

**DOING DEVELOPMENT
IN WEST AFRICA**
A Reader by and for Undergraduates
CHARLES PIOT, EDITOR

Duke University Press Durham and London 2016

Introduction

Charles Piot

The number of U.S. university students traveling abroad for the summer to engage in small-scale development efforts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has increased dramatically over the past decade. The students volunteer in rural health clinics; set up micro-lending initiatives; build schools and dig wells; organize the export of local textiles to markets of the global North—and the list goes on. Compelled by a mix of utopian and pragmatic desires, these students at once hope to help the world's poor while building résumés and finding adventure. A political movement by another name, perhaps.

This book—written by and for undergraduates captivated by the idea of do-it-yourself (DIY) development in the global South—describes projects undertaken by Duke University students since 2008 in two villages in northern Togo, West Africa. The projects are inexpensive and aim small, and they are tethered to a common theme: youth culture/youth flight. Among other efforts, these students have built a cyber café, organized a microfinance initiative for teens, set up a writers' collective, and installed a village health insurance system. They engage their projects with commitment and creativity—and with the courage it takes to live locally and subsist on food that is foreign to the palate, while also being exposed to tropical fevers and dysentery. They come from a variety of backgrounds (Anglo, Caribbean, Latin American, Asian, second-generation African,

African American) and a range of Duke majors (English, cultural anthropology, engineering, global health, physics, international comparative studies, African and African American studies), and there are invariably more women than men. They often do not know one another before setting out but typically develop deep friendships and work hard together to achieve their projects' aims.

Duke alone has ten or more group projects in Africa every summer, many sponsored by DukeEngage, a large civic engagement program begun in 2006 in the wake of the Duke lacrosse scandal.¹ The university also sponsors dozens of individual research and internship projects on the continent and has study abroad programs in Ghana and South Africa. Latin America and Asia have similar profiles. While there are specificities to Duke's programs, they share broad affinities and common desires with initiatives at other universities. Our hope in publishing these essays is that they will provide inspiration, and perhaps a model, for student development efforts elsewhere.



I never intended to be a development anthropologist. Brought up in the halls of high theory—Lévi-Strauss, Marx, Foucault, and Derrida were daily fare in my graduate school classes—I looked down on anything “applied,” which not only seemed anti-Theory but also smacked of complicity. When I was first in the field in the mid-1980s, I ran the other way when I saw a development worker or a missionary. My generation of anthropologists was in search of alterity, of societies uncontaminated by capitalism (or by development workers and missionaries). We aimed to defend and give voice to other ways of being in the world rather than to change or colonize them. It was a noble cause, if also patronizing.

Now, many years later, I still like theory but I am also intrigued with missionaries and development workers—not merely as objects of study (although they are that, as well; I have written about development work in West Africa) but also as fellow travelers, for I have become something of a development agent myself. I have set up a fund in my fieldwork village, contributing royalties from book sales to a village development account, and I take students there each summer to engage in small development efforts. These students have installed an Internet café in one of the villages, set up a

health insurance program in another, established a microfinance scheme, and organized a writers' club, among other projects.

So what changed?

Theory, for one thing. Today, anthropologists know better than to imagine that we might be able to access pure social forms outside entangled global histories—that there might be an uncontaminated outside to capitalism, that missionaries and development workers are not always already part of village landscapes everywhere. It is a foundational assumption of the discipline today that societies and cultures are always messy and mixed; that there are no outsides; and that entanglement and complicity are the norm.

Then, too, we have abandoned the naïve view that the anthropologist studying everyday life in a village might be a detached observer, having little effect on what he or she is studying. Today, we assume that the anthropologist herself is always implicated in the field of study, that she is constantly affecting those around her in a range of ways (through her data gathering, through the money and medicine she distributes, through discussions and conversations, through her social relationships). If researchers are already implicated, like missionaries and development workers, why would they not also want to take the next step and attempt to ameliorate the living conditions of those they care about?

But as significant for me are recent changes in student culture. Whether deriving from the cachet that the phrase “global university” has on college campuses today or from a desire to do good in the world, or both, today's college students are signing up for semester and summer abroad programs in record numbers. They work as interns, conduct small research projects, or attend study abroad classes, many in Africa and Latin America. At Duke, students flock to these continents each summer, thanks to two new powerhouse units on campus: the Global Health Institute and DukeEngage, a service-learning program that sends up to four hundred students a year overseas and has passed Duke Basketball as the number-one reason entering freshmen choose to matriculate at the university.² Projects like these are all the rage at universities around the country (Handler 2013), not just at Duke, and range from study abroad programs and health internships to volunteer work with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). While there are specificities to each program, and to the locales where students end up, the programs are largely driven by common impulse: by students' desire to travel and learn and make a difference in the world.

It is easy to be cynical about this new student culture, this quiet social movement that aims to bring change through personal initiative. Is this enthusiasm not more about résumé building or adventure—"academic tourism," some have called it—than making a difference? Is it not driven by naive assumptions about development and what it means to "make an impact"? How can a U.S. college student, typically from the suburbs, parachute into a village in Africa or Latin America for a few months, with minimal local knowledge, and really hope to make a difference?

