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VOLUME I ISSUE I
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Djembe [jem-bay] meaning “drum”
“Gbudum Gbudum kpa”--the unmistakable sounds of the Djembe pierce the moonlit night in Baro, a village in Guinea, as young people move their bodies to the inspiring rhythm. Just next door in Ghana, the chief of the Ashanti people addresses his subjects as a muscular bare-chested man beats the fontomfrom drum, the talking drum, to echo the chief’s royal address. Halfway across the world, in China, the red drums march in front of soldiers signifying the power of rulers and the destinies of their armies. And right here at Concordia, student bands with their modern percussion instruments dazzle their audiences time and time again in our auditoriums and hallways. Indeed, there may very well be no other artifact as ubiquitous as the drum in the diverse cultures of the world. It transcends both cultural and geographical barriers. Its enchanting beats can be heard from the remote African villages to the great orchestra halls of the world.

So in deciding upon a name for this journal, we chose to readopt a name used in some previous cultural publications at Concordia: Djembe, the name of an African drum. The Djembe as a drum is of unique cultural significance. On one hand, it represents commonalities between the cultures of the world. Indeed, the word “Djembe” is often traced to the Bamanakan language of the Bamana people in Mali, where it means “everyone gather together.” “Dje” means “to gather” and “be” means “everyone.” On the other hand, Djembe highlights the uniqueness of each individual culture just as drums come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and sounds. Each Djembe, like our contributors, has its own unique rhythm and so do the articles in this journal. All of them tell a story and open windows into cultures and world affairs. As you immerse yourself in the writings of this journal we hope they come to life like musical notes on a page, each rhythm drawing you into a better understanding of our world.

-Djembe Team
Fanmi nan Kris
(“Family in Christ”)

I was in a small town outside of Port au Prince during the recent earthquake. Though the ground was shaking, I felt the palpable faith of the Haitian people. I heard them wail in the streets as they grieved the deaths of family and friends. I watched them walk into town lonely, lost and hungry. I saw people who were starving share their food with strangers. Through it all I heard them praise God and depend on his personal presence in their lives. We sang the song “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” (the lyrics appear in bold letters below) together on the morning that we were evacuated from the city. I will never forget that moment for as long as I live.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness
I see Your face in their trusting eyes and white tooth grins.…
They are starving…Jesus can you see them?
I hear Your joy in their lilting voices…
They are hurting…Jesus can you hear them?
I sense Your love in their gracious hearts and humble service…
They are dying…Jesus can you feel them?
I feel Your hands in their work worn fingers and giving spirits…..
They are lonely…Jesus can you touch them?

Great Is Thy Faithfulness
I feel their faith in Your mercy and covenant…
Jesus they are thankful.
I feel their passion when they praise Your name…
Jesus they are faithful.
I feel their trust in their treasure in heaven…
Jesus they are waiting.

All That I Needeth Thy Hand Hath Provideth
Yeah though they walk through the valley of the shadow of death they fear no evil, for Thou art with them.
Thy rod and Thy staff comfort them…
And they shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever

Great Is Thy Faithfulness
Jesus loves them this I know.

Connie L. Peterson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Nursing
Child of Haiti, child of dust,
rocky paths and mountain shade,
burros carrying your cooking sticks
and hunger stalking your nights.

Child of Haiti, child of dust,
sugarcane smiles and tears of pain
wasted hours without school
or jobs or pay.

Child of Haiti, child of dust,
clogged market streets
and burdens carried for miles
…….and centuries.

Child of God, child of dust.
simple faith in better days
and heaven’s platters
full of food.

Child of God, child of dust.
invisible in your misery
…….and your beauty.

Child of Haiti, child of God.
teach me how to hold your hand.
“mwen fanmi” (my family)
teach me how to be your sister.
In May 2006, I served as a faculty advisor to 10 students from Concordia College on a mission trip to Nicaragua to build houses for Habitat for Humanity. The mission of Concordia College is to “send forth into society thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian life”. This travel experience was a direct extension of that mission. As a nurse pursuing advanced education in International Health, I thought that this experience would be valuable in building my cultural competence. As a Christian, I felt called to put my faith to work in a country that so desperately needs assistance. As is often the case with such a trip, I found that I gained so much more than I could ever give. The people of Nicaragua were a paradox. They were extremely poor in material possessions and yet they were the most hospitable strangers that I have ever met. They expressed their joy about living daily in their music, their laughter, and their faith. In the process of working together, we formed connections that will survive for a lifetime. The following poem honors my new friends.

Nicaragua: La Segunda Madre de mi Corazon
(“The second mother of my heart”)

We call them poor because they have no things. They call us poor because we live without faith. They call us underprivileged because they have no money. They call us underprivileged because we have no time for our families. We say their country is “third world”. They say we all live in the same world. We ask, “Where is God?” They say Jesus Cristo esta aqui.

Here in the red dust born of the hot sun, Here with the donkeys and bare feet in the potholed streets, Here in the golden pineapple juice dripping from sticky sweet chins, Here in the walnut brown skin of the beloved faces, Jesus Cristo esta aqui.

Here in the Spanish hymns and Creole drumbeats, Here in the corrugated tin and concrete bunkers, Here in the mangoes, bananas, beans, and crooked smiles, Here in the eyes of his children, Jesus Cristo esta aqui.

Jesus Cristo esta aqui. We will wait until he comes again. Esta listo? We are ready.
A Social Exclusion Issue:
Gender Inequality in the South African Workplace

Miranda Markland
Freshman
French Education and Math Education major

Since the termination of the system of apartheid, South Africa has been moving towards greater social inclusion by striving for equal opportunities for both black and white citizens. However, the same progress has not been made to ensure equal opportunities for women. This is evident not only in the high rates of domestic violence and crimes against women, but also in their treatment in the workplace. Women are prevented from holding executive positions and receiving equal pay. Women are still subjected to prejudices by men in the business world, which sometimes prevents them from entering into fields in which they might excel.

All these inequalities severely diminish a South African woman’s quality of life (QOL). It becomes clear that this reduced QOL is due to the social exclusion of women when analyzed using the Equality Measurement Framework (EMF) developed by the Centre for Analysis representation in their upper levels of management; this is the root of the exclusion still taking place in South Africa today. In a study done in 2008, the percentage of female directors in all South African companies registered in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) is only 14.3%, or 419 women. The disparity between men and women executives at the CEO level is even higher, only 3.9% women. That means that in the entire country there were 13 women CEO’s. These statistics had improved from 2004—7.2% in female directors and 0.9% in CEO’s—but there is still much room for improvement (“Women in Business,” 2008). While 51% of South Africa’s population is female, only a quarter of all executive managers and 14.3% of all directors are women (“Women in Business,” 2008). The World Bank conducted an Enterprise Survey that found that only 1 in 26 salaried African women was in a senior management position, compared to every 1 in 6 men (“Africa,” 2009).

This disparity applies to specific trades as well. Chantelle Benjamin from Business Day News wrote about similar under representation of women in top management in the media. She noted that even though South Africa led its neighboring countries in the percentage of women in top management media positions, the number was still only 25%. The South African Development Community (SADC), the organization that conducted the survey, noted that “while there was a high level of commitment to gender equality in the media, there were no comprehensive and systematic policies to address the gender gap” (Benjamin, 2009).

The executives of a company decide gender policies. When there is a lack of female representation in the upper levels of management, there is a greater possibility that women employees will experience discrimination. In order to protect all female employees from exclusion in the workplace, women have to penetrate the upper levels of corporations much in the same way the Dutch did to usurp the power of the English in South Africa. Once they become part of the elite group of policy makers, female executives can use their power to make policies that enforce gender equality, thus bringing about lasting social inclusion in the workplace.

The government of South Africa has great potential to help get women in the top executive positions. In 1994 after the denouncement of apartheid, women had a right to hope that their own liberation from social exclusion would be soon in coming. However, Gail Smith from City Press writes, “Where unity and common purpose once galvanized the women’s movement in the early ‘90s, now a vast chasm exists between women in government and women’s rights activists. The women’s movement is in
tatters” (Smith, 2009). Smith blames the lack of progress in women’s rights on the African National Congress’s (ANC) failure to budget for and implement programs that would “entrench women’s substantive equality” (Smith, 2009). Without such programs in place, women in business receive little backing from their government. Those who do manage to fight their way up to the top are rare. For each one there are plenty of other qualified young women who are not so successful, and consequently do not reach their full potential.

In addition to women in the government not uniting with the people to create government policies that could bring about greater social inclusion for women, the government system itself also has imperfections that hinder the advancement of women. One of these imperfections is the main agency in the South African government that concerns itself with women’s affairs is the Ministry of Women, Children, and a disabled person, and therefore any legislation that benefits one group will benefit them all. In a society where sexism is already prevalent, especially in the workplace, the fact that the government has such a ministry only encourages steps backward instead of forward. In order for South Africa to achieve greater social inclusion, its government needs to be consciously aware of the subliminal messages it is sending to its people. Without the clear support of the government for gender equality, women will never be able to penetrate upper management and change policies in the workplace that cause the social exclusion of female employees.

One such policy that women executives could enact to create greater inclusion would be a policy that guarantees equal pay for women as for men. According to Gordon Institute of Business Science’s online service NeXt, men who entered their salary into the site earned an average of 505,334 rand, or 68,860 United States dollars, a year. Women were much further behind, earning 402,875 rand, or 54,730 USD a year.

While the survey conducted using NeXt wasn’t scientific, it shows there are some women who earn much less than men (Ntuli, 2007, p. 3). Benjamin also reported that in the study conducted by SADC, there were sizeable gaps in average incomes between the sexes. The largest gap in annual salaries paid by a media company was a difference of 63,460 rand, or 8,622 USD.

The smallest gap was still a difference of five digits in South African currency, which is surprising considering that six of the media sampled employ 50%-60% women (Benjamin, 2009). The fact that half of a company’s employees are underpaid based on gender is an injustice, and one that could be corrected with the right women in top management changing these sexist policies.

With more power, women executives could help women break into fields typically dominated by men. One such field is mining. Thousands of men labor in South African mines, making decent wages for a job that requires little to no expertise. Therefore, men can easily find jobs without going to school for training. Women, however, have a more difficult time being hired for these positions without previous experience, and even when they are hired, they are often paid less (Ntuli, 2007, p. 3). The October Household Survey conducted in 1994 shows the discrepancy in pay and employment rates compared to education for men and women.

The information of particular interest in Table 1 is that in both Plant and Machine occupations and Laboring/vending occupations there is a smaller percentage of women in the labor force, despite the fact that these women were in school for almost a year longer than the men. In order for South Africa to reach greater social inclusion, a woman who is equally or better qualified than a man for a job in any given sector needs to be given preference in selection for the job and then paid accordingly. Furthermore, it will require female superiors to ensure that such preference is given.

The final policy in South African business that needs to be implemented is one that would prevent male biases against women from being carried over into the workplace. The absence of women in the workplace in the past reflects nothing on their natural abilities or desires. Their role as primary care-giver in the home does not detract from their performance at the office. Yet these long-held beliefs of men in South African society are still negatively affecting the pay and advancement opportunities of South African women. Basetsana Khumalo, the president of the Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa, claims that these effects show “we still live in a patriarchal society in which men still dominate…Corporate South Africa is still treating women unfairly by penalizing them for being mothers, wives and professionals instead of rewarding them for
Khumalo concludes by suggesting that the way to solve these issues of sexism in the workplace is firstly for individual women to point out any inequality they see and clearly state how it should be eliminated, and secondly for women to unite to fight for their equality in pay and representation in upper management.

The social exclusion of working women in South Africa hurts not only the women who are discriminated against, but also the prosperity of the entire nation. The lack of female executives paired with the inadequacy of government intervention in issues of gender inequality has led to lower pay and employment discrimination against women. This combination has also been a factor in the failure to alleviate the sexist views of men in the workplace. The lack of advancement opportunities crushes the potential of some women, while unequal pay and employment opportunities keep others in poverty. There is no way to enumerate how many women have been negatively affected in these ways. However, there have been studies on another negative effect of this social exclusion. This last April the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon estimated that between 0.1 percent and 0.3 percent of gross domestic product per year is lost due to failure to “promote gender equality and empower women” (“Africa” 1). If the South African government is seriously interested in achieving social inclusion, then it should invest in projects aimed to promote gender equality. When women are finally treated as men’s equals in the workplace, then the country as a whole will begin to see returns on its investment, and equality will usher in prosperity for South Africa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Labor Force (%)</th>
<th>Education (yrs)</th>
<th>Average Earnings (Rand)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/technical</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative/clerical</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled agriculture</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft and trade</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant and machine</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboring/vending</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diversity and Prejudice
Exploring an Uncomfortable Truth

All of us, as individuals and as social groups, are to some extent guilty of prejudice. From classical imperialism and slavery to Nazism and segregation and even today’s terrorism, anti-terrorism, and anti-homosexual tendencies, we, as humanity, have time and again failed woefully in fostering fraternity, mutual respect and harmony. So the current obsession with diversity is in some ways a reflection of a checkered history that silently hunts us; either positively prodding us toward these desired human goals of respect and tolerance, or actively creating a fear of being perceived through the discriminatory lens of the past.

I use such descriptions as “us,” “we,” “our,” etc., to illustrate humanity’s shared stake in ensuring good relations among diverse communities. Our search for lasting solutions to inter-personal and inter-group relations in light of stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination forces us to focus on the most basic questions of causation. We want to understand how people build stereotypes as well as why they become prejudiced and subsequently discriminate against others. These questions are critical, because we can certainly not solve that whose origins we do not fully understand.

