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Negotiating Cultural and Identity
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Darren Ornitz

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Introduction

There have been many studies conducted pertaining to the process of identity formation among immigrants in the United States, but very few focus specifically on Ghanaian immigrants. The goal of this thesis is to continue the debate on the nature and manner in which Ghanaian immigrants in New York City construct their identities. By so doing, this paper aims to explore and identify the ways in which traditional culture and values are preserved, transformed, or lost amongst the Ghanaian immigrant community in New York City. It discusses the role that Ghanaian and American culture and values plays in the process of identity formation by comparing the attitudes of first and second generation Ghanaian immigrants towards both cultures.

The research for this thesis was conducted through a mix of primary and secondary sources. The majority of my conclusions are drawn from questionnaires and interviews that I conducted during a three month period between the end of January 2008 and mid-April 2008. The data was collected at Ghanaian churches, where I made extensive connections, a naming ceremony, Ghanaian association meetings, and through contacts at the Ghanaian Consulate in Manhattan, music festivals, and other personal observations. The questionnaires focused on the important of retaining Ghanaian culture and identity in New York City and asked questions which would help in exploring the ways in which traditional culture and values are preserved or transformed. In total, sixty people responded to questionnaires and sixteen interviews were conducted among first and second generation Ghanaian immigrants.

Ghanaian Immigration in Historical Context

Ghanaians have had a long history of migration, not only to Western countries, but within West African countries, where citizenship has traditionally been defined more by ethnicity as opposed to country of birth. Within African continental borders, following independence, many professionals from Ghana served in less developed nations as judges, administrators, and university staff (Peil, 1995). West African governments have allowed citizens to live for up to 90 days within the ECOWAS's (Economic Community of West African States). Most governments place little importance on enforcing this 90 day regulation and therefore immigration within the West African countries is very high. A survey conducted in 1991 of almost 3,000 ECOWAS emigrants from Ghana claimed that three quarters of the immigrants left Ghana for work-related reasons, with a third of them expecting better living conditions. A continuous interchange of migration has formed between Ghana and Nigeria, especially amongst men and women with no secondary schooling, depending on which economy is in better shape for craftsmen and traders. Between 1974 and the mid 1980's estimates put the total number of Ghanaians that immigrated to Nigeria or Cote d'Ivoire at about two million (Peil, 1995). Fueling a booming oil industry in Nigeria, Ghanaians flooded the country in order to take over jobs as teachers, construction workers, and artisans, which were being abandoned by Nigerians who wanted to work in the more lucrative oil industry (Peil, 1995)

Despite the flow of Ghanaians within the continent, many have wanted to escape the general educational, economic, and political hardships of Africa and establish a life either in Europe, Canada, or the United States. Following World War II a large number of

Ghanaians followed in Kwame Nkrumah's footsteps and came to the United States for an education with the goal of returning home to help in the nation building process (Takougang, 2003). This desire to travel to the United States was also a result of the United States renewed interest in the continent following the end of the war, which can be asserted by a State Department's Spokesman who said in a 1943 speech, "never before has the word Africa meant so much to the people of the United States....this war has turned a powerful searchlight on Africa" (Takougang, 2003). Ghanaian Students helped to increase the number of Africans studying in the United States from 3.6 percent of the total number of foreign students in the country between 1954-1955 to 8.4 percent in the mid 1960's (Takougang, 2003).

Despite Ghana's post colonial history of a stable economy when compared to other African nations; a falling economy in the 1960's followed by low crop prices, political corruption and uncertainty, rising debts, high unemployment, and rapid inflation, pressured many Ghanaians to immigrate (Diouf, 2004). The same economic hardships felt by Ghanaians in the 1960's and 70's were felt by European countries as well, forcing them to put a freeze on immigration. Running parallel to these immigration freezes were new U.S. policies, especially the 1980 Refugee Act, which placed less emphasis on Cold War policies and increased the ceilings of refugees by region. The plan offered them the option of permanent residence following one year. In 1986 the Immigration Reform and Control Act allowed illegal aliens to become legal, an act that allowed their spouses and children to join them (Diouf, 2004).

The establishment of these laws allowed for the development of a consistent flow of Ghanaian and other African immigrants into the United States. Following the general trend of West African countries to "export" all of their professionals, 60% of all trained physician in Ghana left during the 1980's (Peil, 1995). In general, dating back to independence, Ghana had benefited from a British style of education as well as relative economic security and produced a larger amount of professionals and bureaucrats than most African countries (Peil, 1995). More than 14,000 of these qualified professionals, including many teachers and 3,000 university graduates left Ghana between 1975 and 1981 (Peil, 1995).

Today, following patters in Ireland and Scotland, education standards in Ghana are rising and aspirations to achieve success have been to a land where they can achieve more financial success (Peil, 1995). Despite a better economic situation in Ghana during the 1990's and recent years, in which more jobs have become available, immigration streams are continuing to grow. According to the Dean of the School of Arts, at University of Cape Coast, Ghana, D. D. Kuupole explained; "Ghanaians go for greener pastures even though Ghana is doing well..."¹ Known as the "braindrain", it is often Ghana's most educated who immigrate to the United States. Dean Owusu-Ansah explained, "The disturbing pattern is that those who immigrant are often young, well educated and highly skilled. This is sapping our productive energies!"²

¹ Dean D. D. Kuupole, Interviewed by author, email exchange, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, April 8, 2008

² Dean Lawrence Owusu-Ansah, Interviewed by author, email exchange, University of Cape Coast, Ghana April 14th, 2008

In 1995 it is believed that as many as a fifth of Ghanaians are living abroad. These streams are growing faster as contacts in the United States have been more defined and established (Walker, 2000). The establishment of migration networks has allowed Ghanaians to come to New York City to further their education, gain financial capital to either send back home to family or use to start a company upon return, join family members, or start a new life with the comfort of knowing they will be welcomed into a Ghanaian community. Within the United States, 49,444 claim Ghanaian ancestry, more than 10,000 living in New York City out of a total African born population of about 73,851 (Diouf, 2004).