This is all true, of course, and I spend much of my undergraduate "Development and Africa" class criticizing the view that development can accomplish anything at all without a deep understanding of local culture, politics, and history. Yet I have also found the youthful idealism of the students I have been associated with irresistible and many of their projects inspiring. Moreover, whatever their motivations, their efforts are hailed by those in the villages where I conduct research, and their work has had a positive impact on local lives.

My involvement in student-led development started by chance—and because an administrator from Duke's Global Health Institute called my bluff. She showed up at my office one day to ask if I would mentor three of her students who were planning summer internships in Ghana, help them brainstorm their projects, and check in on them over the summer. I told her I was not keen on going to Ghana—getting there from Togo was time-consuming, and the roads were terrible—but that if she had students who spoke French and wanted to work in Togo, I would consider it. I assumed that was the last I would hear from her—that language would be a stumbling block—only to get an e-mail two weeks later saying she had six students interested in Togo, all with French-language skills. I agreed to speak with them, and won over by their earnest enthusiasm, I ended up taking three.

When they arrived that summer, I set them up with internships and homestay families, then left to do my own research, telling them I would return three weeks later to see how they were doing and to brainstorm a possible intervention. I wanted each to come up with a single idea she could work on during her last month that might make a difference in local lives. To my surprise, two of the students came up with quirky, brilliant ideas—a village health insurance scheme and a money-pooling system—that, in twenty-five years in the area, had never crossed my mind. One of

these, the health insurance plan, was implemented the following year and is still in place today. Moreover, at the end of the summer, villagers pleaded with me to bring more students the next year. They were thankful not only for the projects but also for the money the students had injected into the local economy and for their good humor in the face of everyday challenges. Most important, they felt acknowledged by the fact that students from far away had chosen their village as a place of residence and work. "You've given us many small things over the years," a friend said as I was leaving for the start of classes that fall, "but bringing these students is the best thing you've ever done."

Inspired by the projects the two students had initiated and knowing they would need follow-up—but also sobered by my interlocutor's frank appraisal of my own long-standing attempts to reciprocate local generosity—I decided to bring another cohort the following summer. They turned out to be as good as the group before. And so it went: each year a new cohort brought new ideas and energy, and the projects kept morphing in interesting ways. Today, I have few regrets about this unexpected turn in career. Moreover, these students have opened new vistas for me—not only applied, but also theoretical.

A Brief History of Development in West Africa

If anthropology and student culture have changed since the 1980s, so has development. During the early independence period in West Africa (circa 1960–1990), economic development was top-down, state-driven, and large-scale, focused primarily on infrastructure such as roads, schools, and clinics. With the end of the Cold War and the drying up of state monies, however, development scaled down and went local—"to the grassroots," was the refrain—with NGOs replacing states as purveyors of development and development's focus shifting from infrastructure to education, health, and human rights; from things material to "immaterial." The end of the Cold War also brought a change in development's target population away from large groups such as nations, regions, ethnic groups or villages, all typically run by men, to women and youth, especially girls. Standard projects today in West Africa, many sponsored by European and American NGOs, target girls' education, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and malaria, child trafficking, and microfinance.

Take, for instance, the villages in northern Togo where I have worked for many years—and where I have taken students. In the 1980s, the Togolese state was busy building schools and clinics, and its development agency, *Affaires Sociales*, had a salaried employee in every village. By the mid-1990s, the money had dried up and the state had withdrawn from the development field. In its place, a Danish NGO had opened a child sponsorship program (to send girls to school and provide their families with medical and food aid), and a German NGO had established a microfinance initiative to fund local entrepreneurs who lacked liquidity.³ Notice, again, the shift from material to immaterial, from infrastructure to what the World Bank refers to as “human capital” (Benjamin 2007).

Contemporary economic development sits within a larger global political economy that scholars call “neoliberal” (Foucault 2010; Harvey 2007). Also referred to as the “Washington Consensus” by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, its main boosters since its inception in the 1980s, the neoliberal era is characterized by state pullback and decentralization, democratization, “NGO-ization,” the privatization and marketization of almost everything, financialization and the emergence of the consumer citizen, and class consolidation and growing inequality (Harvey 2007). Across the global South, the neoliberal moment is typified not only by state withdrawal and the emergence of the NGO but also by a new “contract” between development and needy citizen or community. No-strings-attached charitable aid (the “free” handout) is a thing of the past, replaced by a quid pro quo—“We’ll contribute materials, if you provide the labor,” “We’ll offer liquidity as long as you pay us interest,” “Where’s the proof that you have skin in the game?”—and needy citizens come to be seen as responsible for their own development. In Michel Foucault’s (2010) felicitous phrase, the neoliberal subject is a “self-responsibilizing” one, the author of his or her own betterment.

A recent stream of development practice with relevance to my students’ projects—and a distillation of neoliberalism’s embrace of individual initiative, also consistent with the move away from the large scale and top down—is referred to as DIY development (Kristoff 2010). The DIYers are individuals, often recent college graduates with experience in the Peace Corps or working for an NGO, who decide to do it on their own, in the process circumventing the development apparatus. These self-starters identify a problem (lack of access to tampons in Congo, to bed nets in Benin, to the Internet in Togo);

set up a website, where they announce the project and raise money; and purchase and distribute the materials—all with little interference, thanks to the pullback of the state during the post-Cold War dispensation.

