian Textiles”, a thesis written by David Eyako Quashie in 1994, thoroughly analyzed many aspects ranging from proverbial correlations, aesthetic qualities, cultural significance and foreign influence of Ghanaian textile design. The author’s interrogation of the idea of an “authentic” African or Ghanaian contemporary design was stimulating. Quashie countered this idea by suggesting that contemporary Ghanaian textile design is rather a “diffusion” of Ghanaian original thought together with influences from other cultures. The analysis of influences from Mali, Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, and Cameroon was extensive and illustrative. However, the analysis of the relationship between Ghanaian and Western designs was less extensive and by labeling it “diffusion,” the coercive history and effects of colonialism were not accounted for and therefore the cross cultural exchange was implied as natural, and even symbiotic. Overall, this thesis was thorough in terms of
design, covering some technical aspects and expansively covering cultural aspects that influence Ghanaian textile design.

“Development of Textiles in Ashanti with Special Reference to Adinkra”, though written in 1970, was another thesis that was extremely useful in my research. Author, Alice Stella Blankson, outlined rich myths and histories around the origin of Adinkra. Blankson not only explored the most popular and commonly accepted explanations surrounding the origin of Adinkra in Ghana, but acknowledged alternative accounts as well. Blankson also talked extensively about the practical processes of making Adinkra Duro, printing, carving stamps, as well as personal extensive experiments for improving the fastness of Adinkra Duro. It was less extensive with the symbolism involved in Adinkra, but overall it was insightful.

Other materials I reviewed include the following:

“Contemporary Printed Cloth in Ghana: A Story Told, Statement Made” by Kristin Lawson.

“Adinkra Duro and Kuntunkuni Duro Painting” by Nana Ebow E. Maison.

“The Prospects of the Ghanaian Textile Designer” by Godwin Ampaw Agyepong

And other works.
Findings:

Ghanaian Textile Design

Adinkra and Traditional and Transitional Ghanaian Design

According to Robert Nunoo in his thesis, “Adinkra and traditional African design are characterized by taste for interrupting the expected line and juxtaposition of sharply differing design unites… Adinkra printers do use repetition and contrast, theme and variation in composition as the Euro-American tradition, but they disperse these principles through a wide range of sensory elements… creating a restless and continually interesting composition” countering the idea that traditional African textile design is accidental or unintentional (20). Instead, the color, arrangement, and symbology are critical to a successful Adinkra cloth.

According to Gabriel Boakye, an Adinkra printer at Ntonso, the only colors used for both traditional and transitional Adinkra printing are red, brown, and black. Other colors are used only if requested specially - usually by tourists or by non-Asante people. Those colors have persisted because they are associated with funeral ceremonies, as are the Adinkra cloths.

With traditional pattern arrangement, I observed that lines and squares or rectangles are often used to organize the Adinkra symbols. However, the stamps of the symbols chosen are not always arrange in the same way or sequence throughout the fabric.

I observed that, at least at Ntonso, the carving and designing of the actually stamp, “apakyiwa,” is separate work from that of printing. Rather the, carver and the printer rely on and support each other in terms of business transactions. The carver
works with symbols that have been in use for generations, but chooses the form or style of the apakyiwa. I noticed that one difference in terms of design between the traditional and transitional methods is that with traditional printing, the design is usually one-dimensional and the main elements are the symbols themselves, straight lines, and space unless the fabric used for printing has texture or its own separate pattern. One aspect that implementing screen printing into Adinkra design adds is that other elements of design can be utilized. For example, I noticed that some fabrics that were screen printed simply mimicked the pattern and arrangement of traditional Adinkra printing, while the majority of the screen printed fabrics at Ntonso incorporated multi-directional lines, dots to create texture, perspective, and other manipulations of space (see Appendix J). Also, traditional Adinkra symbols were still used, but also were often built upon to create new and interesting versions.

Contemporary Design

From Sarkodie Bismark, a teaching assistant at KNUST, I learned the basic components of textile design. The elements are color, line, dot, shape, space, texture, etcetera. For my own designs, I had to take into account each element to construct appealing designs. The principles (or rules) that guide successful arrangements are balance, proportion, unity, harmony, contrast, repetition, etcetera.

As a side note, while learning these principles, I wondered, since they are widely taught, whether or not much of these principles were Western principles of design and if so, what would Afro-centric principles of design consist of and how would they be taught? It is obvious that there are African principles of design such as interruption and
clashing, but they were not outlined to me, at least not when I was being taught the fundamentals of textile design by Sarkodie.