Our individualities are shaped by the constant interplay of biological, psychological and social factors that also shapes prejudice and issues with diversity. Interestingly, our attack on discrimination has mostly centered on the social component and rightly so. By social, I mean interactions between people in terms of actual behavior and attitudes. Obviously, this component is the only one that can be dealt with by legislative and political processes because it is tangible. Blatant and conspicuous acts of discrimination are easily done away with by legislation and education to engender cultural change— for example: laws to end segregation and discrimination against women in the workplace. As for our biology, there seems to be very little we can do. I use “biology” to refer to our genetic make-up and other natural factors that we generally have little control over. For example, we cannot, or generally, we do not chose to be born male or female; white, black or Hispanic; or to be heterosexual or homosexual. We are left with the psychological component, which encompasses our thought processes, emotions and feelings. In fact, this component could prove to be the most unassailable of the three factors because of its subtle and relatively intangible nature. Indeed, this is the reason why today, while discrimination (social) is just about gone, prejudice (psychology) lingers.

Our attempt on the social front has yielded fruitful results. Laws and education have created a bit of a new social orientation. A cursory observation is enough to show that societal expectations and practices today in the interactions between people of different races, beliefs, cultures etc. have radically transformed. We have a very courteous culture, which may even approach excitement about the unique individuality of the other. I can advance about three different motivations for this: There is the more desired genuine respect and appreciation for the other individual’s unique identity and cultural make-up. There may also be the relatively less desirable simple conformity to the current cultural norms and societal expectations; the third factor would be the fear of being labeled negatively as close-minded, intolerant, racist and so on.

Of course, these factors are relative. One person may truly appreciate the abilities of a woman but merely conform to societal expectations in dealing with Muslims while another may truly appreciate the Muslim cul-
ture but merely conform when it comes to women. Much of the research around this fails to bring authentic results because people are not always willing to share their true private feelings and thoughts especially if there is an assumed normative or they are not even aware of their true feelings. Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote, “Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell to everyone but only his friends. He has other matters in his mind which he would not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things stored away in his mind.” So while the measurements of the extent of the motivations remain limited, it seems accurate to speculate that society would prefer, or at least hope, that the first factor, genuine respect and appreciation for the other, accounts for the greater rather than the lesser of individual and inter-group interactions.

But what is wrong with what we have now? At least we are all courteous and nice and we are not at each other’s throats! And really, there seems to be relative societal cohesion and stability, which is better than the polarized conditions of old. The problem is that the continuous presence of prejudice, conscious or unconscious, even in the absence of blatant discrimination, engenders subtle or latent discrimination. Mere conformity also becomes psychologically taxing as people focus so strongly on not offending the other, which speaks little to the true spirit of diverse interactions.

Today, even though most people have attempted to socialize themselves mentally and socially in order to participate effectively in diverse relations, there seems to be a conscious or unconscious prejudicial cognitive constraint. Mere conformity for example may lead to most individuals focusing so strongly on not appearing discriminatory or not making inappropriate remarks, that interactions become awkward. The result in such cases may be superficial interactions which at best stay on the surface and at worst, may be perceived as pretentious. It becomes psychologically taxing because a person from an in-group does not want to be perceived as holding prejudices while the person from the out-group does not know the true intentions and hence may perceive any subtle reference as evidence of prejudice. The individual from the in-group may also be unaware of what is appropriate and inappropriate in interactions with the out-group, referred to in social psychology as the lack of scripts. This further heightens the anxiety (Avery 2009). This is evidence that while we have made significant strides, we are definitely not there yet. Interactions between diverse groups should be beautiful and natural.

The direction in which we take the diversity discussion in the years to come is significant. The first phase of humanity’s war on discrimination was dealt with at the group level by laws, school regulations, etc. The next step in the war will likely be at the personal level and must necessarily begin with some brutally honest self-evaluations. The test of each individual when it comes to prejudice and assumed stereotypes is not so much in the interactions with the other as it is in the individual’s silent perceptions. In fact, it is actually a test of one’s silent private thoughts—those shared with no one and sometimes not even with oneself. How does one perceive the other group while he/she is alone with his/her thoughts? How does one talk about the other group when in his/her own homogeneous group? The things we cannot and may never say out loud and sometimes even feel guilty for thinking may actually be those that really define how truly diverse we are. I wish to submit here, that any truly honest evaluation will reveal the fact that we all do hold some stereotypes and prejudices.

We define ourselves in so many ways. I, for example, am a male, an African, a Ghanaian, a heterosexual, a Cobber and much more. Each group definition provides an avenue for the creation of an out-group and a subsequent build up of prejudice against and stereotyping that out-group. It is significant to note also that depending on location, the time in history, etc., each group we are part of may be the majority or the minority. I make this point because sometimes, individuals who are victims of prejudice in one context where they are the minority soon go on the defensive about the legitimacy of their own prejudices against another minority group when the group definition changes and they become part of the majority. It is quite hard to find anybody who has a high moral ground in this discussion. Of course, very conscious individuals have reoriented themselves and are already in the group that genuinely appreciates the out-group. But to the extent that we have a general, almost natural, capacity for building prejudice, we seem equal and I daresay we are innocent. The victim of prejudice, say “prejudice A” may be as prejudiced in some other way as the holder of “prejudice A.” But then again, to the extent that
each individual fails to rise above this general capacity to build prejudice, by reorienting himself/herself to fit our inclusive modern times, he/she is as guilty as charged.

If you thought issues like these were dead, you thought wrong. Just take a walk with a feminist, a Muslim, a homosexual, an African American, a Hispanic, etc. and if you are curious and genuine enough, you will find out. But these minority groups are also prejudiced against the majority groups. For example, if a member of the minority simply assumes that a member of the majority holds prejudice, which seems to be a fairly common assumption, then that is prejudice, too.

It is indeed very positive that we have become obsessed with diversity. The forced focus ensures that we can learn about one another which is the only way out. In some ways though, our past has created the fear to offend which has impeded our ability to truly learn, understand and appreciate each other. But let not the fear of the past cripple the making of the future. It is fair to say that true knowledge about diversity can, and will, need to be filled with honest discussion and interaction, objective analysis and cultural dissection, unbiased academic but respectful criticism where necessary and many others tactics with which we, of the liberal arts education, pride ourselves. If we can all agree that we are all not really any better, we take a giant step towards ensuring the much-needed honest discussion that would precipitate general societal change. Change that originates from the individual would be a lasting change. True knowledge with a conscious effort to be unbiased against the out-group but which still allows for criticism is crucial to building diverse relationships that understand, respect, appreciate, and celebrate the individual and collective values of the other individual and the out-group.

But undertaking honest discussion puts us in a bit of a dilemma. How do we have truly honest discussion without becoming offensive? Is there a definite line that we cannot cross? There is no objective answer to this but all groups can foster the process of understanding by being open to questions and welcoming respectful discussion and criticism. Interaction is a two-way process and for it to improve, it will take efforts from both sides. Our world is beautiful, colored by our diversity to form a unique collage of cultures, not unlike a rainbow, and it is our collective duty to maintain peace and harmony within this natural collage.

Guyana, I know by experience, is a country unknown to many. At times I smile after having informed someone that I am from Guyana because I know that many of them think that I meant Ghana. To avoid a comment about other Ghanaians that they know I’ve learned to quickly add, “It’s on the northern Coast of South America,” and then throw in “We speak English there…” to avoid that strange moment when I receive a compliment about how great my English is. What can I say; Guyana isn’t the most popular country in the world. For a country just a bit larger than Minnesota, it has just
about one-fifth the population. In Minnesota there are approximately 61.8 people per square mile. In Guyana there are 8 people per square mile. Need some land? We have lots. But most of it is off limits unless you have no problem living in the middle of the jungle.

I saw the extent of my country’s “greeness” for the first time two years ago when my family and I took a trip to Kaieteur Falls, the largest (in terms of volume) single drop waterfall in the world and without a doubt one of the most powerful falls on this planet. We left from an airport about ten minutes away from Georgetown, the capital. It took about six minutes of flying to move away from a densely populated coastline where 90 percent of the Guyanese population live into a thick blanket of rainforest, which got taller and thicker as we moved closer to the Kaieteur National Park. After seeing this, it wasn’t hard to believe that 80 percent of Guyana’s land is rainforest. It was the greenest thing I had ever seen. Perhaps our large jungle is a reflection of our low population or our combined poverty, but whatever way it is seen, my little unknown country has a treasure that not many other nations have: a pristine rainforest!

The Guyanese rainforest is part of the Amazon Rainforest, which is contained in five other South American countries. The Amazon is the largest and most species rich rainforest in the world. Guyana’s portion of the Amazon contains more than 6000 species of plants, 700 birds, 200 mammals, 200 reptiles and amphibians and innumerable insects, many of which are endemic and some that have not even been discovered yet. Though rainforests make up only about 2 percent of the earth, they represent the most common type of forest cover on earth today and contain over 50 percent of all the species of plants and animals in the world! Rainforests play a huge role in maintaining the balance in the earth’s atmosphere by producing oxygen and removing carbon dioxide from the environment. With the current rate of deforestation in the Amazon being 15,000 square miles per year, and this rate steadily increasing, it is esti mated that the world’s rainforests will disappear completely by 2050. Could the disappearance of the rainforests wreak havoc on our planet? Most scientists and environmentalists agree that Rainforest destruction contributes to a climatic shift toward higher temperatures that threaten to wipe out the vast majority of plant and animal species from the Earth within decades. With these consequences looming it is no surprise that countries with rainforests are encouraged to preserve these rare treasures. The rainforest has to be saved for the sake of life on earth. Yet doing so at this point means that forests provide when trees are kept alive, including storage of greenhouse gases.

For this reason since 2006, President Jagdeo has been pushing an idea that has been around for a while but has not been taken seriously: the world must create economic incentives to prevent deforestation. President Jagdeo has been an activist for this cause, and he has participated in negotiations for the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change, which will replace the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012 and in the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2009 in Copenhagen. Although the blame for the high level of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere lies on the shoulders of the developed world, the consequences of global warming affect everyone everywhere and it will take a worldwide effort to curb global warming before it leads us to catastrophe. Guyana is ready to go but it can’t do it alone. It needs the right economic incentives – and if these are provided the country is willing to protect almost its entire rainforest.

Guyana has developed a Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) to protect the rainforest. Though Guyana has been accused of being yet another third world country looking for a way to gain some easy money, its LCDS has a sound purpose which has both economic and social benefits. It is not about being paid for not touching the rainforest. It is a strategy that can revolutionize the model of the country’s economy by investing in low-carbon economic infrastructure, facilitating investment and employment in low-carbon economic sectors, sustainably managing forest-based economic sectors, particularly forestry and mining, and creating new opportunities for forest dependent and other indigenous communities. It is a way of thinking that can benefit both the people of Guyana and the world.

On my trips to Guyana from Moorhead, I usually need to get to New York City at some point. Flying over New York City is fun because there is a lot to look at. As we approach John F. Ken-
nedy International Airport, my eyes are fixed on the land below. It fascinates me; the tall buildings and all the lights on every inch of land it seems. When I fly over Guyana, I take one look out the window and I know I am in a different world. The plane enters on the northern coast of Guyana where we fly over all things green separated by huge rivers, which flow out into the Atlantic. Here and there, a few specks of light can be seen until we get to the airport. The trees are not as big as those seen on route to Kaieteur Falls but the sight still steals my eyes as much as the view of New York City’s skyscrapers do. Perhaps it is strange but the freshness of that green untouched land fascinates me. When the plane touches down on that green earth—that is my home—and I realize that I don’t think I’d have it any other way.

PanAfricanism

Dawit Alemayehu
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Born and raised in the fast developing, urbanized communities of Addis Ababa, I identify myself as “Arada”—a rather infamous name still used to refer to the mixed tribe residents born in the capital. I grew up listening to the remarkable stories of the Axumites who built numerous monuments, palaces, temples and have left a mark as an inspiring civilization in Ethiopia’s war ridden history. Like most Africans, my idols have been the likes of Kwame Nkrumah and Nelson Mandela. Most Africans are frustrated by the mainstream media’s exposition of the impoverished and war-ravaged Africa. Violence is not a rarity; just look at neighboring country Somalia, which faces a chronic insurgency in its official capital, Mogadishu. Turbulence, chaos and failing control in the country’s regions is no news to those who understand the instability of Africa. However, and this is a strong however, there is a lot more that Africa has to offer that has not been presented to the rest of the world. Yes, we have our problems and plenty of them. There are numerous aspects of our problems that people should know about, yet little effort has been made by western reporters to closely monitor and understand what this intertwined deadlock of poverty and war is all about.

I am a Global Studies and Business double major, and to tell the truth, anything negative said about Africa just gives me the chills. Not to exaggerate further, but my ears have somewhat developed a high frequency to detecting the word A-F-R-I-C-A, simply because anything African interests me and always propels me to new heights. I am part of the executive committee for Invisible Children United and Hip Hop Summit. It has been a good experience challenging me to utilize my leadership skills and inform others of the insurmountable work that is yet to be done. If we are ever to leave behind our intricate problems of poverty, unemployment, ethnic violence and so forth it must start inside our classrooms.
It was in a class discussion about the Grameen National Bank that I started thinking a lot about how the idea of this bank can be implemented in African countries where our gross domestic product has remained unimpressive. It has been my philosophy that positivism is the best route where hope seems nonexistent. Personally, I see no reason why Kenya, Ethiopia or Sudan cannot open banks that use micro loans to help the poor or why we cannot enforce Millennium Village projects by helping teach the extremely poor how to navigate their way out of poverty. If we can trust people’s capacities, encourage learning and innovation while maintaining transparency and openness we can perform at the highest level. This can be done by way of improving the socioeconomic conditions of the poor, but also by providing them financial resources.

