Representing Ghanian Culture to a Global Audience: The Responsibility of the 21st Century Traveler

## Introduction

In 2001, I'm talking on the phone to my first true girlfriend, one of the loves of my life, who spent five years in Sierra Leone, West Africa, and I tell her that I just read the *Poisonwood Bible* and loved it. She gets angry saying that that book has nothing to do with where she was in Africa, and I'm upset because I was only trying to impress her with my knowledge that I even knew anything about Africa and hold onto my first lesbian relationship.

In 2022, I'm in my gym telling a woman that I'm so excited about my upcoming trip to Ghana; she replies that her friend just returned from safari there. I reply in my typical friendly midwestern, German American, always pleasing tone that I'm happy her friend had such a great time. I start wondering how I can go making the elevator pitch around my trip, challenging people but also not shutting them out and allowing them to be curious as well.

It's 2014, and I'm taking my first group of community college students to Japan. When we are in Osaka, I tell them to remember the exit number because Japanese train stations are so huge, and it's easy to get lost. One student replies that they will just follow Google Maps. It's the first time I consciously realize that travel is so different due to technology than when I first started during the years of analog and aerograms.

It's 1993, Nirvana just released *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, but I completely missed it because I was an exchange student in Japan. This experience in Japan at sixteen in the early nineties changed my life and informed who I am today. And yet when I returned, I was in absolute shock when I had to give a thirty second answer to, "How was Japan?"

It's 2022, I'm in Ghana, debating to post on Facebook, about a really cool experience I had meeting a young woman, including our picture. I received her permission, but I'm white, she's Black, a young woman, and someone I just met. We are standing on a dirt road. I'm thinking of all the pictures I have seen of the white savior and all of the linguists who learned language to colonize and proselytize, and the depictions of the countries in Africa as poor, filled with dirt roads, potholes and hunger. I decide to not post the picture … even though that moment is my favorite of the trip.

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I love travel and have been doing it since I was fourteen - when I went to Japan for the first time. I now travel extensively for conferences, study abroad, and pleasure. I fell in love with travel: It suits my brain and curiosity about the world, while at the same time, was and is, a way for me to deal with depression and being gay. However, as anyone who travels knows, you cannot run away from your issues; you always have to do your laundry in any country you live. Over time, I came out and learned to manage my depression and still I love travel, learning languages, and even living abroad. In fact, I most likely will retire outside of the United States.

I have always wanted to go to Africa but had no idea where to start. Then, in my twenties I dated a woman who had lived in Sierra Leone and started teaching ESL to refugees from West Africa. My good friend's husband had also lived in West Africa, so I set my sights on traveling there. Still, I had no idea exactly how I was going to make my dream of going to West Africa a reality. Finally, this past summer of 2022, I was able to travel to Ghana as part of a Fulbright Hayes trip with fifteen community college faculty.

In the next section I will outline my autoethnographic and counterstory methodology. Then, I will follow a linear progression through the paper starting with my pre-departure preparation.  In this section I will analyze the content of YouTube videos I found before I left about language in Ghana, culture, and etiquette. These videos are made by Ghanaians either within or outside of Ghana or African Americans/British. They exemplify both a diverse group of travel b/vloggers who are thriving in an online environment and sharing their expertise and knowledge of Ghana and the necessity of intersectionality in travel. Next, I will explore an Instagram page of a shop I visited in Accra, Ghana's capital city, and show how this shop is the embodiment of a lively, feminist, entrepreneurial, hip, and progressive part of Ghanian society. Then, I will analyze a photo I took and the internal debate I had about posting it on Facebook. This moment made me think about the responsibility travelers have about what they choose to show and tell about countries they visit both in digital and "regular"/physical spaces.

As someone who started traveling before social media and the internet-explosion of dialogues around everything (factual or otherwise) and as a community college educator, I often think about representation of cultures and countries in different spaces. For example, I frequently discuss with students how to engage in respectful behavior when I take learning groups to Hiroshima. However, given most American stereotypes and lack of knowledge about Africa, America's direct involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and the white supremist and imperialistic culture that permeates all levels of U.S. society, I was keenly aware of how I, as a white, English-speaking American, represented Ghana and its people in digital and non-digital spaces. I spent a lot of time thinking, discussing, and reflecting on this while there and upon return, and was often left with more questions than answers. This paper is an exploration of those questions.