In 2004, Margaret Peil conducted a study on migration which gives us some insights into which Ghanaians are most likely to immigrate based on gender and education.

According to Peil, who surveyed and interviewed over 600 Madina residents, Ghanaians who live in the United States are four times as likely to stay as opposed to returning home. Looking at gender, men are four times as likely to live in the USA as women, although women have a better chance of staying once they have settled. This is thought of being an indication that women prefer to stay near their children and grandchildren as well as the fact that men have more possibilities as politicians and leaders back in Ghana.

Culture and Customs of Ghana

In order to better understand Ghanaian culture and identity formation in New York City, it is important to have an understanding of Ghana's vast ethnic make up. When the colonial powers carved up Africa, they did so with little regard for Ethnic territories.

Ghana, which was colonized by the British, has over 100 ethnic groups which all vary in culture and language (Falola & Salm, 2002). -Despite the many different ethnicities there are five major groups: the Guan, the Mole-Dagbanai, the Akan, the Ewe, and the Ga-Adangbe (Falola & Salm, 2002). It is important to understand, especially for comparison later on with identity formation, that ethnicity plays a fundamental role in the construction of societal identification. According to Mr. Joseph Ngminēbayihi, Deputy Consul General in New York explained that in many cases people will place more importance in their ethnic identity across national borders than with their own national identity. This emphasis on ethnic identity is a result of similarities that ethnic groups share in culture, language, history, and tradition. However, despite the different culture, language and history that each ethnic group practices, common cultural elements can be seen in marriage, family, religious values, gender roles, and community values, especially when compared in contrast to cultural elements and values prevalent in the United States. There are many values that not only identify with the many ethnic groups of Ghana but also extend to all of Western Africa.

To put it into context, the United States is the most diverse country in terms of ethnicity. There are obviously many sub cultures within which evolve across ethnicities, socioeconomic factors, geographical disparities, age, and other categories. However,

there are also certain values, practices, and trends that can be labeled as American. These are dominant societal norms and similarities which evolve alongside cultural differences. For example, the law makes it illegal to beat your child regardless of any social, economic, or political difference. Despite the fact that beating may occur more often within specific categories of people, it can be said that American culture, which in this case breeds itself from the Law, places an emphasis on the physical welfare for all of its citizens.

Family Construction in Ghana

Family is one of the most important social institutions of Ghanaian society. Traditionally, within one house a family can consist of the extended families spanning three and four generations. Family connections are kept very close and are used for social benefits such as financial aid and property acquisitions. Ghanaians who grow up in families who adhere to these traditions are bound with a social identity that is directly related to their lineage (Clark & McLaughlin & Ofcansky & Owusu-Ansah & Owusu, 1994). Within the ethnic groups of Ghana, the Akan are one of the only ethnic groups that practice matrilineal descent (Falola & Salm, 2002). Lineage is determined through the mother whereas in most ethnic groups outside of the Akan family identities are formed through patrilineal descent, which means all family ties are passed down through the fathers lineage (Falola & Salm, 2002). In both family constructions, the man is the leader of the house, although it is common for elderly females in matrilineal groups to be included in important decision making processes affecting the family (Clark & McLaughlin & Ofcansky & Owusu-Ansah & Owusu, 1994).

Due to the strong sense of community in Ghana it is very common for biological family members to see others in the community as part of the family and treat them as one.

The Raising of Children and Societal Values

Children are a very fundamental and important aspect to Ghanaian society. A lot of emphasis is put on raising children with the proper values. Children are taught from a very young age the respect for elders and peers. It is very important to always refer to your elders with a title and by their last name. Traditionally, it is seen as very disrespectful to call an elder by his/her first name.

Children who misbehave are scolded by members of society and in many cases punishments such as spanking is typical. It is believed that through strictness and harsh punishments the children will grow up to have respect for others, especially elders. In teaching children fear seems to be a way of getting across the rights and wrongs. One second generation Ghanaian immigrant respondent explained, "For example, a child will be told not to sing whilst taking a bath...failure will result in the death of one of the parents."³ He went onto explain that that the average Ghanaian will evoke fear as a factor to deterring children in engaging in certain acts like throwing sticks at night. Children in Ghana are expected to act in ways that represent well their ancestors, families, their elders, and communities (Falola & Salm, 2002).

³ Alex Anim-Adu, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, March 27th, 2008

In contrast to American society, the duties of child raising is seen as a community obligation and children in many ways have many mothers, all of whom will take active responsibility in administering proper cultural values. Extended family members, especially grandparents play a very important role in raising children as well. There is a strong sense of community obligation. While living in Ghana, often times when I was being driven to school by "daddy", he would stop in the street, roll down his window and scold kids who were misbehaving regardless of whether or not he knew them. There were also many kids and young adults who came over to the house and referred to the mother and father of the house as "mommy" and "daddy". They were treated as children and given food, shelter, and anything else that might have been needed. Throughout my time living with this family I also referred to the parents as "mommy" and "daddy" and was taken care of as if I was one of their own children.