I am passionate about two primary issues, namely foreign aid and education. So one might ask, what about foreign aid? There has hardly been any monitoring of aid to guarantee it was deployed effectively. In most cases, the money that was not immediately banked was used to provide cash to buy big houses for the ministers. Moreover, part of this foreign aid has also been used to pay the soldiers who kept the elite politicians in power while ravaging the rest of the country. The second problem is education. Gender inequality, tribal clashes and tyrants are all the result of lack of access to quality education. A quick visit to the BBC official web site and the headlines read: “Kenya’s dubious election kills hundreds,” “Militant attacks in the Niger Delta have been reported,” “An attack plan on the Chad capital by rebels was resisted by the government army,” and on it goes. So where are we going from here?

In a higher educational facility like Concordia we should dare to ask and talk about success stories from panelists and individuals who try to make a difference in their small way or through involvement with NGO type organizations, and that is what we have come to call PanAfricanism. I will personally be interested to know how much has been done to learn about globalization and its influence on Africa, South America and other developing countries. Given the emphasis on BREW and influencing the affairs of the world, we should challenge our professors to facilitate discussions about self-sustainability, economic growth and green investments that can be further implemented by individuals, a.k.a. all Cobbers. The African success stories ultimately depend on sustained attention by the international community, coupled with local support, and fortuitous circumstances. Of course, such insights are mere theoretic plans, not a generic recipe for success. At any rate if the answer to the question of why Africa has remained poor was so easily answered, all problems could have been solved a long time ago. Unfortunately that has not happened so we keep keeping on.

Africa is not the Dark Continent, but the darkened and plundered. Amidst all these problems we have not given up; we have come back smiling and singing songs of joy for the betterment of our beautiful continent. Africa is full of potential and understanding people who deserve so much more than what they are getting now. I call on ICA, African Student Union and the Concordia community to do whatever is in their power to create opportunities and facilitate practical conversations that can enhance our understanding of what can generate Africa’s salvation. On one hand, I believe that it might be necessary to devise a form of neo-imperialism, in which the west can recruit good local leaders with a vision to promote democracy. On the other hand, we should understand that the rebirth of Africa can only exist once we have understood our historical position in relation to the colonization era and globalization. Or, it may be a balance of the former and the latter ideas. Like all development solution possibilities, the development tied with PanAfricanism must start from within; it should be based on self-sustainability with a focus on ending extreme poverty and deplorable living conditions.

*Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.*  
-Horace Mann
Quiet Leadership

“Of all the will toward the ideal in mankind only a small part can manifest itself in public action. All the rest of this force must be content with small and obscure deeds. The sum of these, however, is a thousand times stronger than the acts of those who receive wide public recognition. The latter, compared to the former, are like foam on the waves of a deep ocean.”

-- Albert Schweitzer

Many books have been written on leadership. There has also been a great emphasis on the need for good leadership in the recent time. Governmental and non-governmental organizations spend a huge amount of money in developing the leadership skills of their staffs. While all of these attempts to develop individuals who will be better in leadership positions are good, there is a need to embrace the idea of leading quietly – which is very contradictory to the well-established, high-profile style of leadership in our society.

People have come to believe that a leader is supposed to have high qualifications and superb recognition within the society. Any leader who is not well known by the public is cast outside the subset of true leadership. According to Joseph Badaracco:

...the most effective leaders are rarely public heroes. These men and women aren’t high-profile champions of causes, and don’t want to be. They don’t spearhead ethical crusades. They move patiently, carefully, and incrementally...And since many big problems can only be resolved by a long series of small efforts, quiet leadership, despite its seemingly slow pace, often turns out to be the quickest way to make an organization – and the world – a better place.

Badaracco makes a good point here. Great leaders who accomplished so much for humanity in the past were not typically leaders of high-profile. They were individuals with a servant-heart, even though some of them had all the qualifications that would have made them desire to earn wide public accolades at all cost. These leaders served humanity at the expense of their personal ambitions and financial stability (Badaracco 2002).

For instance, Albert Schweitzer quietly served humanity in a remote area in Gabon, central Africa. At the time he decided to spend the rest of his life in the mission field, he was an accomplished musician, theologian, and philosopher. Many of his friends believed he was making a bad decision by wanting to invest his life in caring for lepers and sick people in Gabon rather than to continue pursuing public recognitions in Germany. But by his persistent work in what he believed, he became an icon of hope and inspiration to many and most of his thoughts have been reborn in the hearts of many. His principle of having a high regard for all living organisms and the environment – reverence for life – has revolutionized different areas of living ranging from health to environmental issues. His many years of labor earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 (Schweitzer 1998).

While the whole world keeps talking about different problems, there are individuals who take initiatives to make the world a better place. Greg Mortenson, a former Concordia College student, decided to fight terrorism by providing a sound education for females in northern Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although he was not supported by many at the beginning, he
carried on with the work he believed could change lives in these countries. His courageous move has really blessed the future of these children who would not have had an opportunity to have such a good education (Daft 2008).

Will quiet leaders be celebrated while they are still alive? Probably not. These gradual achievements are often unnoticed; when noticed, quiet leaders see such a test of their characters. For example, Mohammed Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, has been helping women with microloans. When his work of several years was noticed and he was called upon to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, he deliberately brought the uneducated women who started the program with him. Together with him on the podium, they received the prize for their organization. Now, Yunus could have gone to Norway to receive the prize alone, but what he did was to really communicate something crucial to the rest of the world: anyone – educated and non-educated – can win the prize. Those women stood not only as recipients of the initiative and kindness of a man but also as evidence of what quiet leadership can achieve.

The whole world was shocked with the powerful earthquake that rocked Haiti on January 12, 2010. Within a few days, people started volunteering to help this country. Reliefs from all across the globe were sent to help the victims. The natural disaster did not hit only Haiti but also everyone else – regardless of geographical locations or race. People who have volunteered and those who have sent reliefs did that out of a call to help. All these are servant leaders even though a greater percentage of them would never have their names on the national dailies or TV programs. And that is the heart of leadership – the readiness to give the best to the course of humanity without expecting anything in return. As we look into the future, it would be great if we began to solve the various problems of the world by using the wisdom that quiet leadership offers.

**Vietnam: Two Years of Civil War in Vietnam**

*By the time I graduated from college (1970), I was more than ready for what we might now term a ‘cross-cultural encounter.’ At that time, the most exotic destination was Asia, and I was itching to learn an Asian language. China was still very much off limits, but the United States government had become very interested in providing free transportation to Vietnam to draft-age men for one-year, all-expense-paid visits—with weapons. I opposed the war, but I very much wanted to learn what was going on, and to do what I could to ameliorate the damage. So, sponsored by Lutheran World Relief as a very green ‘community development worker,’ I arrived in Saigon in September 1970 to spend two years with the ecumenical agency Vietnam Christian Service (VNCS).*

Before leaving the U.S., I had had anxious dreams about coping with the new culture, getting lost in the thick jungles, drowning in muddy brown rivers, or being ambushed by the Viet Cong. The reality was far less exciting. My first night in the guesthouse we were served...meatloaf. Outside, any tropical flair the city had was now choked with fumes, dust and garbage. Saigon had been a pleasant French colonial capital. Now it was jammed with more than a million refugees, frenzied traffic, U.S. soldiers...
casually sauntering from bar to bar—and no war in sight. I spent two months in tedious language training, by the end of which I could barely pronounce the spiky but musical tones of the Vietnamese language. Then I was sent to the northern border.

In the bedraggled and seedy garrison town of Dong Ha just below the ‘DMZ,’ I got my first glimpse of war. Not the bullets, tanks and airplanes of a shooting war, but the grim facts of a stalemated civil war: impoverished soldiers and their families mingling with impoverished townspeople and an occasional crazed American soldier. The town was, quite simply, terminally depressing under the thick grey monsoon sky. Fortunately, I soon was transferred to the province of Quang Ngai, home to the My Lai massacre and other scandalous US military debacles reported by the domestic press. To Vietnamese, Quang Ngai was a traditional hotbed of revolt and revolution. But to Vietnam Christian Service (VNCS), it was a station where overseas volunteers put down roots, making good use of war by marrying local Vietnamese women and raising families.

I was far too young and far too intimidated by the war to think of lasting attachments. The sheer pathos of the civil conflict pointed me in a different direction. Nudged by my liberal arts education, I was curious to learn about this unfamiliar world through Vietnamese eyes. At first glance, the province of Quang Ngai seemed simply chaotic. Nothing made sense: there were people everywhere, jerry-built houses lining the highway, which itself was a mad and noisy scramble of trucks, motorcycles, bicycles, and occasional tanks. I soon convinced myself that if I could not learn to make sense of this chaos, I surely would go crazy. So I studied the available terrain—a narrow strip of tranquil rice fields wedged between purple mountains and the blue billows of the East China Sea. I explored the province by motorcycle, usually within the limits of security, and struck up conversations with grizzled rice farmers.

I also tried to help out. There was no lack of opportunity. I administered a modest technical training program and head-start programs for refugee children. I arranged projects for social-work students to survey living conditions in the refugee camps, of which there were more than a hundred. Almost half of the province’s population had lost their homes, for what would eventually be ten years. Pressing need showed up at our doorstep as well. A steady stream of Vietnamese visitors made all kinds of requests—for scholarships, for enrollment in the local school system, for material aid, for help getting airplane tickets, and so on. My first American co-worker was a Methodist pastor who had married into the culture and was raising a family. He was used to this traffic, but we both felt compelled to draw boundaries on who we would help and why, in a constant casuistry of distinctions that left many visitors dissatisfied. Frankly, we wanted to help smooth Buddhists more than edgy Christians, refugees more than townspeople, students as well as adults. And we most certainly couldn’t do it all.

So we fell into the traditional pattern of the Quang Ngai unit: focusing on building relationships. Even this was not easy, given the huge advantages we inevitably enjoyed. By American standards, our lives were simple—no television, no phones, no refrigeration, no air conditioning, no clean water, not even much electricity. But unlike our Vietnamese colleagues, we had our own sturdy cushion of immunity against the war. So how could we Americans be ‘just friends’ when we never ran short of cash? Unlike our Vietnamese friends and colleagues, we could instantly seek the help of the US diplomatic and military missions, and if the war ever got rough, we always had the option of evacuating by chopper. In contrast, our Vietnamese friends and co-workers lived in very basic mud or concrete houses, struggled daily to find enough

Midnight Christmas celebration in Bau Giang refugee camp, lit by military flares
to eat and enough cash to send their children to school. They could not simply leave if the smoldering war flashed into battle at their doorsteps.

Despite these privileges and immunities that we enjoyed, most of our friends and acquaintances were very gracious. They did their best to uphold Vietnamese traditions of hospitality. We were invited to weddings, for having an American guest was an omen of good luck. We were visited, and visited others at Tet (the lunar new year, usually in late January or early February), when we sat around cracking open and crunching endless red-painted sunflower seeds. We sipped tiny cups of green tea. Occasionally we were invited to visit out in the countryside, where the steady buzz of insects, the sweet nectar of coconuts, the crisp chewiness of grilled corn, and relaxed pace of the afternoon lulled us into comfortable naps on large traditional Vietnamese beds. I began to see how life in Vietnam could be pleasant.

Most of the time, we were good guests. Sometimes we slipped. The local Vietnamese military chaplain once invited a Baptist Army army chaplain and me to lunch. His wife had cooked up an array of scrumptious foods, and my chopsticks were a blur of motion as I shoveled down the delicacies. The chaplain wouldn’t touch the any of it. “I’m just a meat-and-potatoes man,” he announced with some pride. I couldn’t believe my ears. I felt keenly embarrassed—and proceeded to polish off enough for both of us. Yet not only the Baptist chaplain came up short. Despite many invitations, I never gained the confidence to swim easily in this unfamiliar cultural sea. On one level, I just couldn’t let go of the immunities and privileges I enjoyed, to say nothing of my battered but unbowed sense of Western superiority. On a deeper level, my American sentimentality was just too shallow for the hard realities of war. I sometimes thought I was beginning to feel like a Vietnamese, but events soon shattered my illusion that I could cope with the strain of civil war.

In 1972, the war turned violent, with major attacks by the Viet Cong locally, and by North Vietnamese armies further north. The perimeter of security in Quang Ngai shrank drastically. The strain on our Vietnamese co-workers and friends increased. We had to abandon new projects and instead began dispensing blankets and other aid to newly ‘generated’ refugees. One day, a Viet Cong rocket crashed into the boys’ elementary school, killing more than two dozen students. Word spread at the speed of sound throughout the city, and already tense faces grew even more drawn. I gingerly paid my respects to our neighbors, who generally resented our privileged expatriate American lives. I congratulated them their young son had survived, and for this brief moment we shared genuine joy. But joy was not to be the dominant mood. The next day I was asked to drive our Land Rover—perfectly shaped for carrying caskets and mourners—to convey the body of another less fortunate young boy to the public cemetery. I’ll never forget the faces of the crowds lining the street. For one and only time in that war-battered province, I saw people stoney-faced in the street, weeping quietly. As I witnessed—and wept myself at—this display of public mourning, I thought I was as close to the pain of this miserable civil war as a sympathetic observer could get.

A few months later, some Vietnamese co-workers and I, all males and about the same age, decided to take a short vacation together. We wanted to take a break from the relentless pressures of the war, and so took a skiff out to a lovely volcanic island ten miles offshore. By one of those mysterious paradoxes of civil war, the island of Ly Son was being used by both sides for “R&R”—rest and relaxation. Rest is what we got, more than we bargained for. Our skiff arrived just ahead of a typhoon, which cut us off from the mainland for a week. The rain lashed

*Destroyed house in Thu Xa village, Quang Ngai Province*
us three days from one side and then three days from the other, as the eye
of the storm passed over. For all this time, we lived as Vietnamese. We
spent the nights on the bare wooden pews in a church built several years
earlier by Navy Seabees. We wandered the island’s volcanic cones and
beaches, utterly free from the worry of stepping on landmines. My ex-
haustion disappeared, and suddenly my ear for the Vietnamese language
gained a remarkable acuity. My vocabulary also opened wide. Best of
all, there were no barriers of privilege or immunity to impede our con-
versations or adventures. My closest friend, Ngoc, led us to a Buddhist
pagoda lodged high up on a cliff, where we had a long visit with a young
man who had turned to solitary contemplation after some traumatic ex-
perience of war cost him his voice; he communicated by writing, and we
gratefully imbibed the peace that he found in his secluded perch.