**Research Methods**

I have chosen counterstory and autoethnography as my methods for this paper. Counterstory is an intersectional methodology and Esposito and Evan-Winters argue that intersectional methodologies work to "counter hegemony, cultural domination, and master narratives" (21). Counterstories provide a contrasting description to majoritarian stories. Narratives are used, and this methodology is grounded in critical race theory, critical legal studies, feminist studies, and Latinx critical race theory, or LatCrit (Martinez 1-31).  Martinez maintains that counterstories are a rhetoric of "transformational resistance" (28). This makes them both political and catalysts for change both at the personal and social level.

Martinez writes, "Counterstory, then, is both a method and methodology-it is a method for telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told, and, as informed by [Critical Race Theory], this methodology serves to expose, analyze, and challenge majoritarian stories of

racialized privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival, resistance, and justice" (26).

By using counterstory, I will examine my own racialized privilege as a white woman and native English speaker around language and travel. In addition, by looking at digital spaces, I will show stories of empowerment, resistance, and thriving. By using both methodologies, I aim to decenter whiteness as the norm, expose white supremacy, and interrupt notions of imperialism, both colonial and linguistic.

Another closely related methodology is autoethnography. According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner, "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)." Ettorre echoes this and makes an important distinction between autobiography and autoethnography in that autobiography places "the 'I' within a personal context and developing insights from that perspective" whereas autoethnography places "the 'I' firmly within a cultural context and all that that implies" (2). Therefore, autoethnography is inherently political where autobiography is not (Ettorre 2). As such, according to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, this methodology can have a greater reach than more traditional methodologies and lead to both personal and social change. They also maintain that this type of methodology can be therapeutic.

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner posit that this research method "is both process and product." As such, this method views stories as theory, the personal as political, the personal as cultural, and ambiguity in these between spaces. As part of this process and product, the characteristics of an autoethnography include 1) the researcher as participant-observer, and 2) layered accounts that rely on epiphanies (Ellis, Adams and Bochner). For this paper, I will use artifact/text analysis as a participant observer along with my own experience as told in layered accounts of vignettes, reflexivity, and introspection. Specifically, in addition to my own lived experience, I am analyzing textual content in the forms of travel and language videos, a boutique's off and online space, and a picture that I took while on the trip.

With autoethnography, Ettorre shows that "knowledge comes from political understandings of one's social positioning as well as experiences of the cultural freedoms and constraints one encounters" (2). Thus, positionality is of the upmost importance within this methodology. I am white, American, in my upper forties, and from the Midwest. I am able bodied but with some depression that requires seeing a therapist. I am a cisgendered female and a lesbian married to a Japanese woman. I am fluent in German and Japanese but a native English speaker and lived in Germany and Japan for a total of eight years but currently reside in the U.S. Before the pandemic, I regularly spent two to three months outside of the United States, both for work and vacation. This trip to Africa was my first, and it was a grant-sponsored five-week excursion with other academics. This is especially important because any conclusions drawn from this paper around Ghana must be put in the context of someone who visited as an academic and not someone who has lived there for an extended period of time. It is additionally imperative to mention that in terms of digital presence, I am a bit analog, and when I first started traveling, for about the first fifteen years, the Internet was not what it is today.

Autoethnography is okay with subjectivity within the research process, and in fact invites it, showing that all methods, even "traditional" ones, have subjectivity and ambiguity (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner). Autoethnographic research is an intersectional methodology. According to Esposito and Evans-Winters, "[i]ntersectional methodologies are an intentional interruption to Western Euro-centric male-centered knowledge claims and productions because intersectional methodologies attempt to center the cultural experiences, values, and beliefs of the research participants, including the researcher herself" (2).

This is exactly what I aim to accomplish: undergoing an autoethnography through centering stories, values, and beliefs, and making the personal cultural and political in an intentional way to disrupt the traditional way knowledge is made and accepted as the objective norm.

**Race, Gender, and Language in Ghanian Videos and Travel Vlogs**

It's 2000, after my second time living in Japan, I decide to travel around Asia for three months by myself as a twenty-four-year-old, lesbian woman. I buy a Lonely Planet book where it is recommended to rent a bike and go around Katmandu, Nepal, and I do that on my second day there. During my biking, I notice every single person is staring at me. It makes me incredibly uncomfortable, but I continue my day and see some great sights. When I go back to my hotel, exhausted and somewhat defeated, I turn over to the back page of the book and confirm that two white men had written this book. I wonder had a woman traveler and writer been included, would there have been the same recommendation to just rent a bike and ride all over.