Again, there is much to criticize in this trend—in many ways, the apotheosis of development as we know it, the reduction of charitable aid to individual initiative—as it is dogged by all of the problems of development more generally. For better or worse, my students’ projects are a version of DIY development, although I would like to think they are conceived and implemented with greater attention to local context and with a healthy respect for all that might go awry.

One of the widely acknowledged truths of development in Africa over the past fifty years is that it has failed, and dramatically so. Project after project after project has failed, more than 90 percent of them—latrines, energy-saving stoves, animal traction, poultry vaccination, irrigation initiatives, fertilizers, wells projects, labor cooperatives . . . The list goes on and on. More than \$1 trillion has gone down the tubes, Dambisa Moyo (2010), the former World Bank economist, estimates.

There are many reasons for this calamity, including the long history of colonialism, an unforgiving environment, a global political economy that is stacked against its peripheries, government misappropriation of funds. But it is also due to the development apparatus’s failure to appreciate—understand, take account of, spend time studying, articulate projects with—local realities. Euro-Americans love to imagine that technology solves all problems and that the solution to development’s travails is technological. Introduce a cattle-pulled plow and farmers will rush to partake in its wonders; make fertilizer available and crop yields will increase; build energy-saving stoves and women will immediately sign on; make liquidity available and entrepreneurial activity will take off. But any intervention meets a complex reality on the ground: labor regimes that are built around hand cultivation (with specific locally adapted crops); soil that may not respond well to chemical fertilizer; local hearths that may be better suited to diverse quotidian needs; loan and debt systems that march to a different logic; local hierarchies that have long served as mediators of the social and may not rush to embrace new initiatives. I have rarely seen an NGO or government agency that has taken the sociocultural dimension seriously and attribute much of development’s failure to that blind spot.

A Brief History of the Kabre

A hill people inhabiting a refuge area where people fled during the era of the Atlantic slave trade (1650–1800), the Kabre developed an ingenious system of terraced cereal farming, which continues into the present. German and French colonial administrators were captivated by Kabre enterprise and conscripted them as laborers in the 1920s to build colonial infrastructure. A decade later, the Kabre began their own migration into sparsely inhabited, albeit fertile, zones in the south of Togo, where they started cash farming cotton, coffee, and cocoa. Their early success and relative autonomy turned a migrant trickle into a stream, producing a steady flow of youth out of the north, an exodus that continues into the present, and established hundreds of Kabre villages across Togo's southern plateau. These emigrants nevertheless have retained strong ties to the north, returning to initiate their children and bury the dead and to remit some of the proceeds of cash-cropping. A busy diaspora emerged around the back-and-forth between northern homeland and southern terminus, crowding the roadways with those heading south in search of money and with southerners returning home for ritual sustenance (Piot 1999: 40–42, 156–71).

Today, youth still head south to work for family members, although Benin and Nigeria to the east have become preferred destinations—both because the southern soil is less fertile than before (and, some say, family members in the south are too exploitative) and because these neighboring countries provide monetary or in-kind remuneration. It is still too early to tell, but if this new migratory trajectory continues (and that to the south diminishes), it will mark something of an epochal transformation in the Kabre social landscape—not only routing migration toward new transnational destinations but also ensuring that youth return to the northern villages after their labor contracts are up (because they are unable to acquire land in Benin and Nigeria). This would repopulate the villages and ensure a greater material return than before while further attenuating ties with family in the south.

Rituals—especially initiation and funeral ceremonies—are a magnet that keeps people returning, tying together Kabre north and south and consolidating identity. In this diasporic context, reciprocity and relational personhood loom large, as “children” in the south retain obligations to family in the north, giving them gifts and showing them

“respect” (Piot 1999: 170–71). Here, as with everyday relations among Kabre more broadly and in concert with gift-economy principles, personal relations are forever entangled with the exchange of things (Piot 1999: 52–75).

In the mid-1960s, a Kabre military officer named Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who had fought for the French in Indochina during the late colonial period, took office in Africa's first ever coup and ruled in big-man style until 2005. Eyadéma consolidated power by pivoting national politics around his own ethnic group and by filling the military with soldiers from his natal village. This privileging of birthplace was a constant of Eyadéma's reign—his home village today has paved roads and electricity—but it was accompanied by what many feel was a motivated neglect of surrounding (same-ethnic) villages. Such was certainly the case in Farendé and Kuwdé—the site of the Duke projects today and still a development backwater—and remains a sore spot with locals up to the present, for they had taken Eyadéma in after he was exiled from his natal community (for affairs of witchcraft), and he attended the first mission school in the area before he joined the French army (Piot 2010: 136–38). Uncannily, the Farendé cyber café built by Duke students in 2012 is located on the site of the school Eyadéma attended as a child. These Duke projects might thus be read as inheriting this history of development's promise and neglect.

Student Projects

By any standard, the Kabre villages in northern Togo are materially poor. There is no electricity or running water; houses are covered with thatch or tin; fields are cultivated by hand; poor soil and a harsh climate impede cash-crop cultivation. While weekly markets enable the circulation of local foodstuffs (sorghum, beans, yams, sauce ingredients, chickens, goats), they provide little opportunity for extra income. Moreover, the health challenges in this area of West Africa are legion, with disease a constant in the lives of all. In addition to the tropical fevers—malaria, typhoid, yellow fever—myriad intestinal parasites and worms wreak havoc on bodies and plague the health of families. Up to 50 percent of family income is spent on health care each year.