The week was idyllic, but the happiness couldn’t last. We returned by
boat to the mainland, skirting waterspouts still whipped up from the
departing storm. The war was getting worse by the day. I was rail-
ing against the fighting, and felt utterly powerless to do anything about
it—and in the fury of my frustration made at least three bad calls. I ig-
nored local warnings and got stuck in a seaside village in imminent peril
of a Viet Cong attack. In another incident, I goaded local Vietnamese
pastors into witnessing for peace; one of them responded by march-
ing into the thick of some fighting close by and beseeching both sides
to put down their weapons. Fortunately, in this instance no one got
hurt, but yet another such ill-advised judgment on my part got a very
close friend killed in a vehicle accident. The war was beyond my con-
trol, beyond anyone’s control. And it was getting closer. One Sunday morning, B52 bomb-
ers flattened a neighboring district, killing many people by sheer concussive force; I could feel
the ground rocking.

To be Vietnamese, I had thought, is to be like bamboo or coconut palms—bending gracefully
with the wind, and not breaking. But my little bamboo self was getting close to cracking. By
August, 1972, it was time for me to leave. Pe-
riod. My emotional reserves were utterly spent.
My usefulness was ended, and so was my bond
with the local Vietnamese. I could escape, while
all my co-workers and friends could not. I was
turned in upon myself by inarticulable grief
and could no longer face the suffering without
wanting to die myself. I wasn’t the only foreign
worker in my organization who slipped into a
passively suicidal state. Fortunately, some sub-
conscious instinct took over. As I flew out of
Quang Ngai for the last time, I could see Ameri-
can warships offshore, poised to shell the coast.
I let go, or more exactly, I shut down. My men-
tal construct of the province abruptly shrank in
my consciousness to the size of a postage stamp.
For the next thirty years, I could not summon up
mental images of the province, other than those
I had recorded in pictures. I guess it was simply
too painful.

By this point, the reader might wonder: could
it be better not to get attached to an unfamiliar
culture, at least under conditions of civil war?
My grief certainly did not help any Vietnamese
victims cope with their war. But there has been
a happy ending of sorts. As my father used to
say, “Time is a gentleman”. Almost thirty years
later (in 2000), I mustered up the nerve to return
to Vietnam. This time I was drawn not by the
exotic Orient but a very mundane research proj-
ec on poverty. The visit unexpectedly provided
the occasion for some long-deferred healing.
I took the train to Quang Ngai, where I found
the residents somewhat better off, but more
importantly, relaxed and outgoing—no longer
anxious and clingy I traveled by motorcycle
all over the province, drinking in the lovely countryside. I rode with an old friend; he told me his life had been difficult, but he still treasured our friendship of from the war years. This healing, while almost complete, continues. In January 2010, a man who was a high school student when I lived in his house for several months in 1971 found me through the Internet. He sent a picture of his wife and two sons—putting to rest, finally, my concern about his fate.

Concordia advises all students—and faculty—to become responsibly engaged with the world, so that we might gain a sense of service, useful skills, and wisdom for living in a globalized world. There’s always the possibility that a student might stumble, after graduation, into too much BREW. My two-year traumatic encounter with civil war in Vietnam likely did more to shape who I became, personally and professionally, than any other experience. Do I regret it? Might I have had a more productive two years in some other culturally challenging locale? Perhaps, but these are not very useful questions. The better question is: did the experience make me a better citizen of the world? I like to think so, for it gave me a certain hard-bitten hope.

Two years in Quang Ngai opened me to the ways that U.S. power can be misapplied, but I retain the hope that we can learn from our mistakes. The experience opened me to how people can suffer, but I learned how they can gain resilience and rebuild their lives according to the genius of their own particular cultures. The experience made me aware of how fragile the life that I live is, and how fragile are the lives of others, but that inspires me to provide what marginal help I can to enable others to restore dignity, order and hope in their lives. And finally, the two years in Quang Ngai opened me to my understanding of American soldiers who at the time I thought were the wrong soldiers in the wrong place, but who I later realized also suffered their own trauma. I hope that all the soldiers who have carried their own pain and guilt with them these past four decades will find the occasion to return to Vietnam for their own healing. They will not find battered wreckage but a vibrant society, eager for economic and social growth into the future. In this future, there is room for Americans who want to immerse themselves in the language and peoples of a truly fascinating culture.

A concluding unscientific postscript to those who are thinking of venturing abroad: despite—actually because of—this difficult experience, I strongly urge students to go forth and engage some foreign culture on its own terms—in listening, in speaking, in living, in working. I tell my graduating students that they will be impressed indelibly with what they learn about themselves as well as about the unfamiliar culture that draws them in. In effect, they will gain the next step in their liberal education. Volunteers in service abroad can make friendships across involuted cultural divides, and in this age of global communication, those friendships can endure. More importantly, these volunteers will have their characters shaped; they will return home different than when they left. They will learn the importance of confidence, resilience, and integrity. But should they visit a culture in deep conflict? If they are so rash to grapple with a civil war, they will stumble deeply into issues of good and evil. They will gain a privileged, if not terrifying, insight into the workings of social order. If they return wounded in spirit, they will learn the further virtues of patience and compassion. They may find their labors useless, or worse than useless, despite their best intentions, and in so doing, they will trade innocence for wisdom. And they may be strengthened by the experience. In situations of grinding suffering, they will learn what healing is about. Is there a calculus by which one can measure these gains against the costs? Perhaps only by retrospection, thirty or forty years hence, will the net value of their experiences be clear. A liberal arts education is, after all, a long-term investment.
Changing Perspectives: Cobber Cross Cultural Testimonies
Organized by Mark Del Greco

There is nothing more captivating than setting foot on foreign soil half a world away. All senses are awhirl taking in the sights and sounds of your new surroundings. Your heart skips a beat and a surge of adrenaline rushes from head to toe, as feelings of excitement and fear arise all at once. Thoughts of conquering the unknown push you onward into this new world and an experience that will change you forever. The following intercultural testimonies by Concordia students showcase these kinds of life changing experiences. So sit back, relax and join your fellow Cobbers in becoming immersed in studying abroad down under, hospital work in Russia, athletic competition in South America, and so much more.

Mark Del Greco
Senior
Business Management major

It was a glorious experience to submerse myself in the simple lifestyle of a culture that has hardly changed over the centuries. I gradually gained trust and found acceptance into the neighborhood and built friendships that bridged gaps of language, faith, and culture. I found that although we are different in so many ways, we are still so much the same. I fell in love with this way of life and the people who made me feel like family. I sometimes long to go back to where I had no worries and life was not a chaotic rat race. A life in which all that mattered was relationship with your fellow man and what you were going to eat for your next meal. A culture of “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” People had nothing yet they still had so much joy. I question where this is in our culture. It seems so often we get caught up in ourselves and this high stress, materialistic world we live in. We have so much yet why does it seem so many are still unhappy? We forget the things that really matter: faith, family, and friends.

In summary, my Morocco experience forever changed my life. My eyes were opened to a whole new worldview. I now realize how blessed I truly am.
In the summer of 2009, I traveled to Yaroslavl, Russia, with an organization called Cross-Cultural Solutions. While there, I volunteered in a women’s psychiatric hospital, a children’s psychiatric hospital, various elderly centers, and children’s city camps attended by children from low-income families or orphanages. Although I knew only a very minimal amount of language, the interactions I had with people in these places changed my perspective and my heart in a big way.

Each day all of the volunteers would be driven to various locations, where we would spend the day in groups of four or five, with a translator present, as well. The most meaningful places that I spent time at were the hospital for kids, which was like a children’s psychiatric hospital, and the women’s psychiatric hospital.

Most of the kids at the hospital had various behavior and emotional problems, and were sent by their families to stay for differing periods of time in order to be evaluated and treated. Because I could not speak Russian and there was only one translator available, I was unable to really talk to the children, but just being able to play with them and show them love was more than enough for communicating. Each day when we arrived, the kids rushed to greet us with exorbitant amounts of touching and hugs, since touch was something they otherwise did not receive. Many kids wanted to spend our time together simply playing with my hair, resting on my arm, or petting my back. We would play indoor games and do an art project, and then the children would get to spend a small amount of time playing outside of the building they were otherwise locked inside. While outside, many of them wanted only to run and be chased for extremely long periods of time, and they were overjoyed to play catch with a baseball. It seemed that when volunteers were not present, these children received extremely little love and positive attention, so when we gave it to them, they soaked it up.

The women’s psychiatric hospital was the other volunteer placement that had the most impact on me. Women of all ages and diagnoses were housed in this locked building containing rooms with rows of beds and a recreation room. We would go here twice a week to play games and do art projects with the women. Walking into this building was always shocking, as there would be some women lying on the floor in the middle of the dirty hallway, others moaning in their bedrooms, and all of them wearing dirty night gowns and looking disheveled. The smell of this place was so terrible it triggered my gag reflex. Because of the language barrier, it was difficult to discern what exactly these women’s circumstances were, but there seemed to be a wide range of mental illness, going from depression to other completely debilitating illnesses. Regardless, in America today, it would be considered horrific to house mentally ill in the conditions that these women lived in.

One day we were able to bring lipstick and lotion to the women. This day was very memorable for me, because these items were considered delicacies to them. They were so grateful just for some lotion, as their skin was so unbelievably dry. After putting the lipstick on, all of them would stare at their reflections in a little compact mirror we brought, just smiling to themselves for many minutes. One woman said that she was not going to wash her face for three days so that she could look that beautiful for as long as possible.

Volunteering in Russia was extremely rewarding but also heartbreaking. It was hard to leave these people knowing that I was going back to my relatively perfect home and they were staying in the same conditions. It was also difficult for me to handle the language barrier, because I wanted so badly just to tell them that they were beautiful and loved. However, this forced us to rely on other ways of communicating, which were very meaningful. I grew a lot from this trip in my faith and in my understanding of people. I would absolutely love to do something like this again and I would recommend it to anyone.
I flew into the Singapore airport at midnight and was picked up by two of my Indian friends. They asked if I was hungry, which of course I was, so we drove to a local coffee shop to eat. By the time we arrived it was well after midnight, yet the tables outside were filled with people, teenagers on dates, families with young children, and senior citizens. My friend Michael ordered for me, and when my order arrived asked the cook to put more curry on it. I spilled all over the van on the ride home making a huge mess, but the prata was delicious.

There were many frustrations with being outside the United States. First there was no Home Depot that I could visit and purchase all of the tools and supplies that I needed to do a project the “American way.” Needless to say I learned that there was an alternative “Asian” way to do almost every project that I needed to do. The first day I was asked to hang a set of drapes in the cafeteria and then given a concrete drill. I insisted that I only needed a power screwdriver to hang the drapes until I discovered that all of the walls were concrete not the wood that I was used to working with.

One memorable experience was attending a Tamil church service. The service was conducted entirely in Tamil which I didn’t learn at all so without the man whom the pastor assigned to interpret for me I would have been completely lost. It was amazing to see a group of people who were so passionate about the same God as I was, yet in such a different looking and sounding way.

I was also able to play soccer for the Teen Challenge Football Club. I was by far the largest, and most inexperienced soccer player on the field in all of our games. I cannot say that I made a huge impact on the game, but I hope I contributed positively to our team at least a little bit. I would play defense, but on corner kicks I was called forward to try to head in a goal. It was never successful, but I was a giant distraction as three or four of our opposing defensive players would come over and cover me to keep me from scoring. Little did they know that I had almost zero soccer experience. One game I was assigned by my teammates to chase one of the good players on the other team to keep him from getting the ball and scoring if he got the ball. I was able to keep him from scoring, including one time that I was able to head a high pass from getting to him.

The food in Singapore was incredible. Roti prata, a soft Indian pita bread that was drenched in curry sauce, was my favorite. The first time I ate roti prata was after arriving back in Singapore from a weekend in nearby Kuala Lumpur.

I left the comfort of my rural North Dakota life and boarded an airplane bound for Singapore where I would do construction projects at a Christian drug-rehab center. It was a life-changing experience starting with hearing and seeing the in-flight instructions in Japanese and Mandarin as well as English.

After landing in Singapore at one in the morning and exiting the airport I was greeted by the most humid air I had ever felt. Even in the middle of the night Singapore was like a sauna. The American couple that I interned under drove me to the Teen Challenge drug-rehab center where I would be staying for the next twelve weeks. Those twelve weeks passed quickly with me learning how hot 34 degrees really was (Celsius of course) and how to eat briani rice and curry-covered roti prata with my Indian friends without using utensils.
From Feb 2009 – July 2009, I got the opportunity to study on the east coast of Australia. I took four business classes at a local University and lived amongst other college students. I lived with two Australian females and one South African male. Not only did I take classes, I bought a surf board and experienced the surfing lifestyle. A quick 10 minute bus ride to the coast allowed for many trips to the beach.

When I was not in class or at the beach, I was lucky enough to be able to travel elsewhere around Australia. I visited major cities and scenic attractions around Australia, taking in many tourist attractions as well as partaking in various domestic lifestyle cultural activities. Traveling internationally, I was able to visit Japan, but even more amazingly was able to experience the beautiful country of New Zealand.

After the whole experience of being “down under,” many of my perspectives and worldviews changed. I was able to meet many students from all parts of the world. From Africa to Europe to Latin America, I found out that there are many people taking on different experiences and cultures besides their own. It was incredible to see how different people can be, yet still be so similar. The ability to travel internationally today is amazing. With a simple passport, one can experience many great lifestyles and cultures around the world. Overall, my global experiences have developed me into a person without a single mindset and have shown me how much life has to offer beyond domestic borders.
Traveling has been a huge part of my being and has helped shape my view on life in many ways. One way in particular is by helping me recognize the fundamentals of life that I often take for granted, like the simple privilege to drink clean water.