Marriage

Marriage in Ghana is the most important social institution and is seen as an obligation, not a choice for many families. Economic security and the ability to reproduce, a sign of wealth and status, serve as the most important elements of marriage (Falola & Salm, 2002). In a survey conducted in 1983, 60% of Ghanaian women found it important to have five or more children (Walker, 2000). Because so much emphasis is placed on community cohesion, marriage serves an important role in establishing links between families and the rest of society. Traditionally, most marriages were arranged to serve social, political, and economic reasons, although this is more uncommon today.

However, Marriage is seen primarily as a union between two families and therefore family approval is still very important (Falola & Salm, 2002).

There are three main types of legal marriage in Ghana. Customary Law, which represents more than 80 percent of conjugal unions, was made a part of the legal system in 1985 when the government enacted the Customary Marriage and Divorce Law (Falola & Salm, 2002). The Marriage of Mohammedans Ordinance is common in the north, and monogamous marriages, were introduced by the British. Both Customary Law and Marriage of Mohammedans allows for Polygamy, although men married under Muslim law are allowed four wives, whereas men married under Customary law are allowed as many wives as they want. Historically, polygamy was seen as a way to establish more family alliances with villages as well as the economic benefits of having more children to work and add to the social status of a family. Despite Customary Marriages being the most prominent in Ghana, monogamous relationships make up more than 70% of marriage (Falola & Salm, 2002). Christian influence has had a role in this trend as well as economic deterrents; most men would marry more than one woman if they had the resources which are required to do so.

Gender Roles

From a very young age Ghanaian girls are expected to help their mothers around the house, which includes all the necessary chores such as cooking, cleaning, sweep the house, fetch water, and take care of younger siblings. Traditionally, in Ghana this has resulted in many girls having to drop out of school before they reach secondary school.

Although statistics at the primary level of schooling show equal amounts of boys and girls attending, at the higher education levels including universities and colleges, as of 2003, the ratio shows girls attendance at 1 in 4 (Falola & Salm, 2002). During my stay in Madina, cooking responsibilities within the house were shared between the mother and the 21 year old daughter, Francis. Often times I would be informed that Francis, who I called "mommy" as well, would be preparing us dinner (I stayed with two other students). It was always important that we ate everything she cooked. She did not see cooking as a annoying task, yet as her role and duty that she had much pride in.

It is also assumed that it is the man's responsibility to provide for the health and finances of his family. Women are also expected to respect the authority of the household as well as care for children, and carry out the domestic duties (Clark & McLaughlin & Ofcansky & Owusu-Ansah & Owusu, 1994). According to one of my female respondents, "It goes against manhood cleaning the house in Ghana. Your mother in law will be very upset if she finds out her son is cleaning the house in Ghana."⁴ Women have always been very involved in the selling of good at markets, which in many cases gives them economic independence, and are increasingly being asked to provide a great share of the family income although it is primarily the mans responsibility (Falola & Salm, 2002). In thirty percent of households in Ghana as of 2003 women and men keep their finances separate and it is not uncommon for women to provide for their children's education. This is occurring mostly in cases where a man has been unable to provide in a responsible manner or in cases where women and men are engaging in a relationship without

⁴ Doris Ashitey, Interviewed by author, in person interview, New York City, March 20th-April 1st, 2008

performing customary marriage rites. Asante women are expected to pay for children needs such as clothing, whereas men are expected to provide schooling, shelter, and food (Falola & Salm, 2002).

Yet as global movements and new trends are infiltrating Ghana's society it appears that traditional gender roles, although still very much intact, are beginning to transform. Educated women are beginning to obtain higher status as doctors, judges, lawyers, and are increasingly playing important roles as administrators and supervisors, earning the same wages as men (Falola & Salm, 2002). In a discussion with a college student in Accra, Ghana, he said in response to my initial comments regarding my observation of men historically obtaining higher education than women in Ghana, "...that was the case initially but now women obtaining higher education is very high...an example is that the University of Ghana has a higher population of women than men."⁵ Dean Kuupole warns however that "it's true that a lot of our Ghanaian girls now attend all levels of school, but the figures compared to that of boys are still low."⁶

Religion

Religion in Ghana can best be described by Falola and Salm (2004), who claim, "Religion is inseparable from virtually every aspect of Ghanaian life" (Falola & Salm, 2004, 33). The importance of religion and the belief of a supreme God exist within all Ghanaian communities. Although there are many traditional religions still practiced in

⁵ Ankrah Samuel, Interviewed by author, email exchange, Accra, Ghana, March 29th, 2008

⁶ Dean D. D. Kuupole, Interviewed by author, email exchange, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, April 8, 2008

Ghana, Christianity, which is practiced mostly in the South, and Islam, which is practiced, predominantly in the Northern regions, are the two most popular religions. However, during the last twenty years or so Christianity is gaining ground, and some 3,000 different sects of Christian churches have been established in the community. All Ghanaian communities have a very profound respect for religious leaders, who they seek for spiritual guidance and everyday advice. During my stay in Ghana this past summer, members of the community would often freely flow into the Pastors house to seek advice. Within Ghana, traditional religions, Christianity, and Islam, all believe in the hierarchy of spiritual powers, which "play a significant role in determining ones social behavior and overall approach to life"(Falola & Salm, 2002).