What can be done in an area like this, especially when virtually all attempts at “development” have failed?

The first thing I tell students is to lower their expectations, even to assume failure—but also that failure can be instructive. The second is to remain open-minded and flexible, always on the lookout for surprises. While some have switched projects altogether in midstream, most have had to innovate along the way, and it is these improvisational moments that have made all the difference. Third, and perhaps most important, I urge students to adopt an attitude of humility toward the local and assume that local knowledge (about crops, soils, markets, health) will trump outsider knowledge most of the time—that one's first instinct should be to find out from villagers how and why they do what they do. I thus insisted that a student who wanted to set up a microfinance initiative in summer 2013 spend her first weeks sitting with women in the market, learning the ins and outs of local payment and debt. When another student became frustrated with inconsistent attendance at the Farendé Writers' Society she had started, I suggested she make the rounds of teachers and students to learn more about attitudes toward literacy. This enabled her to gain empathy for the students and to better strategize ways to increase attendance.

But I feel that the educational process also ought to begin before arriving in the field. Thus, students are encouraged to take courses on African culture and politics and to sign up for an independent study in which they read broadly in anthropological and historical literatures on West Africa and begin to brainstorm their projects. Many of the Togo projects have begun with a research proposal—"I want to study traditional medicines, to determine their effectiveness and to think about ways they might be integrated into clinic practice"—which further gets them into the literature and into a researcher's mind-set. Finally, the fact that eight generations of students have been to the same place means that those who have gone before can share lessons learned with those who follow.

The essays in this book describe the travails of a determined cohort of students—now more than forty, spread over eight years—attempting to initiate small research and development projects that they hope will make a difference. Some have succeeded brilliantly; others are in progress. Still others were unsuccessful and have been abandoned, while some have focused on research more than intervention. One of the most gratifying aspects of this experiment has been its organic nature. From the beginning,

it has been a work in progress, one idea and project leading to another, one stray comment or insight opening a new set of possibilities.

The majority of projects, and several featured in this volume, have addressed health—both because of real needs in the villages and because global health is a popular area of study today. Thus, several students have carried out research on the use of vernacular or "traditional" medicines—which proliferate in the villages, where fields are virtual pharmacopeia—trying to better parse local understandings (see chapter 2) and to explore ways in which collaboration between village healers and biomedical clinicians might be brought about (chapter 3). One student (chapter 4) carried the rural medicines project into the capital city, Lomé, where she found that everyone she interviewed—from market women to civil servants—continues to rely on herbal medicine in the treatment of disease (especially in cases of malaria and infertility) and that people often go back and forth between herbalist and clinician.⁴

An ongoing project has been to assess the health insurance system initiated by Duke students in the village of Kuwdé, an initiative that, for all of its apparent benefits, has provided a surprising set of challenges (chapter 5). Conceived by Tara Hopkins, a student in the first cohort in 2008, the insurance scheme offers family coverage—free consultation for all family members and a 75 percent discount on medicine—for only \$4 a year. Remarkably, this arrangement has been a financial win-win: families save more money on the medicine they purchase than they spend enrolling, and the clinic makes money from the exchange.⁵ One might imagine that, because of the low entry fee, every family in the village would rush to enlist, but at its peak only twenty-three out of two hundred families had signed up, with enrollment dipping to sixteen families in 2013.

A range of reasons appear to account for this puzzling situation. Some of those we asked prefer herbal medicine, which healers dispense free of charge,⁶ or they do not trust clinic workers. Others mentioned that having to pay the annual premium on a fixed day (September 1) was burdensome, especially with school fees right around the corner. Yet others said that paying to treat an illness you do not yet have could put you at spiritual risk, potentially bringing on the illness. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the idea of insurance is culturally burdened in ways that render it alien to local sensibilities. The Kabre do not otherwise gamble their money on unknown futures; nor do they pay into a general fund that

covers those in need while failing to reimburse those without (but who have already paid in). Put otherwise, the sort of thinking that underlies insurance—hedging against the future, deploying “population” as a category, measuring individuals against statistical (population-level) norms, or what Foucault (2011) calls “biopower”—assumes that people are already inside a distinctively Euro-American cultural order in which the (let’s face it, bizarre) logic of insuring one’s fate against an unknown future is normalized and becomes a part of the everyday order of things.

In 2013, one of the students began to make some headway in getting people to sign up for the insurance plan by appealing to pecuniary logic. She studied the clinic’s books and ran the figures, comparing the expenditures of those who were insured against those who were not (but who still visited the clinic). She then made the rounds of both groups, pointing out to those who were enrolled how much they had saved and to those who were not what they would have saved had they been enrolled. This had an immediate effect, with five new families enrolling within a week. By 2015, forty-seven families were enrolled.

While health remains popular, recent projects have also turned to youth culture. This shift grew out of the research of two students in 2012, Maria Cecilia Romano (chapter 6) and Ben Ramsey, who were interested in the migration of male teens from the villages in Togo to farms in Benin and Nigeria, where they labor for cash or a motorcycle.⁷ Local authority figures (parents, chiefs, teachers) have been opposed to this exodus, not only because they lose the labor of their fittest cultivators (and the schools lose students) but also because of the severity of the labor regime in Nigeria and its effects on the health of their children. But teens leave anyway, often sneaking off in the middle of the night, not to return for a year. “We work hard here and have nothing to show for it at the end of the year,” they assert. “We work hard in Nigeria, too, but in the end we come back with a motorcycle or a ‘video’ [TV and DVD player].”