Being born in America I’ve been raised taking a lot for granted. I especially recognized this when I went on a mission trip with my family to Mexico. The Mexican families walked about two hours one way, over “hills,” which I would classify as small mountains, in order to have their children attend a Vacation Bible School we were organizing. In preparation for this mission trip I packed my grungiest clothes but people who walked two hours in the sweltering Mexican sun daily dressed in their very best and their most special outfits.

It sounds cliché but people were living in poverty, suffering from illnesses caused by the pollution they lived in and yet they found joy in the tiniest little things like paper.

It is so important and necessary to break free from our comfort zones because we have so much to learn about other cultures. When we reach out to each other we often discover that we aren’t as different as we perceived. There are endless opportunities for going abroad and in my own experience I have been so blessed with what I have learned and for the travel bug that keeps urging me to go and explore God’s great world even more!
My trip to Colombia in the summer of 2008 with an Athletes In Action basketball team began for me a fulfillment of the idea that sports cross all boundaries, allowing me to connect with people from a completely different culture and hopefully to use that common ground as a platform to share the gospel. It ended up opening my heart up to love in a new way, and letting that instead be my motivation and the one thing needed to cross all cultural barriers.

Athletes in Action is a global pioneer in sport ministry, existing to bring Jesus Christ and His message of victory into the hearts, homes, and communities of millions of people around the world. I traveled with thirteen others to four of the major cities of Colombia over a span of two weeks, playing 10 games as we went. The games served as our main outreach, sharing testimonies at halftime with the crowds, and then having time to share with the opposing teams after the game. We were blessed to have two amazing players native to Colombia on the team, who greatly helped and most importantly they demonstrated to us what defines Colombia. They helped us to see it as a country where community and relationships are of the most importance. This is something that I witnessed every day, seeing people everywhere I went greeting each other with excitement, with hugs and kisses. I saw huge capacities to love, even when circumstances were not the greatest. I saw kids roaming in rags, looking for ways to have fun, smiling as they took interest in strange newcomers. We had the warmest welcoming wherever we went. Churches took us in as their own, feeding us, entertaining us, and overall just showing a deep desire to bless us, showing the utmost appreciation for our presence.

I left for this journey very much hoping to find ways to use something I loved, the game of basketball, to bring something to others. On the way, my heart was opened in ways that I am unable to describe on paper. God tore down major walls in my heart on that trip, and from that gushed a new outpouring of His love that could then freely flow from me. The people of Colombia showed me that what matters all stems from the relationships we have. Love, I came to see, is what first and foremost has the power to step over any boundaries that cultural differences create. It is God’s amazing love that transcends all.
Where I’m From!

I am from far away,
I am from everyday bridges
From a world whose geography
My creator knows better than I

I am from many sources.
From God the Father,
Creator of Heaven and earth
By His hands, He laid the path of existence

I am from a dark place
With no lights, totally dark
No stars, no moon, no sunshine
My mother’s womb

I am from my ancestors, a family tree.
With many branches attached
I am from a loud house
With more than ten voices

From a beautiful country, breezed by oceans
And diverse traditions like the colors of the rainbow
With mountains, rivers, lakes, and wildlife
A place where the sweet songs of the birds
Wake us up to the morning sun

I am from those moments of crying,
Laughing, caring and sharing
From the past, present, and the future
From yesterday, today and tomorrow

From the hard work of tilling the land
Or roaming the plains with the beasts of life
From in between the towering peaks
The rift valley; the land of the Maasai

The years may come and go
The seasons may change
And the new winds too may blow
But I will always remain

Nashipay Kiria
Senior
Healthcare Management and Organizational Communication major
tal features of a democracy: a government based on majority rule and consent of the governed, existence of free and fair elections, respect for basic human rights and due process of law. Even though it might seem clear what democracy is, definition as a political system is not universal in its understanding and definitely not universal in its practice.

Democracy, as described in the article “A True Clash of Civilizations,” has an overwhelmingly positive image (Inglehart). However, it does have several shortcomings, which often contradict the very principles it seeks to represent. It claims to be representative of the population. However, this might not be the case. Often times various groups are heavily under-represented in world governance. A perfect example of this is given in the article “Let Women Rule.” Swanee Hunt explains that women perceive politics as corrupt and dirty; to feel like they are making a difference, they prefer to work with non-government organizations instead. Even though women constitute 50% of the world’s population, they still represent only 17% of parliamentary seats and 14% of ministerial positions worldwide according to “The World Economic Forum” report. Since most power still lies in policymaking, women are severely underrepresented, their opinions might not be heard, and their needs might not be met.

Democracy implies the existence of free and fair elections. Even the United States, the self-proclaimed leader of free world, falls behind in this respect. In the 2000 Presidential elections, there were many instances of miscounting and denial of voting rights to certain communities. Yet the United States insists on sending observers to developing democracies to ensure that their elections are continued in fitting manner.

Democracy has been a success in many regions in the world. However, it cannot be created or sustained in certain regions in the world. Nations of Africa have tried to improve democracy by implementing elections. However, voter fraud, intimidation tactics, corruption and violence often characterize these elections. Even if the election is successful, there is often very little to no sincere care for citizens as they are still deprived of basic goods and services like water supply and electricity. In the article “Africa’s Crises of Democracy,” author Lydia Polgreen explains that in Africa, some countries go through elections but governance doesn’t seem to improve. While 6 in 10 Africans said that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, satisfaction with democracy has dipped...
to 41 percent from 58 percent in 2001. Trying to give the power to the people in an environment of voter fraud, intimidation tactics, corruption and violence will lead to failure. A better system needs to evolve.

It would be extremely difficult for an entire culture, which has historically not had as much exposure to freedom, to suddenly embrace democracy and all its virtues. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, in their article, “The True Clash of Civilization,” argue that ideas of liberalism, human rights, equality, rule of law and separation of church and state have little resonance outside the West. Muslim societies are also distinctively less permissive towards homosexuality, abortion and divorce. Hence, with this obvious difference in culture it is easy for Islamic nations to come to resent the West for trying to force on them a culture that goes against everything that they believe in. The West hopes that by bringing democracy to Arab countries, they would be able to root out terrorism. However, Thomas Carothers in his article “Democracy’s Sobering State” argues that Arab nations have an opposing view that democracy would likely unleash radical forces that could be harmful to both the region and the West.

However, what might bring the biggest blow to the case of democracy is the fact that there are other very successful forms of government existing in the world today. China is a perfect example of this. Carothers explains that China’s extraordinary economic success has presented a serious problem for those arguing that democracy is necessary for development or that dictatorial regimes cannot produce sustained economic development. China’s rapid growth and its increasing economic muscle on the international stage has made talk of the ‘China model’ more common among ruling elites and citizens of the developing world. The fact that out of the ten fastest growing economies in the developing world, only Albania was led by a (somewhat) democratic government further solidifies the argument that having a democracy does not necessarily lead to economic prosperity.

The biggest argument against trying to create democracy is the fact that mature democracies themselves are bad role models of representative democracy. In the article “The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index of Democracy,” Laza Kekic says, “the world’s only superpower (the United States) is rhetorically and militarily promoting a political system that remains undefined—and it is taking staking its credibility and treasure on that pursuit.” Since 2001, the U.S. has gotten itself into a position with Iraq and Afghanistan that has seriously jeopardized its position as a pinnacle of democracy. The author of “Democracy’s Sobering State” argues that “the war on terrorism has hurt America’s status as a model of democracy and weakened America’s credibility as a pro-democratic actor.”

Various inconsistencies within the system too have made people lose faith in the values of democracy. The U.S. invasion of Iraq also serves to testify that most often the U.S. acts or reacts only in its own self-interest. Carothers explains that much of the political life in Iraq is still controlled, deep down, by the United States. Iraq serves the purposes of being oil-rich and as an important U.S. presence in the area. In the article “Anti-Americanism,” the authors say that critiques of the United States extend beyond foreign policy to its economic and social practices and policies, including the public role of women and the death penalty. Carothers argues that abusive treatment of detainees in U.S.-run prisons or detention facilities in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo has badly tarnished America’s standing as a defender of human rights.

In the article “Muslims’ Veils Test Limits of Britain’s Tolerance,” Jane Perlez talks about the Muslim women in Britain who choose to wear the niqab, or the full-faced veil, and their plights in doing so. Teachers, prosecutors, and ordinary citizens have been scolded and asked to remove their niqabs on baseless arguments. This is a violation against basic human and religious rights. Britain’s experience with the niqab is reminiscent of the oppression present in authoritarian governments.

Winston Churchill said, “Democracy is the worst form of government if not for the others.” Democracy has been widely praised as the best form of government, and according to the “Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index,” it is widely spread as well, encompassing 165 nations. However, this broad acceptance does not imply that it is free from imperfections. Like every other system in the world, it has its shortcomings. Hence, an active pursuit to ‘create’ democracy in countries around the world should not be a goal in the 21st century because the imperfections associated with democracy make it as flawed as any other system.

Instead, a more realistic goal should be to develop a better relationship between mature democracies and other countries. This relationship can be used to influence that government’s
emphasis on basic rights of the people and judicious use of the country’s resources. In most cases, mature democracies are also leaders in global trade. Economic sanctions and embargoes could always be used to keep leaders of countries responsible to the global community for their actions within their own country.

Improving existing democratic systems must be done with the understanding that there is no fixed definition of democracy and hence it is adaptable to any country. Efforts must be made to try to strengthen the judicial process in these countries to ensure that the basic rights of individuals are protected. Elections must be held in a manner that allows people to contest and vote in a safe environment. The media should be made strong to inform people and allow them to make their own responsible and intentional decisions. Above all, mature democracies should focus more on an internal change to refine their working of democracies and clean up the inconsistencies that exist within their own systems. It is then that they can play a positive role in modeling good governance for other world leaders.

Cultural Relativism: What Everyone Should Know

It is undeniably true that we live in a multicultural world. In fact, multiculturalism is one of the most visible characteristics of our world. People respond differently to this cultural diversity. Most people tend to be cultural relativists -- cultural relativism is the idea that no culture is superior to another and that cultural values are unique products of complex cultural processes. Cultural relativism is often contrasted with ethnocentrism -- the belief that one’s culture is superior to that of the others. These two concepts are considered mutually exclusive.

Let me start off with the simple, yet undeniably true premise that there are a lot of cultures in the world and these cultures are different. Culture is an umbrella term that encompasses everything: beliefs, traditions, clothes, food, music... Beliefs are the most important cultural values and everything else depends on them. Multiculturalism implies that other cultures have different tastes, perceptions, and beliefs. Even in a seemingly homogenous culture, individuals still like and dislike differently, let alone a heterogeneous world. Culture is so complex that we only see the tip of the iceberg. The visible aspects of culture -- food, clothes, and rituals -- stem from beliefs -- invisible aspects. It is very easy for us, for example, to label others as “primitive” or “pagan” not knowing that their symbols are as precious as ours. Someone who worships a tree does not see the tree the way we see it, they see it the same way we see our divine.

I stated earlier that cultural values are product of some complex social processes that are socially and geographically determined. These values cannot be true or false; but they can be relatively true or relatively false. They are not static; they are dynamic. What our ancestors perceived as normative is now outdated and traditional according to our current criteria. The evolving standards of decency in the same society are very good examples of relativism.

People with ethnocentric attitudes tend to be supremacists and extremists. They disrespect other cultures. Their ideals are right and any-
thing else is ridiculous and meaningless. The inevitable consequenc-
es of ethnocentrism are racism, discrimination, and exclusion. Most
of our concepts and ideas are disgustingly ethnocentric. We all hear
terms like: “developing countries” and “primitive cultures,” but who has
the right to label others and their culture as such? Ethnocentrism is re-
sponsible for inventing a whole literature of hatred, intolerance, labels,
stereotypes and generalizations.

A cultural relativist, on the other hand, would appreciate other views
even if he/she does not necessarily subscribe to them. Cultural relativ-
ism assumes diversity is synonymous to beauty. Relativism teaches us
that other ideas and point of views are equally important and valuable.
Cultural relativists are flexible and can function in every culture due to
their inclusion.

I think that we should always differentiate between abstract concepts
and concrete ones when we talk about cultural values. We can accu-
rently define concrete concepts since they are physical objects, but by
no means can we give definitive, operational definitions to abstract
concepts. Concepts like freedom and morality do not have physical
existence and thus cannot be objectively defined. These concepts are
abstract and thus subjective and personal. Every culture perceives and
defines these concepts differently. What seems normal in one culture
might be shockingly odd in another.

I am very familiar with the Muslim culture, and I have been living in the
U.S. for three years. I don’t claim to be a cultural anthropologist, but I
have come to a solid conclusion that a deep misunderstanding exists
between these cultures. Both cultures claim “cultural/religious supe-
riority” and both cultures are uncompromisingly dogmatic. It is true
that these two cultures look at things differently, but does that justify
superiority? Here are some cultural differences.

Premarital sex is so common in Western cultures that it became a norm,
but the same practice is haram (forbidden) in Muslim countries. Most
Muslim women wear the veil as a symbol of modesty and chastity, but
the same veil is perceived in the West as a symbol of oppression and
patriarchy. The legal drinking age in America is 21, but it is 18 in most
countries. Is America right and the whole world wrong? Or is Ameri-
ca violating human rights by not allowing people to drink when they
want? My main point is that these cultural values do not have truth-val-
ues. They are not true/false or moral/immoral. They are relative values.
They make perfect sense to the person who practices them, but they
usually do not make any sense to foreigners.