Traditional Child Naming, Initiation, and Funeral Ceremonies

Ceremonies for all occasions are very important in Ghana, and are an example of community cohesion and support. Naming ceremonies, or outdoor ceremonies as they are sometimes called because this marks the first time a child is brought outside, are performed throughout most ethnic groups in Ghana (Duker, 2006). These ceremonies officially welcome the child into the world (Falola & Salm, 2002). Amongst the Akan, the naming ceremony traditionally takes place on the eight day whereas many northern ethnic groups celebrate this event on the third day for boys and the fourth day for girls (Duker 2006). During these ceremonies the child's father will name the child and explain to the community why such names are being given. The child will be given the names of people that the parents believe are honorable people with the hopes that their child will grow up with good character. Naming ceremonies are also held as a way of introducing

the child to the world and laying the foundation for him or her to live a moral life. In the Akan society, the baby will be given different things to taste, for example water. The baby will be given a taste of water, and told, "When you see water say water". This is done so that the child will grow up to be obedient, truthful, and respectful (Duker, 2006).

Another major ceremony most Ghanaian communities celebrate is the transition in a person's life from childhood to adulthood. This initiation into adulthood, which occurs for girls after their first menstrual period occurs and between the ages of ten and fourteen for boys, symbolizes a rebirth. Ceremonies are held which aim to teach the newly accepted adults about the cultural, social, and religious values of the society (Falola & Salm, 2002). The whole community partakes in the festivities which include present giving, libations, music and dancing. During these initiation processes amongst the Gas and Ewes, circumcision is usually performed, representing cleanliness and the endurance of pain that boys must go through to become mentally and physically stronger (Falola & Salm, 2002). In the Akan and Ga societies, boys may sometimes be presented with a gun, which symbolizes their readiness to hunt, or a cutlass, which gives them the ability and right to farm on their own. For girls, to signify their new identity of adulthood, they are ritually bathed and groomed and brought to the queen mother to determine whether they are spiritually and mentally ready to make the next step into adulthood. Although these traditional ceremonies are not performed today in most cases with as elaborate activities, these ceremonies are still very important aspects of Ghanaian life.

Unlike many other cultures, Ghanaians do not mourn death in the same way, instead marking death as the transitions into the world of ancestors and celebrating the occasion. Funerals are a way in which the community can come together and it is not uncommon for Ghanaians to attend funerals on a weekly basis. Within the community, failing to pay the proper respect is seen as a social disgrace to the family of the deceased (Falola & Salm, 2002). Funerals can last more than a day and are seen as social functions, where community members come together to pay their respect, eat, sing, and dance.

Social Change in Ghana

Despite the periodical change that occurs within Ghanaian society as a result of internal factors, it is also important to realize the impact that American and European culture is increasingly having on Ghanaian society, especially the youth. It is affecting the cultural identities of Ghanaian youth and it's happening at a faster rate as Ghanaian youth continue to have more access to Western culture. In 1996 there were no internet Cafes in Accra and internet access at universities was very limited. However, my nights in Ghana this past summer usually consisted of going to one of the many internet cafes, usually run by generators, in virtually every town that I was in. I remember that on any particular night there was a very common scene of young Ghanaians browsing Western websites, looking at music videos, and exchanging emails with western friends. Despite the fact that traditional culture is still intact in many forms, it is important to realize that many Ghanaians are being exposed and influenced by western cultural practices and values, causing an erosion of some of the traditional values and practices. A student at the University College of Education of Winneba, Ghana said in an interview,

Even in the remotest village, people seem to have adopted European culture and even prefer it. Out culture is at stake...the youth are taking some behaviors from videos and think they have the freedom to do what they like. Sometimes Ghanaians seem to copy blindly hair style and clothing. We should think about our cultural background before copying (Quashigah & Wilson, 2001).

During my stay in Madina, I saw signs of cultural infusion almost every day. My Ghanaian "brother" Jonas, often brought home American movies that he bought from vendors and I remember one particular night when the family was gathered around the TV marveling at a World Wrestling Federation match. Often times Ghanaians would try to connect with me by making references to musicians, one Ghanaian youth explaining to me he loved Tupac the rapper, as well as American sports heroes. Kuupole had to say the following about the "Americanization" of Ghanaian youth,

American culture has influenced the Ghanaian youth in the way they dress and also the music they listen too. A number of parents are beginning to complain about the manner in which their children dress: short skirts, bare back, hanging tops, tight jeans with torn legs at knee level or bottucks....Even musicians try to incorporate western pieces or style dancing in their performance⁷.

This desire by Ghanaian musicians to identify with western culture could be seen at the "Ghana at 51 Independence Music Celebration" held March 29th 2008 in the Bronx, which I attended. The performers, all who came from Ghana, included, Reggie Rockstone, the face of highlife music in Ghana, TIC TAC, VIP, and Buk Bak. All of the artists or groups to certain degrees entertained in ways which are consistent with American rappers and hip hop artists.