This social drama—which pits children against elders and presages a dramatic shift in local patterns of migration⁸—became the occasion for a set of projects on youth flight. These projects aim not to stem the migratory tide—an impossible task⁹—but seek to make life more palatable for those who remain behind.

The centerpiece of this effort was the installation of a solar-powered Internet café in the village of Farendé. Two students took it upon them-

selves to design a website where they announced the project and asked for contributions. With the money raised, they purchased laptops and four large solar panels, then shipped them to Togo by express mail. After several near-misses (chapter 7), the equipment arrived, and the two students assembled it all themselves, connecting to the Internet through a local cell-phone tower. Now this small village—well off the beaten path, without electricity or the usual amenities—is connected because of a couple of enterprising DIY students.

Aiming to further enhance youth culture in the villages, many of the projects in 2013 were organized around the cyber café. One student offered typing and Internet classes—to which local children flocked—and another created a writers’ club (chapter 10). The club used the cyber café as a base of operations, meeting there twice a week to share work (about everyday life in the village), offering students computer access so they could type their essays, and publishing those essays online at the end of the summer (see the website at <http://ecrivainsdefarende.wix.com/cljf-2014>). Another student set up a microfinance project to lend small sums to teenage boys and girls (chapter 9), the first of its kind in northern Togo, where such loans are usually reserved for adults. She also set up a website that showcased the projects of the four girls and three boys who were funded (<http://www.farende.com>). A fourth student initiated a project in the mountain village of Kuwdé that enables teenage boys to grow cashew nuts as a cash crop, with the hope that some might find this an attractive alternative to leaving for Nigeria.

While the lines between humanitarian and development aid can blur, and while these projects in Togo have a humanitarian aspect, they technically fall on the “development” side of the charity aid enterprise (Moyo 2009: 7; Redfield 2013: 15). Humanitarian aid is emergency aid—the sort carried out by Médecins sans Frontières in war zones and refugee camps, aiming solely to get people back on their feet—while development aid has a longer view and a commitment to something more than what Peter Redfield (2013: 20) refers to as a “minimal biopolitics.” The Duke projects—health insurance, microfinance, the cyber café, computer classes—are intended for the long-term improvement and development of communities.

Despite all of the good intentions and hard work—and the positive feedback students have received—it is worth also considering the complications of installing a cyber café in a village like this. Who will oversee its

operation? How much should users be charged so it is affordable while also self-sustaining? How can the equipment be safeguarded? How does one ensure that monies end up in the right pockets? How can one spread computer literacy—typing and Internet skills—in a village where most have never seen a computer before?

A first shock came when we discovered that even at the (seemingly low) user rate of sixty cents an hour, most locals could not afford to use the cyber café. In one month in 2013, it had only three visitors—all adults—and made only fifty cents. A second surprise was that most of the cyber café's income came from charging cell phones (with electricity generated by the solar panels), not from computer use. So this state-of-the-art cyber café had become little more than the village's charging station. There were also whispers that funds were being misappropriated by the young woman who tended the register and by the director. In August 2013, someone broke in at night and made off with three of the laptops.

For all of this, the project still has legs. The thief did not touch the pricier solar panels—which are riveted to the roof—and laptops are easily replaced. A night guard has been hired, and checks against disappearing funds have been put into place. The cyber café now offers free computer access to youth one morning a week, which has begun to create a clientele (chapter 8).

This is how it goes with development: the best-laid plans usually go awry. But it is through setback that such designs become better adapted; that utopian dreams are brought down to earth and retrofitted to the local.

In part I, students reflect on the personal and experiential aspects of living and conducting research in a West African village; part II contains descriptions of some of their projects. Both sets foreground the challenges and surprises that these student-researchers faced and the improvisations they deployed. They should be read together, for the personal-experiential and the formal project forever bleed together in a context such as this. The sets are framed by short essays (an introduction and an epilogue) I wrote to knit together the different initiatives and provide larger context for the project as a whole. What impresses again and again in the students' essays is not only their commitment and hard work, and their willingness to think outside the box, but also that they are not blinded by their idealism. They accept their own and their projects' limitations and are comfortable working within those parameters.