Anthony Bourdain once had an interview and recommenced going to a country without any research and just wandering around and getting lost. I instantly thought it's so nice and easy to travel while white man.

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Gone are the days of travel with a book, but because I am a woman, I have always been aware of a woman's representation in the travel industry. I often look for travel vlogs, blogs, websites, and books written by women, as they will have a different perspective and insight than men, especially around clothing, etiquette, and safety.  As a lesbian, I often research LGBT+ communities and laws to connect with other LGBT+ individuals where I travel but also for safety reasons. However, because I am white, I had never paid much attention to racial representation in the travel industry.  Even though I'm fluent in German and Japanese and often learn some phrases in the language of any country I travel, as an English speaker, I often take for granted that English is the language used in travel videos.

Before I traveled to Ghana, I wanted to find resources on etiquette, shopping, and language. First, I found LEARNAKAN videos from Stephen Awiba or Yaw.
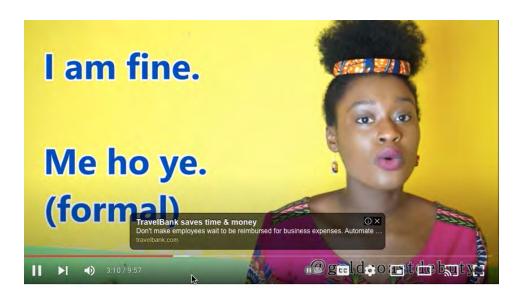
Twi Speaking Lessons
**25 Must-Know Twi Phrases for Learners and Tourists | Conversational Twi | Learn Akan**

I found him through a Google Search and used many of his videos to start learning Twi, one of the main languages of Ghana. English is an official language of Ghana, but all Ghanaians speak a Ghanian language like Twi, Ewe, Ga, or Degbani, so as a linguist, I wanted to study one of them and chose Twi. Yaw has developed countless videos and has around 30.5 K subscribers. He also has a website, where learners can join a fluency club for a price and have access to more content. I never joined because I found an online female tutor, but upon return, I have been thinking of joining to learn from Yaw but also to connect with others trying to learn Twi. Yaw is a linguist, so I noticed right away he taught using methods situated in linguistics. His videos were extremely helpful, and I learned so much from them that I was able to use on the ground in Ghana.

As I wanted a female perspective, I also used videos from MissGoldTwi or Deborah, a Ghanian residing in Scotland. I loved her videos, as they were clear and easy to follow. She repeated a lot and explained the content well. She also incorporated bits of music and history and culture of Ghana like a speech from Kwame Nkrumah, the political philosopher who lead the country's independence movement from colonial England, and subsequently became its first Prime Minister, and current music.

These videos can be seen as acts of resistance – breaking the mold of the anglophone hold on a former colony. Both creators are making a space for a Ghanian language to be taught and thrive and to give others the opportunity to enter a new world of sounds, syntax, and culture. Simply, they are decentering whiteness and English as the only way to move through the world of travel. Of course, English is the lingua franca of travel, but it is exciting to see Yaw and Deborah challenging this by inviting us to learn a Ghanian language. If we want to decolonize ourselves and decenter whiteness and imperialism, travelers must learn some of the local language. Because of the virtual world, it has never been easier to find resources to learn a language or even some basic words or phrases. Traditionally with African countries, it has been white missionaries or white linguists owning these languages and using them for scientific study or proselytizing. Therefore, these Ghanian content creators should be celebrated for teaching their languages online and giving the world access to them as well as thriving online, resisting, and rewriting a majoritarian story around language and travel.

In terms of etiquette, I found videos from an African American man who lives in New York but was traveling in Ghana, Kels Acosta who has 7.1K subscribers on YouTube.

He and his friend Joe were traveling and working in Ghana, and they had videos about eating, etiquette, and shopping in Accra, the capital of Ghana. My favorite video is "10 Things I Wish I Knew Before Coming to Ghana," and I used two of the tips on bargaining and taking Ubers while I was there. Kels talks about Ghanian Time, where lateness is an expectation in Ghana, and I experienced this several times, but he never does it in a condescending or as offensive to the culture way.