The biggest problem is that we often reify -- the fallacy of treating
an abstract concept as if it were concrete -- these abstract concepts of freedom and
morality. We tend to think that morality or freedom have physical characteristics and
give them definitions according to our own criteria that may not be applicable in another
environment. This reification of these abstract concepts often leads to cultural imperialism.
Cultural imperialism is characterized by the domination of one culture. Cultural impe-
rialism also implies that all cultures receive and not give, because they are often seen as
“primitive” and “uncivilized”. In a multi-cultural world, all cultures should interact and influ-
ce each other and this can only be achieved if we all appreciate and respect other cultures.

In conclusion, I want to clarify that cultural relativism is not the belief that we are all
wrong and that there is no truth. Cultural relativism is quite the opposite. In fact, I am very
convinced that cultural relativity will eventually lead to cultural normativity. For instance,
if we all encourage peace and tolerance and discourage violence and intolerance, peace
and tolerance will eventually become norma-
tive values not relative values. That, I believe, is
the ultimate goal of relativism. I believe that it
is a means not an end. Inclusion and relativism
seem to be the appropriate responses to our
cultural diversity.
A Scottish Scientist Looks at His Keyboard…

When I first began to write this article, I initially balked at the idea and was uncertain what to write about, particularly when I heard of some of the more weighty topics that other people were covering. Combine this with the fact that in the past I have jokingly described my nationality as Scientist first and maybe Scottish second; I worried what I would talk about. Maybe my description of myself is correct; there’s something about being a scientist that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries. We speak a universal language of equations, reactions, interactions, common names of organisms, molecules, phenomena and whether we hail from regions of biology, chemistry, physics or mathematics, there is a shared culture and kinship between us all. But is that all there is to me? Should I define myself solely as a Scientist or go to the other extreme and embrace my Scottish roots overwhelmingly? After

15 years in the U.S., my accent is still so strong that it only takes a few sentences for someone to ask where I am from. So there is no way I’m ever going to just pass for American, but should I go the other way and adopt the Mike Myers of Saturday Night Live philosophy: “If it’s not Scottish, it’s crap!”? The latter seems an unreasonable way to go, too, and not just because having to wear a kilt everyday—especially when the wind is hitting 40 below—seems a particularly chilling experience. So I decided to use this article to reflect a wee bit on what it means to me to be Scottish. This year marks my 7th year in Fargo which means this is the longest I have lived in a single place since leaving to attend University. So do I now consider Fargo to be home or do I long for the plaintive wail of bagpipes across a misty Scottish glen?

It’s perhaps timely to personally reflect on this as well. 2009 marked the 250th anniversary of Scotland’s national poet Robert Burns. To celebrate this, the powers that be in Scotland commissioned what was described as Homecoming Scotland 2009. And I recently received a 1972 book called Understanding the Scots by Moray McLaren, which purports to be a guide for the English and other foreigners to allow them to understand the unusual ways of the native Scot. But these both focus on the past, the former event attempting to reconnect with the country’s sons and daughters who now live far from home and the latter playing up a stereotype that may have faded into the mists of history. Last year also saw the publication of a 200-page document, describing the potential directions in the process for Scottish Independence, which seems almost contrary to the attempts at a unified Europe. So does being Scottish simply consist of looking back at past glories and histories or is it possible to look forward as well? With the rise of a unified Europe, is being Scottish still relevant or is it just a label? Am I instead a citizen of the United Kingdom, a denizen of Great Britain, a European? Or am I becoming… an American? After all, it says United Kingdom on my passport and Scotland is not even an option in the post office country codes when sending letters airmail. With the internet connecting all corners of the globe and national boundaries fading slowly in so many ways, how do I define my Scottishness?

Almost instantly, I find myself doing what I talked of above and lapsing into past stories. Scotland is steeped in history and it has colored so much of the culture I grew up in. To some, it seems the
history of Scotland is about fighting, especially against our southern neighbors. We fought the English a lot and we did not do very well in most of these wee scuffles. One which shaped the modern Scot the most was the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 to 1746. We lost badly! At the same time, the 18th and 19th centuries saw the Highland Clearances where many of the native Scots left by choice or often against their will, emptying the land and making it available for farming. The efforts of Walter Scott in the 1820s and the predilection of Queen Victoria for a romanticized figure of the Scottish Highlander were key in shaping the stereotype of the kilted Scotsman that still exists today, but is this still a relevant image or has it dated badly? What does it mean to be Scottish in the 21st century?

I may throw terms like “national pride” into this piece, but is that simply a blanket term related to geographical origin? Just because I was born in the country, is that all that defines me or is the accent simply all I need? To me, my Scottish identity is in part the legacy of my country and its inhabitants. There is a wealth of material in the sciences, the arts and so much more that ties into my national pride. Another title on my bookshelf is How the Scots Invented the Modern World, and I could spend pages here regurgitating how so many of the things we take for granted were created by Scots. But should I reduce the legacy to simply wandering around pointing at TVs and telephones saying ‘Aye, we came up with that”? Or is there more to it than that? National pride arises from the whole culture and that means the good and the bad: the achievements, the arts and the sciences together. Not just the works of the past but also those in the present and those to come, too.

Of course, I may not be a typical Scot either when it comes down to it. My perspectives are skewed by a somewhat outsider status arising in part from the fact that my increase in cultural awareness developed significantly after leaving the country. Do I have a heightened sense of nationality arising from my geographical remoteness or was this something that would have developed with age regardless? My increase in cultural awareness admittedly did grow once I moved to the U.S. but would that have happened if I had stayed? In secondary school, we were not exposed to many significant cultural markers. We were taught English history, and literature ranged from Orwell to Shakespeare. The only significantly Scottish work was Sunset Song by Lewis Grassic Gibbon, which I will admit I did not get. Robert Burns was dredged up now and again but dismissed quickly, his main legacy being required recitations every year in January. It felt like rote memorization and there was none of the feeling, the passion that I now see in his work. As far as other Scottish poets…were there any?

It was during my undergraduate that I first started to develop a better sense of what it meant to be Scottish. It may have been the academic locale or the unavoidable sense of history of the town of St. Andrews (oldest University in Scotland, more than just a golf course you know), it may have been the chance to interact with students from other disciplines or some combination of these, but slowly over those 4 years, I began to understand the culture and history I was born into. And then graduate school beckoned and somehow I was enticed stateside to Notre Dame. Instant culture shock and I spent my years in the lab since stepping outside that safe environment meant denying that I was Irish on a daily basis, since to most American ears, the Celtic burr sounds no different whether the speaker hails from Scotland or Ireland. At Notre Dame, everything Irish was championed and a characteristic Scottish contrariness or homesickness encouraged me to further delve into my own culture. One thing I have found amusing over the past years since I moved to the U.S., though, has been the cultural markers that the average American (if there is such a thing) will raise when they find out my country of origin. It’s varied from Braveheart to Groundskeeper Willie from The Simpsons, to most recently Susan Boyle (no, I don’t know her just because she’s Scottish).

So now I sit trying to define how I consider my nationality. It’s not an easy thing to do. The scientist part of me wants to quantify, to create a scale, a measurement system, develop tests and calculate standard deviations to arrive at an answer but it’s more than just numbers on a spreadsheet, an answer on a calculator. So what is Scottish nationalism then to me? Perhaps the way I think of it is pride tied into a cultural awareness. There is a legacy to being a Scot that is more than just a geographical point of origin and that is what I take pride in. It’s not the blind support of the Scottish team in events like the Soccer World Cup (and not just because we are not very good and once again failed to qualify) and it’s not cheering for the U.S. in the same event just because they are playing England (Go U.S.A!) It does not mean anything Scottish is automatically good. And I don’t say that
just because I’m that one Scotsman who does not drink whisky, play bagpipes, and golf every day.

The positive aspects to being “not from around here,” as my colleagues describe me, include being informed and educated about my culture and sharing that. In the lab here on campus, whilst I may make the effort of emphasizing relevant historical work by Scottish chemists, that does not mean I disparage chemists of other nationality. I can demonstrate this pride in my nationality, be a cultural ambassador and educate those around me about my country, stand up and be proud about my background instead of trying to hide it like I did at times in the past. And where does that leave me today? My office displays a few traces of my nationality, from two small flags atop my computer to a calendar of Scottish cows. And while you may hear the faint sounds of bagpipes from my playlist, it’s only a small percentage of the total tracks. I maintain my efforts to remain current on events in Scotland; the internet lets me read newspapers from back home and I try to stay current with contemporary Scottish authors but I also continue to try and fill in gaps in the historical works. I went back to Sunset Song this past year and now see the importance of the work.

And so to Robert Burns. In Scottish culture, he is one of the most important figures. He is our national poet, and while his legacy may have been debated in countless academic studies, his work to me does evoke a certain nationalistic passion. To many, his legacy may simply be as the bloke who wrote “Auld Lang Syne,” a work butchered by the tipsy across the world every New Year, but there is more. To most his work is all but incomprehensible, written in Old Scots, a dated dialect. I’ll admit there are even some bits I have to look at the translations to get. Yet the shadow he casts over the culture is immense. But should Burns be the be-all and end-all that defines my sense of nationality? He was voted the greatest Scot ever in a recent poll so he seems like a good iconic figure. But whilst Burns still occupies a lofty spot in the poetry I read, it does not end with him. Another work I find particularly relevant is a longer piece by Hugh MacDiarmid, “A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.” It is more contemporary and a scathing take on Scottish nationalism, scorning those so bound to just blindly following traditions with no means nor intent to change or evolve. And in part, it is through this work written less than a century ago that I find resonance and define myself all the more. It is a modern take on the Scottish national identity that rings true for me; cynical in parts, yes, but realistic, grounded and not mired irreversibly in the past. Aware of and respecting the traditions and history but not hopelessly bound by them. Just like a scientist digesting the research which has been done and looking to push back the boundaries at the same time. And that to me, at least, is what it means to be Scottish.
Concordia Liberal Arts: My Experience

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A liberal arts education seems to be a concept deeply rooted in the understanding of most people, at least to some extent, at Concordia. And while it may not necessarily influence most student choices at Concordia College, I am convinced it is what has given me the sense of purpose and direction that I have today. The irony of it is it seems a relatively alien concept to me when I first arrived after getting the unique opportunity to study in the United States. Coming from Tanzania, in east Africa, I was never exposed to the idea of a liberal arts education. In fact, it was only in 2006 that I first became acquainted with the concept.

Before I came to Concordia my understanding of what a liberal arts education entails was very limited. It took me several semesters to comprehend its purpose and fully grasp its many interpretations from a personal perspective. Discerning its meaning was very daunting because I was more familiar with structured educational systems at home that were not as varied and extensive as Concordia’s. The differences between these educational systems and the whole process of trying to switch from the former to the latter were challenging. At times I was not confident of ever finding the right path. But now I have come to appreciate it and it has become an integral part of who I am.

The fundamental goals of a liberal arts education are to create an intellectual individual with knowledge in varied fields, even though one can specialize in some area. To put it bluntly, it is simply taking courses outside the scope of one’s major. At least, that is how its goals are achieved. I must admit that I was really skeptical of the efficacy of such a structure in the beginning. Being in a liberal arts college I had to take diverse courses from different disciplines to fulfill the college core curriculum, but being accustomed to a more structured system I found myself putting more emphasis on my major courses. The irony if it is that I changed my major because I lost interest in it along the way. I had originally chosen that major because it was supposedly considered one that would help me to get a good job after graduation. With this in mind, I decided to pursue it because what I wanted to study was not offered. I must admit that I wasted much of my time and resources taking classes that would not count towards my major.

Along the way, I came to realize that the core courses played a big role in shaping my college life. These courses caused me to develop and grow academically. They challenged me to think critically and develop my arguments and reasoning. Gradually, I came to appreciate the totality of a liberal arts education and that one needs such courses that will equip them with skills such as writing and oral communication – in my case; I needed this since English is not my first language.

More importantly, the knowledge I gained from taking such classes helped me uncover the track I needed to follow in order to have a major that will not only get me a good job, but will better launch me into a successful career that I can later enjoy too. The beauty of a liberal arts education is that it gives room for one to explore a broad range of knowledge that is not to the exclusion of one’s area of interest. This, I feel, is a major difference between liberal arts institutions from non-liberal ones.

Every time I reflect on my path, I find it is impossible to underestimate the power of the liberal arts including programs such as exploratory symposiums, different lectures from varied speakers, and forums that the college encourages students to attend. At times instructors will require one to attend and write a brief summary paper. All of these programs are geared
toward helping one explore oneself and discover one’s potentials and capabilities. I have found this to be very true.

The education at Concordia has helped me to explore myself and discover my calling. The diverse body of knowledge has equipped me with the skills to think for myself and develop interest in the area I consider to be my career. It was not until the spring of 2008 that I came to know and decide what I wanted to do with my life. And this was after listening to the Nobel Peace Prize holder Muhammad Yunus during the March 2008 Peace Forum. His work of empowering women and fighting against poverty inspired me so much that I decided to do an independent study on two books he has written; “Bankers to the Poor” and “Creating the World without Poverty”.

The independent study, which I did simultaneously with a microfinance internship at Uchumi Commercial Bank Limited (UCB), during last summer in Tanzania, convinced me that helping people get out of poverty is something that I am very passionate about. Since then my interest in micro-finance has been growing. Now, I am convinced that a career in micro-finance is exactly what I want to do. My intention of helping people through the provision of micro-loans, financial education, business consulting services and intermediary service lies within the college’s mission of “influencing the affairs of the world.” I felt myself influencing the affairs of the world as I led a micro-finance project that I initiated among women in my home village. The idea for this business came from my concern for the numerous problems that plague the Maasai, especially the low income ones. Since we, the Maasai, started to lose our nomad lands to African safaris and game parks, and started being forced to adapt to a life that is not dependent on livestock, many families have become unstable and face an uncertain future. It is here that my organization seeks to intervene to help my people transition smoothly into a new life. By providing them with small loans, they too have the opportunity to develop small businesses and sustain their families. Without offering such assistance it is evident that many Maasai families will be left in deep poverty.