Notes

1. Duke men's lacrosse became national news in 2006 when an exotic dancer, hired to perform at a team party, claimed that she had been raped. While her charge did not stick, the incident remained in the national spotlight for months while claims and counterclaims, and the racial and gendered aspects of the event, were debated and adjudicated. A savvy administration responded to the tarnishing of the university's reputation by, among other things, attempting to rebrand Duke as an institution defined by its "service to society" through establishing programs like DukeEngage.
2. Created in the aftermath of the Duke lacrosse scandal in 2006—and, as suggested above, an attempt to reframe Duke University as more than just a basketball and party school—DukeEngage is a well-endowed program that covers all expenses for students and faculty for more than forty projects worldwide. As of summer 2015, more than three thousand Duke students had volunteered through DukeEngage in seventy-nine countries on six continents and engaged in more than one million hours of service worldwide.
3. By the early 2000s, both NGOs had departed (par for the course, as NGOs come and go with shocking regularity) and a new microfinance scheme, this one focused on women, had arrived on the scene. In 2012, the state rejuvenated *Affaires Sociales*—renamed *Actions Sociales*—and sent a "volunteer" to work in the villages one day a week.
4. Both the United Nations and the World Bank have promoted the enhanced use of "traditional medicine" in countries of the global South, even making it a policy priority, not only because such medicine is cheaper for individuals but also because widespread use will save indebted states significant sums of money that is currently spent on subsidizing pharmaceuticals for their citizens.
5. The clinic charges uninsured patients twice what it pays for medicines and taxes insured patients half what it pays. The clinic makes more money on insurance premiums (\$4 per year per family) than it loses in subsidizing the cost of medicines for the insured.
6. While no money changes hands, healers do expect to be "thanked" with a chicken or a small pot of beer by a patient who has been cured by the healer's ministrations. As several interviewees pointed out, the monetary value of this gratuity is far lower than the cost of pharmaceuticals.
7. Girls migrate, too, but in smaller numbers and less often to Nigeria than to Benin, where they work as domestics or in bars. Those who work in the bars often also take up sex work to supplement their meager salaries. Because of the sensitive, locally shameful nature of sex work—due to its health risks and unwanted pregnancies—the students working on youth flight focused more on boys' migratory experiences (but see chapter 6).
8. As mentioned earlier, since the early colonial period (circa 1930), the migratory routes of Kabre youth led to southern Togo, where they cultivated for

family members in return for school fees and pocket change (Piot 1999, 2010). Today, southern money has dried up, and youth are choosing Benin and Nigeria instead. These new destinations have potentially dramatic implications for the northern villages: unlike southern Togo, which often became a terminus where migrant youth would eventually settle, neither Benin nor Nigeria is likely to become a permanent destination, because young migrants have no family or land there. As a consequence, most youth return to the northern villages when their contracts in Benin or Nigeria run out, and with no history or toehold in southern Togo, they typically remain in the north, reversing the trend established during the colonial and early postcolonial periods and potentially also repopulating the villages.

9. There may be few constants across village societies around the world, but the flight of youth is one of them, with the reasons for leaving strikingly uniform: the desire for money, adventure, or a taste of modernity (the “bright lights,” in American parlance). Such pull factors are important for Farendé and Kuwdé youth, but they also mention a range of push factors, including the desire to escape authoritarian parents and the excessive demands of family, and the urge to flee what they see as a cauldron of witchcraft to avoid its deadly effects.

References

- Benjamin, Bret. 2007. *Invested Interests: Capital, Culture and the World Bank*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2010. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. New York: Picador.
- Handler, Richard. 2013. “Disciplinary Adaptation and Undergraduate Desire: Anthropology and Global Development Studies in the Liberal Arts Curriculum.” *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 2: 181–203.
- Harvey, David. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kristoff, Nicholas. 2010. “DIY Foreign-Aid Revolution.” *New York Times Magazine*, October 29, 2010.
- Moyo, Dambisa. 2010. *Dead Aid: Why Aid Makes Things Worse and How There Is Another Way for Africa*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Piot, Charles. 1999. *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2010. *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Redfield, Peter. 2013. *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors without Borders*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Part I

Personal Reflections

1. Students Reflect

**Stephanie Rotolo, Allie Middleton,
Kelly Andrejko, Benjamin Ramsey,
Maria Cecilia Romano**

Stephanie Rotolo

It was barely 5:30 in the morning, but the sun had already begun its ascent, and people and animals were moving about the courtyard. I pushed back the mosquito net that hung above my straw mattress in the corner of the room and slipped my feet out onto the warm clay floor. After a quick, cool bucket shower, I returned to the room, dressed, and ate a breakfast of bean fritters and local beer. I watched and listened as neighbors came and went, conversing in a language I did not understand. I turned off my gas lantern, gathered my notebooks, and gave my Kabre greetings to the women in the courtyard before making my way down the mountain to the small clinic. I passed homesteads and fields along the way and wished everyone I came across a day of productive work.

I was in an entirely different world. I had spent months preparing for this experience—studying the history and culture of the community, practicing my French, and designing my research project—but there were some things I simply could not have anticipated. Effective communication did not just mean speaking a different language; it also required breaking down cultural barriers and being innovative in getting a point across. Time seemed to move at one's own discretion, and what would normally be a ten-minute walk could take up to a half-hour, if, as expected, you stopped

to greet the people in your path along the way. Thus, meetings and interviews took place when all participants were present and ready, regardless of the time they had been scheduled. Communication with neighbors required visits to their homes and engaging in face-to-face conversations. The rare cell phones in the village were used for professional purposes or in cases of emergency. Without electricity in the homes, individuals would go to sleep when the sun went down (by 7 PM) and wake up when it rose again (6 AM). Everyone contributed to work around the home and in the fields, and neighbors worked together as one entity for the larger good, redefining the way I perceived "community."