⁷ Dean D. D. Kuupole, Interviewed by author, email exchange, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. April 8, 2008

Ghanaians in New York City

My interaction with the Ghanaian community in New York began when I introduced myself to a Ghanaian pastor at the Bethel Presbyterian Reformed Church (890 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn NY) which holds a Ghanaian mass every Sunday at 3 am. Pastor Samuel Atiemo, who has obtained four PHD degrees, in Social Work, Psychology, Theology and Education, and came to the United States from Ghana, stressed the need for me to acknowledge that Ghanaian culture in Ghana could not be homogenized into one culture. Despite this, Pastor Atiemo and I discussed the fact that amongst the different ethnic groups there are many similar values and cultural practices.

In conducting my research, I actually found that despite the many different backgrounds of Ghanaians that live in New York City, there is much greater unity amongst ethnicities as compared to back home in Ghana where ethnicity in some cases is more important than National Identity. As one gentleman respondent said to me, "Ghanaians in New York unify under a national Ghanaian identity...where in Ghana people tend to unify under ethnic or tribal identity."⁸ Amongst the Ghanaian community, most Ghanaians in New York City will first and foremost identify as Ghanaians, socializing and sharing common cultural identities, especially in contrast to plural American culture. This is not to say that their ethnicities do not hold any importance to their cultural practices in New York, as many Ghanaians pointed out to me that especially within the home there are differences depending on their ethnic origin.

⁸ Ben Ofori, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, March 27th, 2008

In adapting into the American system, I found that an overwhelming majority of first generation Ghanaians immigrants, most of whom have been here for at least ten years, found it important to maintain their idea of Ghanaian culture. Out of 60 first generation Ghanaians I gave questionnaires too, 61% of my respondents said that it was "very important" to "maintain traditional Ghanaian cultural practices" and 26% of them said that it was "essential". First generation Ghanaians find that the values from Ghana are important in having success and leading productive lives here in the United States. One of my respondents explained, "I believe as a first generation Ghanaian immigrant, it is quite critical to preserve some of the unique and rich aspects of Ghanaian culture."⁹

Among the most important aspects of Ghanaian culture was the need to maintain the teaching of respect for elders and peers. In the questionnaire survey, 98% of my respondents believed that it is important to teach children to respect their elders. With regard to child rising, there was a noticeable responsibility, or at least right, amongst parents to scold children other than their own. During every Ghanaian mass that I attended, the children were always running around from one adult to another. In most cases, I was completely unaware of whose parents the child belonged too because all of the adults were lecturing the children and instructing them if they were misbehaving, such as running or just moving around too much. However, as will be discussed and explained later on, the community obligation in raising children has been lost when compared to the societal norms in Ghana.

⁹ Ben Ofori, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, March 27th, 2008

Ghanaians also preserve their culture by partaking in traditionally celebrated functions. Ghanaian festivals, picnic, and gatherings, are all ways in which the community can come together. Naming ceremonies as well as "coming of age" traditions are also practices, although more so amongst the first generation community.

Amongst the most important traditions that are preserved are the importance of funerals; traditional dress, which consists of wearing black, red, and dark colors, is worn for mourning and the community will contribute to helping with funeral expenses, which often include sending the deceased back to Ghana to be buried. Ghanaian associations play a major role in helping to organize and fund funerals for community members in need of help. Although there are many community events that take place, the majority of Ghanaians in New York feel that culture is preserved mostly in the home, where families can speak their native language and partake in traditional ways in the seclusion and privacy of their own homes. Of the respondents who filled out a questionnaire 54% of my respondents said that "traditional Ghanaian customs and practices are preserved mostly inside the home", whereas 45% of them said that culture was preserved equally inside the home and outside.

The Church has also played a very important role in bringing together the Ghanaian community. For first generation Ghanaians, religion, as in Ghana, is a fundamental part of life and it is not uncommon for Ghanaians in New York to be at church for more than three hours every Sunday. The importance and emphasis of religion for Ghanaians was something I could detect very easily both at church and in speaking to people through out

the community. This emphasis on religion that Ghanaians hold so close to them could be seen in some of the email exchanges I had in which a Ghanaian would write "blessings upon me" in signing the email. In New York Mark Gornik, a Presbyterian minister who wrote his doctoral dissertation on New York's African churches describes the influx of African churches in the city, "Africans are taking their faith to Africans" (Walkin, 2004). Mr. Gornik has counted at least 110 new African congregations that have formed since the late 1980's. Of these congregations, many have Ghanaian ties such as the Apostolic Church of Ghana, the Lighthouse Church of Ghana, the Emmanuel Presbyterian Reformed Church, and Bethel Presbyterian Reformed Church (Walkin, 2004). Reverends, Pastors, and Priest usually deliver their sermons in a mix of Twi, the most common language amongst Ghanaians in New York and Ghana, as well as English. Churches allow Ghanaians to come together in a setting where they can flaunt their African tradition, especially in the ways in which they dress and conduct service. Ghanaian masses are full of Ghanaian traditional attire, music, and dancing. As Daniel Berkoh, a 53 year old member of the Church of the Pentecost in the Williamsbridge section of the Bronx, sees it, "It's like being among my people. It makes me feel as if I'm back home in Ghana" (Wakin 2004).

The formation of Ghanaian Associations in New York City has also played a central role in facilitating the assimilation process for Ghanaians into the American system as well as the preservation of culture and values. Within New York, there are eleven of these associations. Many of these organizations identify with a specific ethnic group from Ghana, such as The Akan Association, the Ga-Adangbe Kpee Association, the

Asanteman Association, and others. However, all of them are united under an umbrella organization, the National Council of Ghanaian Associations, which brings group members together every month at a meeting at the Ghana mission of New York to organize and discuss concerns etc. Despite the formation of many groups under a specific identification, which is a way of lending support to that ethnic region back home as well as facilitating specific cultural practices, the groups share common goals.