Naturally, as soon as I learn the rules I like to break them, or at least play with them. With my first design, I painted hands going in an actually regular pattern cutting diagonally across the page (see Appendix B, Figure 1). However, I used “unharmonious” colors and according to Sarkodie during my critique, there was a lack of balance because all my colors were bright with no dark tones. For me, this design choice was intentional, it did not seem to appeal to those helping learn design though, because they were concerned with marketability and did not think the colors I chose were “mature.”

Although hand painting designs is an important skill, computers are still used often to further manipulate the design and to separate the colors for screen printing. However, the hand painted design must be done well, with uniform colors and no texture at all or else the design will not be as appealing when manipulated on the computer (see Appendix B, Figure 2).

The software I used for computer aided design was Adobe Photoshop CS5.1. I used a channel system on Photoshop in which each design component had its own channel. This allowed for me to make detailed edits to specific parts of the design without affecting other parts of the design since they are on separate channels. When I came close to finalizing a design, I would manipulate color, texture, or size to see the most appealing arrangement (see Appendices C, D, and E).
Traditional Ghanaian Textile Printing

Origins of Adinkra

It is commonly accepted that Adinkra printing came to Ghana from Cote d'Ivoire. Even Gabriel Boakye, the last traditional Adinkra printer at Ntonso, agrees saying “Yes, Adinkra came from Cote d’Ivoire, but it collapsed there.”

The Gyamans were a kingdom in what is Cote d'Ivoire today. According to the popular story, the king of the Gyamans, Nana Kofi Adinkra, made a copy of the Golden Stool which was sacred to the Asantes. This act angered the Asantehene, Bonsu Penin, to the point that he waged a war in the early 19th century which ended with the defeat of the Gyamans and the decapitation of their king. According to the story, the captured Gyaman slaves serving in the Asantehene’s palace introduced the craft and subsequently “the Ashanti adopted the designs, gave them their own philosophy and gave them names” (Blankson 17). Adinkra printing was said to have formally started in Asokwa, brought by Opanin Duodu after he learned from the captured slaves.

Other Ghanaians believe that Adinkra has always been a part of their culture, originating from the people from which the Akans originated and coming to Ghana with their migration. What also supports this is the translation of the word “Adinkra.” “Adinkra’ means saying goodbye: ‘di’ means to say and ‘nkra’ means goodbye,” and with Adinkra cloth being intentionally used to say goodbye to those who have departed from the living, it is easy for Ghanaians to trust this view (Blankson 17).

I learned Adinkra printing at Ntonso, a village about 14 miles north of Kumasi. When Ntonso was still a young village, two elderly residents of Ntonso apprenticed at Asokwa and brought Adinkra printing back to Ntonso where it quickly gained popularity.
in terms of business because the land could not support many crops for farming (Blankson 23).

*Making Adinkra Duro*

My first day at Ntonso with Gabriel Boakye, I learned much about Adinkra Duro which is made from the bark of the Badie tree. The Badie tree used to grow well in this area but is now nearly extinct. Because of it's scarcity, Gabriel has to travel to the Northern Region of Ghana (about 7 hours one way) to collect the bark. The method of harvesting the bark involves cutting a vertical line into the bark of the tree and then returning to the tree the following day to remove the bark. The tree is not cut down for harvesting. After one layer of bark is removed, new bark will grow on the Badie, yielding up to three rounds of bark per year. Those that sell the bark sell old bark and new, fresher bark. If Gabriel uses enough fresh bark to make ten gallons of Adinkra Duro, the same amount of old bark would only yield about seven gallons.

Before boiling the bark, Gabriel explains the hard, outer part of the bark needs to be scraped off with a machete (see Appendix A, Figure 3). Once this is done, the remaining softer part of the bark is broken up and soaked (see Appendix A, Figure 4) for two days if it is in the rainy season or three days if it is in the dry season. If the bark is very fresh it can even skip the soaking process. After soaking, the bark is pounded in a large mortar with a pestle (see Appendix A, Figure 5). According to Gabriel, with the boiling stage, the cauldron should be filled halfway with the pounded bark and halfway with the water that was used for soaking. There is no specific amount of time for how long the bark should be boiled the first time, just as long as the dye is extracted (see Appendix A, Figure 7). With the second and final boil, Gabriel adds more of the sifted
soaking water and removes the bark from the cauldron. This boil lasts around seven to eight hours depending on the strength of the fire and is not finished until the Adinkra Duro is “thick like tar” (see Appendix A, Figure 8).