Now it has been almost four years since I came to Concordia College. Like other students I have developed an active engagement with knowledge, certainly not as a passive observer. It is this liberal arts education that permitted me to see the relationships between ideas, philosophies, subject areas, but still put each in its appropriate position.

Studying at Concordia is something that I will forever be thankful for. It is an opportunity that one should take advantage of. The experience that I have obtained is very influential and I don’t think I would have gotten it anywhere else. I might have studied my supposed major and lived miserably in a “well paying” job that I wasn’t passionate about. Thankfully, my education at Concordia has set up new pathways to my ultimate goal in life. The more I learn, the more I want to learn.
Education For A Purpose: Self Revealed and a Look Back in Time

This text is neither a fiction, nor a scholastic analysis per se. It’s a narrative of my actual experience through educational system in my native country, Cameroon in Central Africa. The story is narrated in the light of the model of liberal arts education I experienced on Concordia College Campus, and from the point of view of the mature person I have become. It highlights the difficulties I went through, from my childhood through adolescence and adulthood, and underscores the growth of my faith in education. It ends with the stress on the need of rationalizing the correlation between both concepts – faith and education – in Africa in order to transform education into an actual instrument of the emancipation of individuals and the development of African communities in a globalized and changing world.

I had always equated faith and vocation, considering both from an institutional religion standpoint; devotion to a specific religion was essential to the definition of both concepts. Consequently, there was no use imagining some form of significant correlation among faith, vocation, and education. Then came my participation in a year-long seminar (2008-2009 academic year) on Faith and Learning on the Concordia College campus in Moorhead, Minnesota. Books and articles as well as discussions with fellow participants introduced me to thinkers and scholars like Cantwell Smith, James Fowler, Ernest Simmons, or Neil Postman, to name a few. Their contributions to the understanding of the above-mentioned concepts on the one hand, and with regard to liberal arts education or pedagogy in general on the other hand revealed me to myself and opened new perspectives to my approach to educational issues. I realized how far I had been for many years from understanding the full meaning of the purpose of education, mainly from the liberal arts perspective. I could clearly perceive the interconnectivity of faith and education and apprehend how the power and the efficiency of any educational process is grounded in the understanding of the need of empowering oneself in order to empower other people and a community as a whole; the more a society values the learning practice, creates a mentoring environment, and trusts education as a factor of empowerment and change, the more efficient is teaching and the more motivated are students.

My paper is a narrative of my personal experience as a student, an attempt to underscore the painful itinerary I followed to reach the statement above. Is it worth sharing a personal story? Isn’t the ego hateful, as the seventeenth century French philosopher Blaise Pascal once put it? Writing about oneself may sound embarrassing to some writers or pretentious to some readers. The leader of the nineteenth-century Romantic Movement in France, Victor Hugo, felt this kind of malaise. His reaction to the egocentrism he was being accused of reassures me of the legitimacy of my own undertaking: “Is my book about one man’s life?” Hugo questioned. Yes, the poet answered; but it’s also about other people, he added. “None of us has the privilege to boast about one’s life. My life is yours and yours is mine. Your struggles are mine; there’s only one destiny… Alas! When I am talking about me, I am talking about you. How don’t you feel it? You are insane if you believe I am not you!” (Hugo 24).

So is my story. It’s a window to generational issues; many young and old Africans alike are seriously concerned with countless challenges. As simple as it may sound, the issue of the use or the purpose of education I am addressing in this paper is one of the nagging questions Africans are confronted with. There’s no specific approach to my story. I am taking a look back in time from the standpoint of the old adult I have become; the story is therefore structured and sometimes informed by analysis and remarks.

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Assistant Professor of French and Francophone Studies

This text is neither a fiction, nor a scholastic analysis per se. It’s a narrative of my actual experience through educational system in my native country, Cameroon in Central Africa. The story is narrated in the light of the model of liberal arts education I experienced on Concordia College Campus, and from the point of view of the mature person I have become. It highlights the difficulties I went through, from my childhood through adolescence and adulthood, and underscores the growth of my faith in education. It ends with the stress on the need of rationalizing the correlation between both concepts – faith and education – in Africa in order to transform education into an actual instrument of the emancipation of individuals and the development of African communities in a globalized and changing world.
in the light of my knowledge of the purpose of education and liberal arts model. The journey, whose background is education in a postcolonial system, will take me from my childhood (search of self) to my adolescence (faith awakening and doubt), and to my adulthood (big questions).

Primary Education: The Aftermath Of Colonization And Search For Self

I joined the very basic level of the school system – the kindergarten – a few years following the independence in 1960 of my native country, Cameroon, located in Central Africa. It was colonized by three European colonial powers, Germany, England and France respectively. The latter applied the colonial administrative system known as “direct rule,” assimilating the people of the colonized territory into French culture. The two years I spent in the kindergarten were the best during my eight years of elementary education (pre middle-school). We used to play with a lot of toys, recite French alphabet, eat, and sleep. Our teachers were nice and classes were fun at that young age.

The promotion to the primary school came with a lot of changes: verbal abuse from teachers substituted for nice words. The whip took over bread. Memorization and recitation of many courses by heart replaced the alphabet games. Students were always split up into two groups in different classrooms: a group of smart students and a group of the weak, moreover, the whipping students group. The end of the school year and the grade passage were moments of anxiety for me and many other classmates: how good or bad was the next teacher in terms of using his/her whip?, we would ask. What was the so-called whip made of: a piece of solid rubber, a stick of strong wood, or a bunch of electrical wire? In addition to whipping, what kind of practices would he/she use as punishment methods? These are the kind of questions that mattered for students.

Some teachers gave their whips names such as “His Excellency,” “the assistant teacher,” “the black snake”… Depending on each teacher, there were so many means of torture that I could not list all of them here. Principals, teachers and the whole educational system trusted the range of chastisement devices as adequate to back up the teaching process and acquisition of knowledge. Thus, no one found the system abnormal, neither educators, nor families. No wonder many children ran away from the school and sometimes from their families, for they could not bear all the pain supposedly inflicted for their instruction. How does one define “education” in such a context?

What was the curriculum like in the midst of this hard-line discipline? During my six years of primary school, we covered a large variety of courses, namely history, geography, observational sciences, arithmetic, French grammar and literature (reading of selected texts), hygiene. As I stated above, almost everything needed to be recited. Two-thirds of the materials covered derived from French environments and the remaining from the African realities in which French authors and pedagogues were interested. Their primary focus was to completely transform students into French language speakers. We were to be faultless, perfect. Even though almost all the teachers at the primary level were Cameroonians, the language for teaching was French and French grammar was their main delight for punishment. No supplication would save faulty students from flogging. The assimilation process was running high and proved to be successful. Today, French grammar seems to me like the most elementary component of the French language. I am always ashamed to acknowledge that I can speak my native language, but I know nothing about its structures; the French administration had put a ban on the teaching of native languages in schools. Up to this day, no native language is taught in Cameroon by the formal education system.

At this point of the narrative, it seems appropriate to underscore the influence of the French colonial legacy on the Cameroon educational system, and this more than a decade following the independence of the country. With regard to the discipline rules at schools, the coercive and constraining methods bring to mind the punishment techniques lots of Cameroonians endured due to hard labor on many construction sites during the colonial era. We were still in a French world. And this world was white. Under the French domination, education in Cameroon was meant to provide the colonial administration with the indigenous auxiliaries. The highest level of education for the largest number of students was Grade 6. After that, a few practical and professional education schools – there were two, actually – would train the auxiliaries whose job was to support the colonial administration. The independence in 1960 brought changes: the number of K12 schools increased and a university was created. But approaches to education and curricula did not change considerably. But who could implement necessary changes, given that the new political
class and decision-makers who took over from French came from the above-mentioned auxiliaries group?

In such a context, how could I make meaning at that young age and understand what education was without the helping hand of parents and those in charge of the educational system? What need was there for trusting the education system? These questions call attention to the analogy between trust, love and faith. If trust comes from faith that is personal, and if beyond religious belief faith could be expressed “in art, in institutions, in law, in community, in character, and in still many other ways” as Wilfred Cantwell Smith advocates, how could I believe in and love or trust an institution that did not awaken or nurture my faith (Smith 171)? Commenting on the relationship between belief and faith, Sharon Daloz Parks views the latter as a multifaceted phenomenon; she draws from Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s analysis to equate the noun “faith” and the verb “to believe” as “to hold dear, to prize,…to love,…to give allegiance, to be loyal to, to value highly” (Parks 17).

Seen from that angle, there was no evidence in our context that education was a value, a source of any form of expectations and hope. Instead, besides severe sanctions, there was no motto, no slogan that could boost our energy and help us dream. The following are two examples to make this point clear; both are from the United States. There’s a school in Brownsburg, Indiana, named Eagle Elementary School. The motto of the school is: “Where Children Spread Their Wings!” My second example comes from Maryland. When I was living in Silver Spring with my family, my daughter was then a 3rd grader. At her school they would daily recite a credo titled: Eagle Expectations Daily Pledge (at Burnt Mills Elementary school in Silver Spring, Maryland). Below is the short text of the pledge.

As proud as an eagle,
I pledge to stand
To spread my wings
And lend a helping hand.
To myself and others,
I will be honest and true.
I will take pride in my school
And everything that I do.
I will aspire to go higher.
To get better, I’ll give my best.
I’ll work hard and play safely
And never settle for less.
To myself and all others,
I will show great respect.
I will look.
I will listen

And learn all that I can.
Then as confident as an eagle,
I will proudly stand.3

The day my daughter brought this self-explanatory text home in January 2006, I read, remembered my primary school years in Cameroon, and wept. The eagle flies high, symbolizes power, freedom, sharpness, and many other characteristics. Students’ identification to these features is a great source of motivation. In my time, school environment was always an ordeal, a nightmare, a confrontational scene of victims (students) and torturers (teachers). I do believe any child around the world is born with a pair of wings, regardless of the space and race. In our postcolonial context, our wings had not only never been unfolded, they were broken. But we still had our eyes to shed streams of tears. Why should I therefore believe in something that was hurting me and my classmates? Yet, I did not run away from school; why?

I was a kid and I knew nowhere to go. School was like a curse, with no way out. Paradoxically, the very subject we were being treated severely about at school – French language – gave me a way of expression out of the formal school system: I could read any text, no matter how difficult it was. I could discover new things and worlds. Comic strips were my favorite. In our neighborhood, I translated letters, instructions, or forms some families and individuals received from their relatives or from the local administration, and I helped them write answers or fill in the forms in French. Very often, the job was rewarding. Most of the time, I received gifts and money as a token of gratitude. I started loving education for what it would continue to help me discover by myself and for all the small gifts I got from using my knowledge around the neighborhood.

For my grandmother I was living with at that time and who knew nothing about French language, I had already achieved more than her
expectations; her own way of measuring my progress was through the spelling of my name. “Teachers will not kill you; at least, you can write your name,” she used to say each time I would go to her to complain about physical cruelty from school. I should stress that my grandmother had so far experienced nothing but colonial domination and French contempt. Writing one’s name was of a significant importance to her. That meant one could work for and communicate with the white masters. When I was a child, Cameroon was a free country. But in my grandmother’s mind, independence had no meaning at her old age. The conclusion of the primary education was marked by two examinations: a certificate and the Common Entrance to the secondary school (middle and high schools combined). I was successful in the first, but failed the second. My grandmother showed no sign of disappointment. I was sad because I missed that year the opportunity to escape the whipping, one of the main reasons everyone was working hard; there was no more whip from the secondary education upwards. I was nevertheless determined to learn more than writing my name.

Secondary Education: More than Writing

My Name: Faith Awakening and Doubt

The Common Entrance to government secondary education programs (as opposed to private secondary schools) was an examination organized by the government. Successful students had no tuition to pay. The secondary education had two divisions: the government secondary school was the equivalent of grades 7, 8 and 9. There was only one for each county. The government high school comprised grades 10, 11, and 12. There was one at the provincial level. There were six provinces around the country. The entrance examination to these schools was therefore very selective. Hundreds or thousands of students sometimes would come from different sub-counties to compete for eighty places in the government secondary school.

I passed the second year I took it. It was prestigious. I was very proud of my result. People knew to value knowledge. I was really something else in the county. I was a “collégiens” (schoolboy), someone who deserved respect. From there on, I would wear a uniform, something we were not used to at the primary education. Everywhere, people would notice my position in the society. Above all the changes, there would be no more whips, no more flogging.

But to keep this privileged status, I had to work hard. Failure to pass a class would result in an expulsion. Though there was no tuition, students still had to pay for their uniforms and school supplies. I had no one to count on. My dad passed away when I was one. He left no fortune. My mom was from a very poor family; she got married to another man who did not allow her to take me with her. They were living in a different county. Anyway, she was not happy in her second marriage. My grandmother was old and had no income. Yet, she was my only support. Uniforms and books were expensive. People’s gifts for my reading or writing “job” were sporadic. I sometimes asked them to buy me notebooks. They couldn’t afford to buy textbooks because they were expensive. During breaks, I would find jobs in people’s farms for the equivalent of 50 cents a day. Some wicked people would not even pay on the pretense that the job wasn’t well done.

Under these conditions, my main concern was just the uniform that would allow me to attend classes. Some nice classmates would share their textbooks with me or would let me use them for homework. Still some professors didn’t accept the practice and very often, would expell me from their classes. During my first year, I was noticed by the mathematics professor as a student without a textbook. Maybe he believed I was not interested in the subject. He didn’t expell me though. One day, I asked a question about material I did not understand. In his answer, he made fun of me: “Do not worry. If you do not understand this year, next year might be yours,” he said. “A classroom is like a band; there is a conductor, and there are accompanists. You are one of these.” Students laughed. From there on, I never asked any other questions in mathematics. To this day, mathematics is an obscure subject to me.