In consistency with a study done of Ghanaian associations in Cleveland by Kewku Siripi Ocran, Ghanaian associations in New York help to integrate and organize Ghanaians into a Ghanaian community which helps to preserve a national identity, culture, and values (Ocran, 2005). The organizations play an important role in organization of Ghanaian events and social outings. For example, every summer the NGOGA organizes a Ghanaian picnic which is characterized by Ghanaian music, food, and dance. These associations also help Ghanaians by providing assistance and support in helping Ghanaians adjust to a new society, though helping in conflict resolutions, and especially for people who need help with dealing with times of grief such as funerals and illness in the family (Ocran 2005). According to Ms. Ivy Rose Quarshie, Deputy Executive Secretary General to the NGOGA, the associations help to "instill family values" which is an integral part to Ghanaian society in Ghana.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ivy Rose. Quarshie, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, April 6th, 2008

A Loss of Traditional Culture

Despite strong desire to maintain traditional culture, 60% of the Ghanaian first generation immigrant's I gave a questionnaire too associate with an even mix of Ghanaian and American culture. Although maintaining Ghanaian culture and values certainly helps to reaffirm for many a Ghanaian aspect to their identity, cultural practice and identity do not necessarily have to go hand in hand. Nagal (1944), discussed the reality that many immigrants assert their ethnic identities while at the same time their cultural practices are more consistent with the society in which they live. Sixty one percent of the first generation Ghanaian immigrants who were given a questionnaire feel their Ghanaian identities are equally as important to their American identities, while 39% claimed that their Ghanaian identities are most important, despite the fact that they had assimilated into American culture and might not necessarily partake in all of the cultural norms consistent with Ghanaian culture. None of the first generation Ghanaian immigrants felt that their American identities were most important, despite the fact that many of those who filled out questionnaires have been here for over fifteen years.

The most noticeable loss of cultural norms was in perception of gender roles. The strong sense of equality and importance of education in American culture have allowed Ghanaian women to expand their traditional roles as adhering to domestic work inside the house and child bearing. As a result they have had a better opportunity than in Ghana to become educated and succeed in the professional work force. Despite the changing societal norms that are taking place these changes are happening at a faster rate for the Ghanaian community in New York. More than 46% of my questionnaire respondents

responded to the statement "A women's primary duty is child bearing and domestic work" with "Strongly Disagree", 34% disagreed, and only 4 people selected either "somewhat agree", "agree", or "strongly agree".

It is important to realize that of the first generation women and men that I spoke too, the majority of them have been in the United States for at least 20 years, and were not in Ghana to experience the recent push for educational equality amongst men and women that we are seeing there today. As a result, it is fair to conclude that for these women the American cultural landscape allowed for the evolution of their roles to society which might not have been the case had they remained in Ghana. Within the United States, African women in general are the most educated female group: 93% of them have at least a high school education and 31% have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 23% for the general female population (Diouf, 2004). A respondent explained, "Your observation was accurate. However, in New York, it's totally different. We are in a different culture with high demands for higher education and expectation. Many of Ghanaian homes here, the women are making more money than the men."¹¹ However, whereas in Ghana were it is appropriate for the wives to keep their own money, in the United States they share that income with the man for all of their family needs (Diouf, 2004).

Not only have gender roles evolved over educational lines, but many in the Ghanaian community believe that both the men and women share equal roles in all aspects of

¹¹ Doris Ashitey, Interviewed by author, in person interview, New York City, March 20th-April 1st, 2008

raising a family. One of my interview respondents explained, "...in America where both spouses work and contribute financially, it is appropriate to share in household chores. In the average Ghanaian household in America, both spouses work. In fact in some cases, the women actually contribute more to the family income, hence the change in traditional gender roles."¹² More than 55% of my respondents believe that responsibility for the well being of a family is a joint responsibility between husband and wife.

When it comes to child rearing, there are definite changes to back home, the most prominent one a result of American law which makes it very hard to discipline children in ways that are common at home, such as spanking. Most of the Ghanaian parents I spoke to have claimed that they have had to accept the fact that spanking their children is just something that they cannot do here. If they are to discipline their children in the same way that they do at home as one woman explained to me, the social service organization will show up on your door. The way in which parents discipline their children in Ghana is considered by American law, child abuse, and this has made it very hard for parents to maintain those techniques. West African culture shared the cultural value of raising children to have respect and method of enforcing that are similar. African parents in the United States will often send their children back to Africa for a time in order for them to be disciplined and taught the proper way to behave according to African values. One Ghanaian mother I spoke to explained to me that although she never sent her son back home, she constantly threatened to send him back if he did not begin to behave, a solution that she claimed other Ghanaians had implemented.¹³

¹² Ben Ofori, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York, March 27th, 2008

In terms of the responsibility of raising children, as opposed to in Ghana, where in the majority of cases there is a strong sense of community responsibility, raising children amongst the Ghanaian community in New York relies more on individual parental efforts. The societal norms of American society, in which for the most part extended family members do not live together has made it very hard to maintain traditional child raising practices. One respondent put it, "The responsibility is solely the parents while back home it is more of a shared responsibility amongst the extended family and local community."¹⁴

Many Ghanaian parents worry that a so called "Americanization" will occur amongst their children and second generation Ghanaian youth. This can be seen in the traditional ceremonies that Ghanaians have for their children. Despite the fact that these traditions remain alive in New York, American culture has had its affect. For example, one woman respondent explained to me, "I attended a party for the coming of age for a girl. Her bottom and chest were the only body parts covered. That was how she was presented...as American born."¹⁵ This is also consistent with other African immigrants who "feel that the next generation will not only forget or reject its culture but that the youngsters will adopt American attitudes that Africans often find destructive of the very values they hold dear: the strong sense of family, respect for else...and age hierarchy"(Diouf, 2004).