**Printing Method**

The traditional method of printing at Ntonso involved, nailing down the fabric on the printing table which is covered with foam. In my design, I wanted lines to create boxes on the fabric. First, the Adinkra Duro, fresh from the fire, needed thinner Adinkra Duro (from the 1st boil) to be added to it. Then a comb is dipped into the Adinkra Duro and dragged across the fabric in a downward motion to distribute the Adinkra Duro evenly. Next, I stamped the fabric. I chose symbols that convey connectedness and collective relationships. *Funtummireku denkyemmireku* is a crocodile with one stomach and two heads. According to *The Adinkra Dictionary*, it is a “symbol of unity in diversity, democracy or oneness of the human family despite cultural differences and diversities” (110). *Osram ne nsoroma* is a moon and a star showing “faithfulness, fondness, harmony, benevolence, loyalty and femininity” (178). *Sunsum* symbolizes “spirituality, spiritual purity, and the cleanliness of the soul indicative of the essential nature of man, the basic unit of human embodiment” (192). Printed symbols can be seen in Appendix I.
Transitional Printing Methods

Preparing and Developing the Screen

Although I did not get to watch the screens being made at Ntonso, they seemed to consist of the same thing used at KNUST (which I will discuss in detail later): a wooden frame and silk organdy or a similar fabric. The frames were much smaller, however. The screen maker I met, Kofi Gyebi, used photo emulsion mixed with a sensitizer. Kofi first coated the screen with the photo emulsion mixture and then placed it in a very dark room with a fan. With the design, he used the computer and printed it off a normal inkjet printer in black ink only on white paper. Then he applied kerosene to the design on the printed paper using a small piece of foam. After the screen dried, I observed him remove it from the dark room and place fitted foam at the back (inside) of the screen. Then he placed the kerosene soaked design at the front of the screen and covered it with glass. He brought the screen outside and placed it on the ground glass side up and foam side down. Kofi said he exposes it for thirty seconds if the sun is hot, or more than thirty seconds if there is not a lot of sun. After exposure, he soaks it for five to ten minutes and then washes it thoroughly.

Screen Printing Experiment

The screen printing process is similar to the one I did at KNUST (discussed later). First, we nailed down the fabric to the padded printing surface. Then two nails were attached to the top of the screen to create a small amount of space between the fabric and the screen. Instead of using registration marks designed into the screen like those at KNUST to keep the design alligned, Gabriel took a thin twig and broke it to
match the width of the design on the screen. Then he attached the twig to the left side of the screen at the center. After I printed my first design onto the fabric, I moved the screen to the right so that the twig touched the edge of the last design and at the center. Then I printed again. This created a space between the two printed designs, where the second screen of the same size would be able to fit perfectly. With the second screen and second color, the twig was no longer necessary since the empty spaces were already created to size. Instead, I looked through the corners of the design on the screen to match them up with the corners of the designs on the fabric. I used the leftover printing paste from my work at KNUST which was water based. The screen printers at Ntonso use an opaque paste instead which dries on the surface of the fabric, whereas mine penetrated the fabric to some degree. Also my colors of green and a purplish brown were not common choices as red, brown, and black paste is usually used.
Contemporary Ghanaian Textile Printing

Preparing and Developing the Screen

In order to screen print, a screen needs to be stretched with gauze-like fabric to which the design will be transferred onto and the printing paste will be pushed through onto the fabric.

With Jeremiah Takyi (“Pastor Jerry”), the technician for the printing studio, we used 40” by 20” wooden frames. The fabric used to make up the screen is called ‘silk organdy,’ though other mesh like material can be used. Jeremiah started by stapling the silk organdy to two perpendicular edges of the frame. Then, he pulled the fabric so that it was “drum tight” and secured it with staples to the remainder of the frame.

Next began the coating process. The screen needs to be coated with a light sensitive substance called photo emulsion, which consists of white glue, pigment, and potassium dichromate. Pastor Jerry specifically used white wood glue (Keimex 140). First the glue is mixed with pigment, which sole’s purpose is to make the photo emulsion easier to see on the screen. Then, water is added. Pastor Jerry said “there is no exact measurement, but it should be not too thick… not too watery.” The mixture is stirred, the potassium dichromate is added, and then the mixture is stirred again. Pastor Jerry added one large capful of potassium dichromate to the medium sized glue container (a ratio of about 3 ounces to about 30 ounces).