In addition, I watched videos from Vanessa Kenbi, a woman from Scotland but who now divides time between Ghana and the U.K.



She has over 165K subscribers and makes videos like this one about "Cultural Do's and Don'ts" but also about living and raising a family in Ghana. She is somewhat of a nomad and travels back and forth between the U.K.

In all the videos the tone is fun, engaging, and positive, especially toward the country and people of Ghana. The comments on the videos are overwhelmingly positive, coming from a diverse group in terms of race, gender, and country of origin. The content creators often bring in Ghanaian locals to talk about their expertise in terms of using greetings or eating.

When I first watched these language and etiquette videos, it never hit me that all the creators are Black: Ghanaians living in Ghana or the diaspora or people of African descent from the U.S. or the U.K. However, upon reflection, I thought it so refreshing and different to have so much content coming from Black content creators. As someone who travels to Japan, many of the vlogs I am familiar with are made by white content creators, so I was happy to see more diversity in terms of people making content.

However, upon further reflection I realized that those thoughts are situated in white supremacy. It's not refreshing and new; it's just that I've never noticed it because the majoritarian story around travel is white. In fact, for example, there are many people of color creating content about Japan. According to Oneika Raymond, a Black prominent journalist and speaker, travel websites, blogs, and forums that are "FUBUs (for us, by us)" have been growing at a rapid pace. In addition, Raymond writes that:

However, despite the fact that we are creating our own opportunities, **representation in/by major media outlets still matters and the paucity of people of color in this arena just ain't right.** Because, for those of us hoping to become the next Anthony Bourdain or Samantha Brown, being blanked by the "big dogs" in mainstream media means losing out on lucrative partnerships, collaborations, and sponsorship deals. Because, more importantly, not being invited to summits like the one at the White House means that **our unique voices and points of view are excluded from the important conversations that ultimately help change the world and inform our global perspective.** Because, our absence from the mainstream **perpetuates the single story of whiteness in trave**l and helps to **perpetuate the notion that travelling isn't something people of colour do**.

The existence of these videos and Raymond's excerpt illustrates that the content is out there, but intersectionality should be the norm and expectation, and the travel industry needs to support it at the highest level. These videos provide a counterstory to the narrative that travel is only for cisgendered, straight, able bodied, wealthy, white people. When we consider content creation, intersecting identities need to be at the forefront in terms of gender, race, ability, language, and sexuality. As a white woman and educator, I need to do better. I need to be more aware of my own positionality and look for content that is more intersectional and help promote that content. So many people are already doing this work, so I'm not saying that as a white woman I'm here to save the day, but rather I will be more aware of seeking out more intersectionality in videos, sharing them on my social media, and encouraging my students to do the same. At the same time, I can encourage outlets to promote these videos by liking them, subscribing, or even lobbying prominent travel outlets to promote more intersectional content.

**Shopping as Counterstory: Elle Lokko, the Store and Instagram**

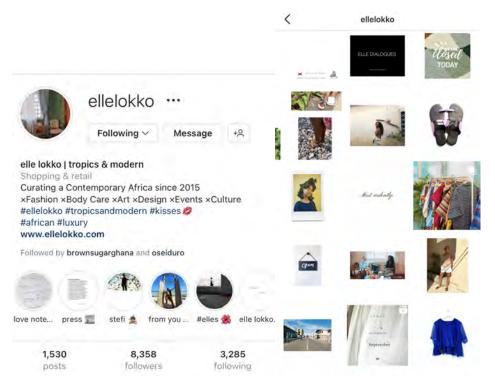"Why do we want all these people from 'shithole countries' coming here?" -Donald Trump

In 2022, I'm at the Japanese Consul General's house for dinner. I'm carrying a clutch, and as I walk around everyone is complimenting me on it to which I reply, "Thanks I got it in Ghana."