¹³ Personal communication, interviewed by author, New York, March 23rd, 2008

¹⁴ Patrick Safo, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, April 3rd, 2008

¹⁵ Michael Ahenkora, Interviewed by author, email dialogue, New York City, March 22nd, 2008

My research into second generation Ghanaians found that parents have much to worry about. Second generation Ghanaians are a lot more prone to latching onto American culture, despite their parent's attempts at passing down Ghanaian culture and values. Data from the questionnaire I conducted showed that 89% of Ghanaian parents believed that it was "very important for them to "raise their children with Ghanaian values and culture." This is not to say that Ghanaian first generation parents in New York do not want their children to interact with American culture; 42% believed it was essential for their children to "learn about and interact with American culture", and 30% believed it is "important". However, they believed overwhelmingly that not only would raising their children with Ghanaian culture preserve tradition but that the values gained from that upbringing would benefit them greatly in life.

However, despite the importance placed on raising their children in consistency with norms from home, parents believed that it is a hard task to accomplish as much as they would like. Fifty one percent of the first generation Ghanaians who filled out the questionnaire believe it is hard to maintain their own Ghanaian identity in New York and most parents explained that it was even harder to pass along Ghanaian culture to their children, in many cases stating "obviously so".

This is not to say that second generation Ghanaians reject all of the culture and values their parents try to raise them with, but that the pressures of being born in a society in which two cultures are pulling at them can be a very tricky landscape to balance. In

many cases their identity formation comes under constant attacks as they do not seem to fully fit into an African identity or an American/African American identity. According to one second generation Ghanaian;

One of such challenges is that neither culture fully accepts you. An African American is quick to point out to you that you're not one of them...you're an African...A "Ghanaian adult" (by which I mean one who spent most of his/her life in Ghana before traveling abroad) normally pokes fun at those of us who came here at a much younger age or those who were born here at how we speak the local language.¹⁶

Another second generation Ghanaian immigrant, Jennifer Effah, talked about the hardship of being raised by African parents. She explained how that if anyone ever asked her if she was African she would explain how her parents were, but that she was quick to point out that she was born in the United States in order to be accepted.¹⁷

Many second generation immigrants also do want to marry within the Ghanaian community, which is very important to Ghanaian parents. As one mother puts it,

I would say that 50% of the Ghanaian American children are marrying outside our community. Most of the parents want their children to marry within the Ghanaian community. I would say most of the parents are not too happy when their children marry outside the Ghanaian community. Even if you marry another African, it's still a problem. The children are not asking us for approval, they tell you who they plan to marry and you have a choice to accept or there is a chance to lose your child.¹⁸

Whereas in Ghana many parents set up their children with arranged marriages and approval is important, in the United States, second generation Ghanaian want to make their own decisions. One Ghanaian man, who is married to a Ghanaian American, describes his frustration with how Ghanaian parents try to force upon them marriage

¹⁶ Jennifer Effah, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, April 1st, 2008

¹⁷ Jennifer Effah, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, April 1st, 2008

¹⁸ Doris Ashitey, Interviewed by author, in person interview, New York City, March 20th-April 1st, 2008

within the Ghanaian community: "I do not believe in what our parents have tried to do and still continue to try to do, which is to ensure that Ghanaians end up marrying other Ghanaians...their primary reason being that if it does not happy, we will forget about our roots...which I think is absurd and I've often argued with such parents throughout my years (often in public when they would try to set me up with their daughters and such)."¹⁹

As discussed before, traditionally in Ghana the man has ultimate authority, and some Ghanaian children have not appreciated the way in which their fathers have treated their mothers and therefore do not wish to marry into those conditions.

Identity Formation and the Question of "Race"

In looking to identity formation for Ghanaians in New York, it is necessary to acknowledge the racialized landscape of American in which these identities are being formed. Ghanaian first and second generation identity formation in America is especially interesting when compared to how they form these identities alongside African Americans and other Black Caribbean immigrants in a racialized society. Do Ghanaians see themselves as Blacks first and foremost or do they identify more so with other factors of their identity? Do they see themselves as needing to identify with black solidarity as African Americans generally feel in the American context in order to fight the racialized landscape? How do Africans and African Americans identify and categorize each other? More importantly, how do first generation Ghanaian immigrants differ from second generation Ghanaian in identity formation along racial lines?