To coat the screen, the photo emulsion is poured into a metal trough which is about 10” to 12” wide. On one side of the screen, the trough is pressed against the front of screen at the bottom, tilted at a slight angle toward the screen, and brought up swiftly to the top of the screen. This action is repeated on the other side in order to completely
coat the screen. I observed that Pastor Jerry repeated this process two more times, resulting in the front of the screens being coated twice and the back (or inside) of the screens being coated once. Pastor Jerry explained that the screens need to dry for at least an hour in a darkroom. If they are to be used for mass production or commercial projects, the screens should be coated again. If they are to be used for personal work or small scale projects, one coating is sufficient.

After the screens dry, transference of the designs can take place. In the dark room, the “safe light” (a non-fluorescent light) should be activated so that the designs can be arranged onto the screen without the photo emulsion being activated. The designs should be printed on paper exact or relative to the size of the frame and only in black ink so that light cannot pass through the design. If the original design has multiple colors, each color should be separated, printed only in black, and applied to its own screen (so if a design has three colors it would call for three screens). For each screen, the printed design was placed face up on the glass of the light box. Then, the front side of the screen was placed onto the design. Next, even pressure was applied to the back of the screen so that there was no space or air between the glass and the design or the design and the frame. The lights in the light box (fluorescent light) were turned on. According to Pastor Jerry, since the lights in the box are bright and relatively close to the glass, the screen should be processed for three minutes. If the lights are fewer, dimmer, or further away from the glass, the screen should be processed for a longer duration. After time is up, the screen needs to be washed thoroughly. On the screen, the photo emulsion that was above the parts of the design was not exposed to light because the black ink acted as a barrier to the light. The photo emulsion on these parts
will wash away while the photo emulsion that was exposed to the light chemically bonded to the screen and will not wash away (see Appendix F, Figures 1 and 2). Therefore the design will be the open space on the screen where the printing paste will be forced to be passed through onto the fabric.

*Screen Printing Experiment*

Before I could start printing, my screens needed to be prepped. I had to cover the sides on both the inside and outside of the frame with masking tape to prevent printing paste from leaking out (see Appendix F, Figure 3). Then with the help of Sarkodie and others at the printing studio, I stretched my six yards of fabric onto the printing surface which is padded with foam underneath leather and stapled it down. After mixing pigment and printing paste to get the colors I wanted, I started printing by placing my first screen on the fabric and distributed my first color near the base. Then I used a squeegee to push the paste from one end to the other, applying firm even, pressure and holding the squeegee at a forty five degree angle (see Appendix F, Figure 5). On the screen are one centimeter long squares in each corner called registration marks (see the bottom right of Appendix K, Figure 3). With each subsequent print, the squares on the left side of the screen should match up with the right printed squares on the fabric to prevent any gaps in the printed fabric. With the second color and second screen, I repeated the same process, except this time we printed every other space and came back and did the ones leftover to create time for the last print to dry. Once we finished with the second and final color, we removed the fabric from the printing table and hung it to dry for about an hour.
Conclusion

Although the act of traditionally printing Adinkra cloth has declined substantially in Ntonso, there is still hope for the practice. According to Gabriel Boakye, people prefer the traditional method because of its higher quality. Hence, demand for traditionally printed cloth is consistently there, but the process and rate of production is slow. Some also argue that tourism is keeping the traditional method afloat. Though tourism has an impact to some degree, it seemed to me that the biggest role it had was encouraging printers to printing in non-traditional colors and patterns. Though some may view tourism as stimulating to the local economy, my fear is that style preferences of tourist may become a threat to traditional styles and traditional printing.

Though I learned a lot about design, the contemporary processes of design and printing seemed to be more focused on marketability and efficiency, while in Ntonso the focus was more on the aesthetic quality and cultural appeal. As a designer learning the contemporary method, I feel less able to incorporate my personal style of textile art into my designs, and even when I was able to, the designs most representative of me as an artist were not seen as marketable or appealing. It was a little difficult, because a lot of my art is intentionally unharmonious, so it was often difficult to reach a balance of expressing my art and gaining approval. Eventually, I got over my frustrations and decided to focus more on skill building only. I am very appreciative of Sarkodie’s help and knowledge, but when I continue my stay in Ghana, I will focus more on experimentation and conveying themes around diaspora in my textile designs rather than technical skill.
I will extend my stay here until March, in which I will build upon my knowledge to focus more on collaboration, multi-medium art forms, experimentation, and the cultural significance of cloth in Ghanaian culture and African American culture.