Despite being welcomed by all with an inordinate amount of hospitality, I was still the *anasara* ("Nazarene," in Kabre) or the *yovo* (from the German *jawohl*, in Ewe), the white person. I was stared at by children who had never before seen a foreigner; I was heckled on the streets and in the market; and I was asked countless questions about my life at home and my reasons for coming to this community. A few weeks into my stay, on a Saturday afternoon at a small village market, a woman I did not recognize approached me and told me that I had "saved her." I was confused about what she was referring to; my host brother explained that this was her way to thank me for the health-care discussion I had led the previous weekend. One of the other students and I had decided to host community-wide discussions after Sunday church services to address maternal health, sanitation, and malaria. Apparently, this woman had attended and was adamant in expressing her gratitude for our work in the community.

I had not thought much of it before, but the esteem in which I realized I was being held as a white, foreign student was hard to believe in and get used to. I was told by village chiefs, men's working groups, and other community members how much my work meant to them. While it was certainly comforting to hear this trust, it seemed at times that the community believed more in my capabilities than I believed in myself. In a meeting with the chief of the canton, I was reassured that regardless of what I accomplished during my stay, this experience should be about creating a partnership; that above all, my presence would establish a connection between the villages and a city in my home country.

Most of my days were spent sitting in on consultations at the clinic and conducting interviews, as men took breaks from their long hours of work in the fields. One of the hardest aspects of my research was leaving my pre-

conceptions and personal beliefs at home. As I sought to understand the community's traditional medical system, I delved into entirely unfamiliar topics and issues. Growing up, I was taught that health and disease were simply biological matters, whereas Kabre understood them as interwoven with spiritual and social relations and concerns. With each interview, my previous understandings were twisted and flipped upside down. "*Il ne faut pas avoir des inquiétudes*," my translator would tell me. "Don't worry." Through the challenges, the fear, and the frustration that inevitably come with cross-cultural experiences, I thought back to what the canton chief had told me when I first arrived in the village about creating a partnership and mutual understanding between cultures. I was there to learn, and I quickly realized that my most enriching experiences would come from asking questions and participating in the local culture as much as possible. I had originally traveled with a research plan in mind, accompanied by particular questions I wanted to ask and issues I thought would be important to discuss with the community. After a somewhat rocky and inhibited start, I finally got comfortable with the interviews—speaking to my translator in French who would then relay information in the local language to the person being interviewed, and vice versa—and allowing them to deviate from what I had intended. I found that doing so gave me greater insight into Kabre culture and opened doors to more questions and areas of research. With few exceptions, people were generally excited about my project. They seemed proud of their culture and wanted to share their personal narratives and insights.

This engagement extended well beyond my formal project. I learned to prepare a local yam dish called *fufu* and made and sold local beer at the nearby market. I played soccer with my host brother and spent hours under the stars in the courtyard playing card games and telling stories with the entire family. I attended ceremonies to the rain spirit, participated in funeral rituals, and spent time in the fields with men's work collectives. By fully immersing myself in Kabre daily life, taking risks and letting go of my fear of failure, I accomplished more than I had imagined and created real relationships that have lasted beyond my stay in northern Togo. The community's unfailing optimism in the face of adversity taught me the value of working through all the challenges with which I am presented, regardless of how insurmountable they may appear at first.

Alexandra Middleton

On my last night in Togo in December 2012, I went to dinner with Dr. Patassi, one of the leading infectious disease physicians in the country, at a restaurant in the capital, Lomé. Patassi, as others call him, is Kabre and lived in the northern villages until he was twenty. He thus grew up using the same local medicines I studied during my fieldwork. Yet he left the villages to pursue biomedical training in Moscow before eventually returning to Lomé to practice. A few minutes into our conversation, I found myself explaining my project to him, telling him about my interest in local healing practices and the challenges of collaboration between biomedical clinics and the House Medical System (HMS) I researched in the north. His response, as I should have anticipated, was skeptical, but it still jolted me: “Why are you interested in that?”

I was thrown in part because his words resonated with those of my pre-med peers back at Duke who had queried me about my interest in studying non-biomedical forms of healing. In the two years since then, I had chosen not to pursue a career in medicine and instead to explore the anthropology of medical belief and practice, letting go of the idea (of both the doctor in Lomé and my Duke peers) that there might be a single truth by which others might be judged. My fieldwork, and the discourse of medical anthropology I tapped into, allowed me to see such views as epistemic, nested in histories and power plays. Part of my own development—as a thinker, an anthropologist, and a person—required holding on to this insight and moving past stark either-or dichotomies. In this sense, my work evolved with me.

Throughout, the research process for me involved a set of internal negotiations and justifications. Often I questioned whether I would end up contributing anything substantive by the end of my stay. In all honesty, much of the on-the-ground research process struck this very same vulnerable nerve. It frustrated and confused me. Especially at the outset, it felt meandering and unfounded, at times without direction. I quickly learned not to become too attached to any sort of schedule or agenda; at a moment's notice (and sometimes even without notice) it could be felled. Meetings were cancelled and rescheduled; interviewees were often absent or preoccupied with tending their crops and fields.

Furthermore, I quickly grew overwhelmed by the enormity and complexity of the indigenous medical system. I started out with a medical census of sorts but realized that two months would offer barely enough time to scrape the surface. I also realized that the community was reflexively oriented to this deep-rooted medical system and that, as an outsider, I could not expect to immediately understand, navigate, or conceptually inhabit it. Given these circumstances, my work was characterized by constant re-assessment and internal questioning, driven by a restless desire to figure out what would best serve the community itself and not just my own intellectual or personal curiosity.