Oddly enough, I was always a bit upset about teachers mocking me or classmates not allowing me to use their textbooks, but I was never discouraged. It was nothing compared to tortures at the primary education. I loved teachers who didn’t bother me about textbooks. Sometimes, my grandmother would ask me to drop everything and stay home with her. After all, she believed people could no longer mock me, for I knew at least how to write my name; moreover, I could easily speak and write in French. We were poor, and that was a good reason to stop going to school. But I could not explain what exactly was inciting me not to consider my grandmother’s advice. Was it the respect neighbors and other people around the county were showing to me? Was it my teachers? Even though most of them were not helpful to me, I felt they were knowledgeable people I wanted to identify with. They had become my first models.
Was it the desire to know, to understand things around me? Was it the competitive spirit that prevailed among students, since we came from different sub-counties? Was it a kind of personal challenge? If so, did I need to prove something to myself?

There was something above any answers to all these questions. By the time I was starting my third year at the government secondary school, all the odds seemed against me, but I was determined to fight, to study hard. I was filled with energy. I had confidence in myself. I couldn’t exactly tell why I was so passionately engaged in studying. As time went on, completing my secondary education became central to all my concerns. Maybe I started valuing education as a way to succeed in life at that time. If so, it was certainly the moment of the emergence of my faith.

The examination marking the conclusion of the government secondary school and the entrance to the government high school was tough and very selective as usual. Thousands of students came from different counties to take the exam at the provincial level. I was successful, but filled with joy and sadness; my grandmother was growing older and I had to quit her for another city, the provincial headquarter where the school was located. Henceforth, I would be able to see her during breaks; that meant three times in an academic year. Fortunately, a nice man offered to stay with me in the new city.

The principal of the government high school and the majority of the multiracial faculty were French. Also there were Europeans, Asians, Cameroonian and Americans. All of them were serious, talented and caring professors. I began to believe I was an intelligent and lucky boy that could stand any forms of examination. With confidence came dreams, and with dreams hope; in between university and me, there were three more years. If I could make it, I could have a job and help my grandmother, my mother and other relatives in the family. Two things impacted my knowledge and faith growth: church and the philosophy course.

I was born a catholic Christian. But there was no one to take me to church regularly. During my years of primary education, my grandmother took me there a couple of times. As a kid, I was more interested in games with other kids than in worship or sermons. I was a teenager when my guardian encouraged me to attend Sunday services. He didn’t buy me a bible. I stole one and I used it for years. I was so deeply engaged in attending church and Sunday school that by the end of my second year at the government high school, I made my first communion. I understood the necessity to keep reading the bible in order to improve my knowledge of the gospel, my relationship to God, my faith. The moment was appropriate, for the last year of high school seriously shook my faith when I started the philosophy course.

Every student had to take philosophy during the last year of high school. We were initiated into the intellectual search and reasoning about some major concepts and principles, including the existence of God. Our teacher was a Cameroonian who was far from believing in God. I was fascinated by the philosophical doctrines about freedom, responsibility, socialism, imperialism, nationalism, identity, science or existentialism. Critical thinking was emphasized. Existentialism was one of my favorite subjects. But I was seriously confused by all the arguments about the existence of God. According to me, Nietzsche was insane. I was convinced God was at work in my life, with regard to what I had gone through so far. Yet, I was vulnerable; all the philosophical debate had sown seeds of doubt in my mind. I didn’t miss any Sunday services, but I started listening to and reading the scriptures in the light of philosophical ideas, trying to question everything. Finally, I chose to live by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal’s advice: that was to believe in God and win everything if he did exist, or lose nothing if he didn’t. One thing that remained unshakable in my mind was the way I highly valued education.

This consideration was strengthened one evening by my guardian. We sat and he gave me the following piece of advice: “Zacharie, you are a brave and gifted boy,” he said. “Trust education. Don’t smoke, don’t drink alcohol. Don’t run after girls like many young guys of your generation do. Education is your mom and your dad. Whatever you want in life, you will get it only if you trust education and keep on working hard in order to be successful in your exams.” No one had ever advised me in such a way. I felt comfortable, for his words were in perfect agreement with my beliefs in education. I was grateful to him. I engraved his words in my mind for ever and always turned to them as a reliable source of motivation. I worked the hardest I could. At the end of the academic year, I was successful in the examination that opened wide the doors to the university of Yaoundé, the city capital of
 Cameroon. I was again to travel about two hundred miles to attend college. The pursuit of my dream was taking me increasingly farther away from my grandmother.

High Education: Where to go from there? Big Questions

Education at the university was free and besides, students were having scholarships from the government, an equivalent of $30 every month. Moreover, there was a big library with many books. We knew all these things and opportunities still at high school, and I dreamt the more. When the lists came out, I was among the few students who did not receive the scholarship. There was no specific reason for that. All my claims to the school administration and government were unsuccessful. A friend told me I needed help from an influential member of the administration to support my claims. But I knew nobody of a high position in the society. What could I do without any form of assistance in a big city? My dreams, my hope, my world fell apart. For the first time, I bitterly experienced the deep meaning of favoritism in our society and got trapped by many existential questions: Wasn’t God above everything? Hadn’t He been with me so far? Why did He forsake me at this very moment I was so hopeful about my future? He was so far away at this time of dreadful reality! Had He ever existed? Weren’t philosophers right about his non-existence? I wept and shed all the tears of my body for the father I didn’t know, for my poor grandmother, for being so lonely, abandoned and lost in Yaoundé. Who would lend me a hand?

I turned to a priest and even though he gave me a place to stay for a while (which agreeably surprised me, for I didn’t expect so much), his words just raised more questions in my mind. “Didn’t Christ suffer and die for my salvation?” he asked. What was it that I was going through, with regard to Christ Passion? Many hardships were still on my way, he went on. That was the image of the Christian life. But because God was a faithful God who never abandoned those who believed in Him, perseverance, endurance, patience and faith would help me overcome. He insisted on trusting God and asked me to cross out doubt from my mind. He told me about the critical moment I was facing in between my adolescence and the adulthood ahead. He understood I was truly broken and helped me over many days.

As we were dreaming and completing our first university cycle, many young college degree holders were roaming about the country without jobs. Wouldn’t that be our condition very soon? Work prospect was harmful to our self-confidence. Everyone was afraid of responsibilities and uncertainties ahead. Some courses gave rise to other general questions, especially with regard to the whole country. For instance, we were not indifferent to the many ways that our postcolonial society was being impacted by neo-colonialism. France’s grip on the country was tangible. No wonder people were still struggling with identity issues many years after independence. We knew our leaders and policy-makers were simple puppets in power with France’s blessings. They were serving its interests. The administration everywhere and all the political community were corrupt. Without a political support, there were few opportunities to make one’s way in the administration, the main job provider in the country. I once asked one of my professors who had proved to be a virtuous man how he could comfortably work in a corrupt administration. “Do your entire job, be quite sure to do it well, and set your mind at rest. Imagine that someone else somewhere is doing the same thing. That might bring some changes to the society.” That was his answer; I listened to him, but I was not convinced this was the best way to promote the saying “united we stand, divided we fail” as well as the necessary change in a society. My faith in my two religions and my guardian’s words reinforced my inner and unshakable truth: if I worked hard for my education, I would succeed.

Thank God, I passed my exams, did a variety of jobs, kept on with
research activities at the university, and went back to the teaching career. I have never left it.

Conclusion

While once visiting Concordia Language Villages in Bemidji, Minnesota, I had a discussion with Mr. François Fouquerel, a French man who was the Dean of the French Village. We talked about French legacy in Africa in terms of education. I asked him this question: “Is there a French Dream, as one would talk about American Dream?” “Yes,” he answered bluntly: “If you work hard in school, you will be successful,” he continued. “How do you relate the individual and personal success to the community benefit?” I asked. “Well, when you hold a high office, especially in the administration, you forcefully work for the welfare of the community,” he replied. I was shocked: what I had been holding dear as a personal philosophy – if you work hard in school, you will be successful – was actually inherited from France. I had totally become a French product, manufactured in a confused and visionless educational system in Cameroon.

Consequently, I have struggled hard to find a faith to live by. The narrative shows it all; I have gone through a process without purpose, meaning, perspective, vision and adequate planning. I have most of the time wandered aimlessly, and counted on the laws of fate. Yet, the energy I relied upon to get through is inside each of any child. Each one has a pair of wings to unfold. Education offers the yeast that would help sway individuals and society as well and leave the dough to rise. This power doesn’t need to be left to chance. A systematic education with a purpose, a vision, needs a mentoring environment, as Sharon Parks put it. 4

The state of education in Africa has been impacted for a long time now by some kind of sluggishness. The continent still has a long way to go to recover from all these scourges and engage in necessary changes in the era of globalization. Unfortunately, African leaders and policy-makers hold education as a subversive activity, a menace to their juicy positions. Despite definitions and objectives displayed in any programs, they actually enslave students and educators as well. I strongly believe the model of liberal arts education creates the humanistic and mentoring communities that free students and help them “think critically about self and world” (Parks 128).
Appendicies:

A Social Exclusion Issue by Miranda Markland


Staying Green by Rebecca Ram


Source : BBC News http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7165602.stm

Cultural Relativism by Ahmed M’Bareck

Quiet Leadership by Josiah O. Adetola


Democracy by Sudhir Selvaraj

Print.
Perlez, Jane. “Muslims’ Veils Test Limits of Britain’s Tolerance.” Søe 83-84.
Print.

Education for a Purpose: Self Revealed and a Look Back in Time by Dr. Zacharie Nzepa Petnkeu

Notes

1. In Lutheran Higher Education. An Introduction for Faculty (1998), Ernest Simmons draws from the Ian Barbour’s work to summarize the four models of faith and learning. The third and the fourth model (Dialogue and Integration) seem instructive to me to understand his analysis in chapters 5 (Student Faith Development) and 6 (Pedagogical Issues). His survey of the seven stages of Faith is highlighted by James Fowler’s findings.

I subscribe to James W. Fowler’s definition of faith in Stages of Faith. The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (1981); in section 2 (“Faith, Religion and Belief”) of Part I of his book, Fowler moves beyond a simplistic definition to widen the focus of faith and to assert with Wilfred Cantwell Smith that “faith is a quality of human living. At its best, it has taken the form of serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one’s life, a meaning that is profound and ultimate, and is stable no matter what may happen to oneself at the level of immediate event. Men and women of this kind of faith face catastrophe and confusion, affluence and sorrow, unperturbed; face opportunity with conviction and drive; and face others with charity” (page 11).
James Fowler pays tribute to Wilfred Cantwell Smith for the above broader opinion about faith. This view comes as a result of Smith’s analysis using the phrase “cumulative tradition” to transcend in his definition the mere domains of religion and belief: “By ‘cumulative tradition,’ I mean the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit, as it were, of the past religious life of the community in question: temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths, and so on; anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another…” The Meaning and End of Religion. (1962, p. 156-157).

Obviously, education stands as a part of transmittable social values that require personal faith, as Smith puts it, from individuals engaged in the process of learning. My story is a reflection of an itinerary of confusing faith in education in an environment of purpose, attention, and meaning deficiency. Yet, Neil Postman affirms: “without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are house of detention, not attention,” in The End of Education. Redefining the Value of School. (1995, p. 7)

2. The original text is from the Preface to Les Contemplations by Victor Hugo. The translation is mine. In this collection of poems written in 1856, the author grieves and pays homage to his daughter Léopoldine, accidentally drowned with her husband in September 1843.

3. Refer to http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/burntmillses/


Bibliography

Biographies: Editing Staff

Jenni Amis, Chief Editor

Jenni Amis is a junior English writing and History double major from Plymouth, MN. She is currently serving her third semester as a technical assistant for Concordia Theatre’s Audience Development Group; helping to produce and distribute advertising for Concordia’s theatre productions. Jenni also studied abroad in Ireland in spring of 2009 and really treasured her experience abroad. She has appreciated working on this first volume of *Djembe* and hopes that you enjoy it too.

Amy Watkin, Faculty Advisor

Amy Watkin is an assistant professor of English and has been teaching at Concordia since 2005. She teaches courses in composition, American language and culture, introduction to literature, global literature, and British and American literature. Amy recently traveled to Rwanda with a group from Concordia, and looks forward to bringing more students to Rwanda in May 2011.

Nutifafa Yakor, Production Coordinator

Nutifafa Doe Yakor is a senior currently studying Accounting and Economics. He comes from Ghana in West Africa and has been at Concordia since fall 2008. He has been mostly involved with Concordia Intercultural Affairs and believes it’s been an absolutely fascinating experience working on the first volume of *Djembe*. He hopes you have as much fun reading as we did putting it together!
Chelsea Wilson is a sophomore English Literature and Psychology major hailing from the epitome of small-town USA: Hill City, Minnesota. Her plans post-college could include working as a criminal psychologist, an author, or an editor. She has greatly enjoyed the opportunity to work with the writings of her fellow Cobbers and to learn from the experience.

Josiah Olusola Adetola is currently a senior majoring in Chemistry from Nigeria, West Africa. He came to Concordia College in January 2007 and has been a part of a few organizations on campus, such as International Student Organization and African Student Union. He hopes to graduate in May 2010 and believes the bank of experiences gleaned from Concordia will eventually help him to positively influence the affairs of the world.

Mark Del Greco is a Senior Business Management major from Sandstone, MN. He has always had a fascination with traveling and exploring new places and cultures. Mark spent the summer of 2009 in Morocco where he was exposed to a beautiful new land and culture. After graduation, he hopes to set out on new adventures that take him to the far reaches of the world.

Anna Hagen is a senior from East Grand Forks, MN focusing her studies on Graphic Design and English Writing. Upon her completion of school she would like to continue to work on publications such as *Djembe*, so her experience with the new-found journal has been both fun and rewarding.