If I had more time with this research project, I would have travelled to textile mills in Accra and I would have interview traditional and transitional Adinkra printers, as well as the general community about the implications of colonialism in the Ghanaian textile industry and in the Ghanaian textile culture.

Recommendations for further research include studying the history of Adinkra symbol design more in depth and studying contemporary Adinkra symbol modifications or the creation of new symbols. I would also suggest interviewing those that have left the traditional printing method for the transitional one or different work altogether.
APPENDIX E - COMPUTER AIDED DESIGN (DESIGN 3)
**ADINKRA SYMBOLISM**

Adinkra prints are an African indigenous art form originating in the Ashanti region of Western Africa. They are made from natural dyes and are often used in ceremonial and everyday life. The prints feature intricate designs that have deep cultural and historical meanings. The following symbols and their meanings are some of the most frequently used in Adinkra designs:

1. **Adinkra Adene** - Represents the four seasons of the year: spring, summer, autumn, winter.
2. **Adinkra Amma** - Symbolizes the four directions: east, west, north, south.
3. **Adinkra Anum** - Represents the four elements: earth, air, water, fire.
4. **Adinkra Dansu** - Symbolizes the four phases of the moon: new, waxing, full, waning.
5. **Adinkra Duaasa** - Represents the four stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood, old age.

Each symbol is carefully crafted and has a specific meaning, making Adinkra prints a rich tapestry of African culture and history.
APPENDIX I - ADINKRA HAND STAMPING TECHNIQUE
APPENDIX J - ADINKRA SCREEN PRINTING TECHNIQUE

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2
APPENDIX L - ADINKRA STAMPING ON KENTE CLOTH

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2
The Black Star Proclamation 1 December, 2014.

In 1919, King Marcus Garvey, A Jamaican-american – Kwame Nkrumah’s source of inspiration, feeder of the poor, builder of schools and organizer of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), incorporated the Black Star Line: “The UNIA’s most ambitious undertaking, the Black Star Line, was established in 1919 as a black-owned, black-operated shipping line that would carry cargo and people between Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. Thousands of African-americans purchased $5 shares in the venture; supporters were so enthusiastic that Garvey was able to acquire the Black Star’s first ship in only three months. Though the Black Star Line eventually folded through a combination of mismanagement, bad weather, and the interference of J. Edgar Hoover’s Bureau of Investigation, it embodied Garvey’s philosophy of black self-sufficiency, race pride and pan-African unity. Ghana’s national soccer team, the Black Stars, can trace its nickname to Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association.” (Leah Nahmias). The same fire burning within Marcus Garvey burns within thousands of African-americans; at our hearts we are kings, queens, servants and nation builders, though our current situation does not let us exercise those aspects of our identities. As African-americans, much like the Muslim’s Hajj to Mecca or the Jew’s travel to Israel, returning back to Ghana was about me performing closure for my past and demonstrating new beginnings for my future. Marcus Garvey was a person who understood my sentiment the most and dedicated his life, to the death, to trying to reunite the African diaspora with the glorious continent of Africa, the spirits here and the bounties of knowledge here available for human progress. Thus, I dedicate a portion of my title to the Great Marcus Garvey. I pray everything I do for the diaspora becomes my very own “most ambitious undertaking”.

Throughout my 105 days in the SIT Ghana study abroad program, I have experienced the harmful, negative psychological effects of being educated under a system which favors a race neutral experience and has historically sympathized unequally with white students’ experiences than that of me. I flourished, however, in what could have been a very lonely, confusing situation with the help of my friends; for this I am thankful to God and to them. This experience has moved me and thus I vow, from this point forward, to use my life in a way that demonstrates me having the most love I can have for myself. I will do this for me mainly, but also so the Western and African worlds, through my self love, realize that all my experiences are events so
pivotal to my existence, and to theirs, that they should ceaselessly celebrate me and amplify my voice.

Though I focused heavily on developing technical skills during these 105 days, I still feel like it was important work. After this program ends I will use my new practical skills and new knowledge gained about Ghanaian textiles to delve deeper into my necessary diasporic work by continuing research, by collaborating on projects, and by continuing to nurture the relationships I have recently started with Ghanaians that have similar goals and mindsets to preserve and build upon African diasporic connections and support. –Le’Ecia Farmer
Bibliography


Informants

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