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Yes, I'm *that p*erson. But I learned around twenty-four upon my second time living in Japan, that a fun and exciting way to engage in conversation around travel is through art, clothes, and jewelry. So many of my clothes, so much of my jewelry and household wares are from my travels. They are good memories for me but also a way to shape narrative around travel and engage in conversation about where I have been. It can be a gateway; by starting with a compliment on a bag, the conversation can easily shift to "deeper" conversation around cultural and country topics.
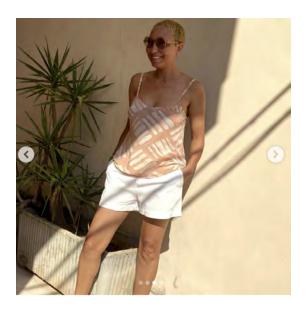
However, I would argue that shopping is a "deep" topic. I often feel ridiculed for caring so much about shopping when I travel. On the Fulbright Hayes I participated in, some academics made lighthearted jokes about me shopping and being so interested in it. Maybe it's because shopping is considered feminine and not serious enough, but I think so many things can be learned through

shopping.  I have learned the beauty and dance of bargaining, I've been to some amazing markets and shops, I've connected with locals and other travelers, I've used different languages at these shops and markets, and I've supported local economies. In addition, if done in an intentional and sustainable way, shopping can support different marginalized groups in many countries.

When I travel, I love to go to markets where one can bargain, but as I have gotten older and more financially stable, I also love to find more boutique stores where the collection is already curated, and all I do is look for something I like but most likely will pay more than if I were shopping at a market.  Before I left, I looked for some shops online and through one travel and shopping website from Ms. K, a woman based in Brooklyn who is German-Ghanian who listed shops she had visited when she was in Ghana and what she had bought there.  One caught my attention, and I instantly started following Elle Lokko on Instagram and even started picking out clothes and jewelry I wanted to buy. There is also a website, but I find that the Instagram account is monitored more closely, highlighting updated and changing events, or new items.
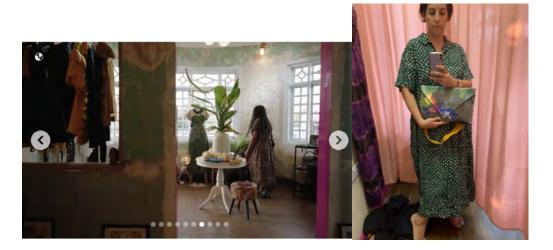


This store is a concept store and promotes African products in beauty, arts, jewelry, clothes, and bags. It is owned by Stefania Manfreda, a woman of Italian-Ghanian descent.

Elle Lokko has been around since 2015 and has nearly 10,000 followers on Instagram, but I predict this number will go up, as it was just prominently featured under Ghana in Lonely Planet's "Best Places to Go in 2023."

When I was in Accra at the end of the five-week grant, I made it a priority to visit the store with a friend from the trip, also a lesbian, and had a fantastic shopping experience. The store was large, bright, and airy, and I spent about an hour in the store, chatting with other customers and the people that worked there, browsing, and trying on different clothes. I bought a dress, earrings, and a clutch.



I was met by Daniel, a Nigerian model, that now lives in Accra and works at Elle Lokko. He helped me by bringing different sizes, helping me style pieces, and bringing me other items based on what I had chosen.  That is my favorite type of shopping experience-when someone with more expertise than I have helps to style me.  When I tried on the green dress with the bag I'm holding in the picture, he told me the dress was too big, but the bag was perfect. I was unsure, but then when I walked out of the dressing room, an African American woman, Edith, a little older than me from New York commented that I had to buy the bag, as it is a piece of art.

She was there with her mother, and she spends half her time in New York and half in Accra. Edith and I exchanged WhatsApps and are still in contact today.

It's these connections that I thrive on when I travel. However, my favorite part of the store is that they promote all African artists and designers. When I was there, Daniel could tell me who designed anything in the store, from jewelry, to art, to clothes. I felt each piece was a work of art and could support African (mostly West) artists and designers. This is echoed in the Instagram account with hashtags that take you to different sites which I only noticed after I visited the shop. In turn, I ended up following myriad other designers and shops.



33 likes

ellelokko #nilhane × #bissaheritage #handbags and #lamps

30 likes

ellelokko it's regal. #muggsjewellery with the traditional beads

This store, in both its physical and digital spaces, is a counterstory in a number of ways. First, the store is counterstory within Ghana which is known for being a patriarchal and morally conservative society, especially around LGBT+ issues. The store is owned by a young woman who is global, stylish, trilingual, and successful. Regarding LGBT+, on Instagram, they often push the boundaries of gender, including men in dresses or carrying purses. In fact, here is a picture of Daniel on one of the Instagram stories, modeling items for purchase.