¹⁹ Jennifer Effah, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, April 1st, 2008

There has been some considerable research done on issues of the relationships between different black immigrant communities and African Americans that I will use to compare to my own findings from interviews. According to Hackshaw (2002), African Americans “subscribe to a vision of community that emphasized individual obligations to the Black community as a whole” (Hackshaw 2002, 154). Under this view, blacks should identify under a racial solidarity; a notion that has been formed as a result of the political reality of race that exists in the United States which has resulted in the formation of a “shared consciousness of the struggle” (Hackshaw 2002, 157). One African American participant in a group study on racial identities, explained, “We understand the ancestral contact that happened to us in coming over here. We remember how we came over here. We are more alike than we are different” (Hackshaw 2002, 159). African Americans believe that it should be obvious to Black immigrants that the racial landscape of the United States does not differentiate between ethnicities, but instead subscribed to the notion of race as your primary identity; black is black; and therefore should unite under a racial identity to fight discrimination. However, first generation black immigrants are more likely to see the establishment of community formed through individualistic accomplishments and values and do not identify with a sense of racial obligation (Hackshaw 2002). They identify first and foremost as under ethnic characterization and dismiss the notion of racial inequality as a factor for not achieving success. One Ghanaian mother explained to me, “We tell our children, to study because they can become anything they want. African Americans blame whites for their problems.”²⁰

²⁰ Doris Ashitey, Interviewed by author, in person interview, New York City, March 20th-April 1st, 2008

This conflict of identity has led to tension between the African/Black community and the African American community. Jackson and Cothran (2003) discuss the idea that the fears that are associated with a perceived difference between African Americans and Africans culturally, socially, and intellectually, result in a "continued rivalry for economic and social advantages". This perceived incompatibility between African and African Americans results in a "mutual rejection". This incompatibility is only fueled by stereotypes that are thrown back and forth between the different black communities. An example of these perceptions is described by a Ghanaian woman I interviewed: "I once worked in a place where there were few African Americans and you can tell they did not like Africans. They claimed we had taken jobs from them. Africans also feel African Americans are lazy because they have all these opportunities here and they don't apply themselves. From the situation we come from and come here and make it, we don't understand why they can't."

The formation of "racial" identities for second generation Ghanaian is more complex. Second generation black immigrants see themselves as primarily Americans since they were born here, but also differentiate themselves from traditional stereotypes of "what it means to be American". This differentiation is a result of being brought up by immigrant parents who consistently derived differences, especially regarding work ethic, between Africans and African-Americans. As a result of being brought up with Ghanaian culture and values, although not all, many second generation Ghanaians also feel that it is important to maintain their Ghanaian identity alongside their American identity. According to one of my informants, "My Ghanaian identity is very important to me..."

I call myself a Ghanaian-American...in order to address all of the cultures that have shaped who I am.”²¹

Despite second generation black immigrants ability to differentiate themselves from African Americans, Neckerman (1999) suggests that the racialization in the context of American society has a lot more impact on racial identity formation for second generation black immigrants than it does for first generations immigrants. Unlike their parents, who immigrated from countries where the political construction of race was not nearly as much of an issue as it is in the United States, in growing up in a society that racializes people, while taking little consideration for a persons ethnic background (J. Pierre, 2004), second generation blacks are able to identify and subscribe much easier to the African American idea of racial unity. Despite being brought up to consider themselves as being different from the African American community, second generation black immigrants race and minority status “define a common experience of racial exclusion at the individual level and at the group level as well” (Hackerman, 2003). This common experience has even led some second generation Ghanaians to identify themselves as African American. According to one second generation Ghanaian college student “I dealt with a lot of racism and prejudice. I think those experienced have led me to see myself more as African-American. Although my heritage is African, I have had to deal with the same racial issues as my black friends from America.”²²

²¹ Adjoa Anyane-Yebo, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York, April 17th, 2008

²² Abena Agyemang, Interviewed by author, email exchange, New York City, April 8th, 2008

Conclusion

Ghanaian culture is very much alive and present in New York. This is a result of the importance to first generation Ghanaians to preserve traditional cultural practices as well as their Ghanaian identities. They see the culture and values that they grew up with in Ghana as being a fundamental part of their ability to achieve success in New York. Respect for elders, a stress for hard work and education, religious practices, community bonds, traditional dress and dance are all aspects of their Ghanaian identities that they express in the Ghanaian community in New York. These values and practices are made possible primarily through Ghanaians associations, Ghanaian churches, community events, musical performances, ceremonies, and funerals. Despite the strong desire to maintain a Ghanaian identity and cultural practices, the influences of American plural society have definitely had some transformative affects on their ability to maintain societal norms from home. Amongst first generation Ghanaians the changes can be seen most clearly when looking to traditional gender roles, family structures, and the ways in which children are raised, all which have been conformed to exist more consistently with American society.

When looking at second generation Ghanaians it is very apparent that most of them have been raised by parents who have stressed the important of growing up with Ghanaian values and culture. As a result of being raised by Ghanaian parents, some second generation Ghanaian immigrants partake in traditional Ghanaian practices such as attending church, having naming ceremonies for their own children, and speaking in their family's native language. However, the importance of maintaining their Ghanaian

culture and identity is not nearly as strong as their parents, and in most cases they identify first and foremost as Americans, rejecting their parents' urge for them to marry within the community, maintain traditional practices, etc. In some cases they will conduct traditional practices as a result of their parent's wishes as opposed to their strong desire to do so. The affects of growing up with American friends in American society outweighs the pull of their parents desire to raise them to be "Ghanaian" and in most cases parents can do little to stop the influence of American values and societal norms. Second generation Ghanaians also feel more so than their parents the affects of living in a radicalized society. As a result of growing up in a society that has a history of politically constructed races playing a major part in identity formation, they feel more connected to African Americans, in many cases identifying themselves as African Americans, seeing racial categories as being more of an indication of your identity than ethnicity.

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