

Nope. I'm Ghanaian.

Written by Nana Boakye

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I set off for my Princeton in Africa experience in Addis Ababa with no expectations of grappling with questions of dual identity, as a Ghanaian-American. While I have close relationships with my family in Ghana and would have been perfectly comfortable living there, I wanted more of a challenge. I wanted to see a part of the world that was unknown to me while also working a challenging and impactful job. Working with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Ethiopia seemed like the perfect opportunity. I wanted to learn about their culture, but as a spectator. Of course I would “immerse” myself in the culture. I would eat Ethiopian food, fumble through Ethiopian dances, and maybe buy a cultural artifact or two. Still, I knew that I would be a foreigner living among Ethiopians.

Yet even before touching down in Addis I was forced to contemplate how I was viewed, as the flight attendants and Ethiopian passengers insisted on speaking to me in Amharic (Ethiopia's *lingua franca*). I was confused, because I thought that I in no way looked Ethiopian, but rather, definitively West African. As my time in Ethiopia elapsed, I began to realize how wrong I had been. A standard conversation with an Ethiopian proceeded as such:

Ethiopian (*rambles on in Amharic*)

Me (*madly gesturing to my ears*): Inglizgna.*

Ethiopian: Oh sorry. You have a Habesha** face.

Me: Haha. I've been told. No, I'm not Ethiopian.

Ethiopian: Are you sure? Maybe you should ask your parents or look into your family's past. I think you are Ethiopian. You just don't know yet.

Me: Nope. I'm Ghanaian.

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I have found that in Ethiopia I often refer to myself as Ghanaian. In America, my American identity was always an implied hyphen to my Ghanaian identity. In America, someone is always Something-American. I'm Ghanaian(-American) and in Ghana, everyone refers to me as American (though obviously Ghanaian, ethnically). In these cases, however, the other half of my identity is assumed. I don't have to choose. In Ethiopia, I'm not sure what I am, I feel as though I do have to choose and I'm not sure what side to pick.

I found the same issues arise at the place I worked. Though my Ethiopian co-workers initially thought I was Habesha, once they learned that I was American, lumped me in with the expats, despite my supposed Ethiopian appearance. And while I enjoyed the expat company I still found myself also wanting to hang out with Africans.

Thus, my African Experience has me searching for my identity rather than finding it. Princeton in Africa promised me a challenge, but I never imagined this one. Taking cold showers, staying in refugee camps, surviving without Keebler cookies; I had expected those. Finally dealing with the classic issue of dual identity? But what ever else it has been, the experience has been exhilarating. Maybe I'll figure everything out by the end of the year. If I come back to Princeton Reunions in a kente cap and dashiki, you'll know which side I chose.

If you are interested in learning more about opportunities with Princeton in Africa check out their website at www.princeton.edu/piaf