This store's audience is most likely for tourists and Ghanaians from a higher socioeconomic status and is not indicative of all views around sexuality and gender in Ghana. In addition, not all travelers or Ghanaians would have access to shop there. Yet, the physical store and its online presence are examples of what Kishonna Gray calls Black digital feminism, which is political and resistant, and where there is simultaneous engagement with the digital and the physical to amplify voices which have always existed but need to be heard. In fact, by promoting African designers and models, it shows that fashion is not just something that white people do but is global, African, and exciting.

Finally, I would argue that Elle Lokko is a counterstory in terms of what many travelers might expect in terms of shopping in Ghana. This is not a shithole store in a shithole country because Ghana is not that in the first place. Those thoughts are steeped in white supremacy. In fact, this store could be in Tokyo, New York or Paris. In fact, I wish it were in Chicago. It is one of my favorite boutique stores in the world, mainly because of the items you can buy, but also because of the story it tells.

**A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words**

It's 1985, and I'm watching Live Aid with my family. During the commercial breaks, there are calls for donations and pictures on repeat of Ethiopian children covered in flies. These are my first images and memories of Africa.

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I'm embarrassed to share this memory, as it is such an embodiment of colonialism, racism, and the white supremecist narrative that permeates U.S. society. It makes me frustrated that my African American friends of my age were learning about Ubuntu or learning Swahili., doing all the work, and I was just living in my privilege of positive images of white people, statutes that look like me, and my idiolect being the one used in the school I attended. I wish I could say that things have changed and perhaps they have somewhat due to content as I wrote about above, but in terms of many parts of mainstream white society, I would argue they have not. Just look at comments about Africa from the former president or the fact that an increasing number of school systems don't want to even mention the word slavery with school boards instituting mandates around white-washed history curricula.

When I traveled to Ghana, I was hyper aware of this. I knew there were going to be painful and challenging moments, and there were. I'm still thinking about conversations I had around the transatlantic slave trade, whiteness, privilege, language privilege including speaking the local languages and being given more grace or excitement because of being white, identity, intersectionality, and how to be a co-conspirator. One thing I learned is that I need to do better, I need to show up, and I need to speak my mind even if my voice shakes. I often hide and don't speak up, as I'm a pleaser, but traveling to Ghana with a mixed-race group of academics made me want to look at myself more and empower others to do the same. In the video, "Examining Black Feminism in the Digital Era," Kishonna Gray tells a woman who asks a question how white women can help and not be passive, "You gotta go get your people," and continues to talk about the importance of starting within our own communities. Gray asks her what have white women done in the spaces they come from or to transform their classrooms. She continues by asking the woman, what have been her responses to the racist uncle, the white women who voted for Trump, or the anti-gay grandma. These are great questions, and a reminder that a good place to start is with myself, my friends, and my family around me.

When I traveled, I was also hyper aware of how I visually represented Ghana in online environments. Facebook is my medium of choice, and at first, I was posting images of nature and the university, and my language learning stories, including how names are done in Ghana, but then after day six of a five-week trip, I stopped. I have about 1,139 friends on Facebook, so posting would have been a great opportunity to allow my friends and family to travel with me and give them access to a country, languages, and culture, many will most likely never visit.

I stopped after I had written a post with this picture, which is my favorite picture from the trip. I had written a long post about how much fun I was having in Ghana and how friendly the people are and a story that happened with me and this young woman, but then I got nervous about how I was presenting this picture, so I didn't post it. My friends and family know that if they would post something negative, I would block them or delete it, so it wasn't that. I just didn't love the optics of a white woman and a young Black girl.

Allow me to explain. It was day three, and we were visiting a Ga neighborhood, Teshie, in Accra. Although I had learned Twi, I also had taken two online lessons with a tutor to learn some Ga, so I was excited to try out some phrases. In addition, as an English language teacher myself, I love when people speak English with me, and I try to give them positive feedback, as this can be motivating. Learning and speaking in another language involves vulnerability, risk taking, and courage, and I try to be a good language partner to build confidence. I also tend to gravitate to women when I travel; as a woman I tend to be interested in their perspectives the most.

When we arrived in the neighborhood, there was construction, so we had to walk a long way to get to where we were going. As we were walking, people were greeting us, so I tried using some of my Ga phrases. Then, I came across a school group, and I greeted them in Ga, but one of them, the young woman in the picture, spoke to me in English, a language Ghanaians learn in school. I love assertiveness around language learning, so I stopped and started talking to her. Because it was so much fun, I asked if I could take a picture of them, and this is what I got.



We then went to the place of our lecture and after, we were making our way back to the bus, and the young woman was waiting for me near the exit of the workplace. I was so touched. We talked a bit more, and then I asked if I could get a picture of her and asked if I could post it on social media to which she replied yes.

I loved this moment with her and this picture because it sums up the number one thing I love about travel: connection. I loved that she came back to see me, and that we could speak more in English and my extremely limited Ga. Sometimes when you travel, you just have these magical moments where you connect, and the world seems like it is going to be okay. I'm a big believer in the power of travel to open minds, start conversations, and change perspectives.  In this picture, we both look so happy, and you can see how excited we both are to connect and share our languages and cultures with each other.

However, I didn't post it because I was nervous about how others would interpret it. Of course, I would have posted it with a narrative, but still why was I posting it? My own ego? I got nervous that people would think she came back to talk to me because she wanted money. I thought maybe I would come across as the white savior, there to "save" African children. One could see me as in a long line of pictures of the white linguist colonizer, who is there to take their language away from them and replace it with mine. And still when they learn mine, I would say that their version of English is not "English" enough. I digress but thinking about how to frame my trip and tell the narrative both in online and non-online spaces is something that I struggled with when I was there and still struggle with today.

After much rumination, I don't think not posting, which is what I ended up doing, is the answer. I have tried to speak about Ghana every opportunity I am given, but I think I need to do more. After writing this paper, I would like to think about posting some pictures and narrative of my trip on Facebook, as I had so many amazing experiences which I would like to share.

So how does one go about choosing pictures to post? I don't have an easy answer to that. Reflecting on what to post and asking permission are the first steps, but that cannot be the only way.  I've been thinking about having some conversations around this with others I traveled with to hear their opinions and ideas. Because I often travel with students, I would like to come up with or look for a heuristic for them to think about before they post videos, blogs, and pictures. I think even having a conversation with students about these issues is worthwhile. Just like risk management and sustainability, how you represent the culture you travel to in different spaces is part of being a responsible 21st century traveler.

**Conclusion**

I will say this: Every American should go to Ghana. It should be a priority of those that have the means to go there and a priority of educational institutions to provide study abroad trips there. Ghana is directly tied to the U.S. historically, and it is imperative that people from the U.S. travel there and visit the sites where many of our brothers and sisters come from.  For white Americans, it is crucial to deal head on with our involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and white supremacy in the U.S. This is hard and painful, but an important step to decolonize ourselves. For me personally, I came back inspired and ready to fight; I learned that I want to speak up and be a co-conspirator not just an ally.

I will say this: every American should go to Ghana.  It's an incredible country and worthy to be on anyone's bucket list. It's safe, rich in culture, music, and language, and full of incredible, kind, and funny people. Most people are at least bilingual. One of the coolest world festivals is

held there called the Chale Wote Street Art Festival. Now on my bucket list! I often dreamed about living in Accra while I was there. It's not a shithole country. It is a cradle of culture, civilization, and rhetoric. Americans need to open their minds and stop centering themselves. Why does rhetoric start with Europe and whiteness?  Why not Ghana? These thoughts are not new, but bare repeating. Go there, go there, go there.

I will say this: Every American should travel to Ghana, but not everyone can. Therefore, people who travel to Ghana have a duty to share how amazing it is, and yet this can be hard to do.  How do you put five weeks into a thirty second soundbite at the gym or by the copier at work? What pictures and stories do you choose to post online or make a Tik Tok video about? However, those who travel there must grapple with how to tell the narrative of their trip both in virtual and non-virtual environments. Not everyone will be able to travel Ghana, but through others' travels there, more people will have access to it. Therefore, travelers must be aware of their role and responsibility in this process.

I will say this: Every American should travel to Ghana, but not everyone can. However, there are countless online resources to introduce you to travel, ecology, language, culture, history, and food. Most of this content is often made by Ghanaians either in Ghana or the diaspora or by people of color living around the globe. There are spaces that have been curated and created, and so we need to enter those spaces and learn. These are spaces of resistance and collaboration which tell countless counterstories around Ghana, Africa, race, identity, and travel. They are there thriving and inviting you to challenge your own assumptions and stereotypes around Ghana and Africa. Some of these experiences will be challenging and will leave you with more questions than answers. But it is only through these questions and hard conversations, that growth and decolonization can occur. Go there, go there, go there.

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