In the midst of these disenchantments, I stumbled upon a partial realization that still continues to play itself out, even as I have returned to the United States. As I relaxed my rigid definition of “change” or “progress,” I realized that I would not be able to serve the community unless I really knew it. Even if I struggled to understand or even fully condone the use of local medicines, I could at least try to know the community whose lives depended on them. I consciously tried to be more present in my interactions with my family members and the community. I attended all of the ceremonies and funerals that I could. Instead of retiring to my room early, I stayed outside into the night playing cards with the village kids. I brewed the local drink (made by women) with Stephanie and sold it in the Farendé market, much to the delight of my neighbors. When the local musicians played, I applied the few West African dance moves I remembered from the dance class I took during the second semester of my freshman year and joined in the collective movement.

In addition to all of the shifts happening *within* me, I began to notice a shift in the responses of those *around* me. At the beginning, I imagine, the Kabre saw me (understandably) as something of a recluse and as a student who asked strange and seemingly obvious questions about traditional herbs, who stumbled through the local greetings and could hardly carry on a conversation in French. But as I invested more time and energy in my interactions, the divide began to disappear. Even the simple act of stopping on my way down the mountain to engage in a greeting with the toothless old woman who lived outside my homestead yielded smiles and, on my part, a deeper feeling of connection. Welcoming but inevitably detached hospitality morphed into coexistence and laughter.

If I were to attribute this budding intimacy and trust solely to my own efforts, that would be misleading and untrue. Even before I arrived in Kuwdé, a considerable measure of agency and trust was granted by virtue of my professor's rapport with this small community, built on his twenty-five years of fieldwork there. When I entered the village, I received a degree of trust and acceptance that I realize is probably rare in fieldwork and certainly in other areas of international engagement and volunteerism. I was able to ask questions and probe local knowledge in ways that probably would have taken years to establish on my own. For this I felt even more indebted to the community of Kuwdé and even more compelled to contribute something in return.

Since my return, I have repeatedly asked myself: what was the takeaway from my experience in Kuwdé? Among other things, I developed a true appreciation for the fact that change and progress come in modest, often immeasurable amounts. In the middle of an interview, one of the medical workers at the Case de Santé (Health Hut) said, "Thank you for your questions. We learn from them." Our interests as engaged "outsiders" with a desire to learn from the community drive their interests. Our investment in indigenous medicines lend a sort of local legitimacy to the system itself. Our interest in collaboration between the biomedical and local medical practices is, we hope, generating interchange and dialogue between the two, however slowly and subtly.

But on perhaps a more essential level, our presence had an additional effect, however modest. "When you bring your students here, it brings the village to life. No matter what our local struggles, things become sweeter," a village woman told our professor at our farewell ceremony. That sweetness (happiness?) is perhaps the most resonating affect I will take away from my time in Kuwdé. It is a different flavor from any I have seen or experienced in my life to this point. It is founded in people, not in acquisitions or individual accomplishments, money or hedonistic pleasures. It is the toothless smile of the old lady after I greet her in her own tongue, the euphoric giggle of a young child chirping from the tall grasses as I return a *bonjour*. In this place where survival and health are not one's own business but the business of an entire village, exchange and interchange yield the most enduring sense of fulfillment, purpose, and vitality.

Kelly Andrejko

The first day I set foot in the Hôpital du Bè, in Lomé, Togo's capital, my heart was about to beat out of my bright blue scrubs. I had just zoomed to the hospital on only my third motorcycle ride ever, and it felt as if all eyes in Lomé were on me. I took a deep breath and reminded myself why I was standing in the sweltering heat of an African summer, in the waiting room of an urban Togolese hospital. I had received a grant from Duke to travel to Togo's capital for eight weeks the summer after my sophomore year to conduct research about the intersection between biomedical and traditional medicine, as well as to shadow health professionals at the hospital. Nevertheless, all of the confidence I had conveyed in my grant proposals seemed to be evaporating as I looked around for the director of personnel with whom I was to check in. Quickly scanning the room, sweating bullets, I saw a person screaming with a green and furry infection on his leg. No, not him, I thought. I saw an authoritative-looking nurse in a striped red outfit glaring at me. No, not him. Then I saw a smiling man in white lab coat heading my way. That's him!

The day before, in a comfortably air-conditioned director's office, it had been carefully explained that my fellow Duke student, Camille, and I would be spending two weeks in each of the hospital's main units—gynecology, pediatrics, and general medicine—leaving the remaining two weeks up to us. Day one for me was a trip to the *sale d'accouchement* (birthing room).

As I was dropped off in the birthing room, I quickly remembered that my shadowing experience back home had been confined to the consultations of a pediatric neurologist, all neat and bloodless. I was instantly overwhelmed as I stepped into the stuffy, poorly ventilated birthing ward. Momentarily struck speechless by the birth occurring on one of five cloth-covered metal tables directly in front of me, I was broken out of my stupor by a midwife handing me a pair of gloves and a face mask and instructing me to take over for her. In my rusty French, I sputtered that I was there just to observe; I was not trained in any way to help with birthing. This would be a conversation I would have dozens more times at the hospital that summer, as no one could understand why I would travel to a hospital in urban Africa with no medical training. Saying no was one of the most difficult parts of my work at the hospital, as the doctors were clearly overwhelmed with patients, yet I knew I did not have the necessary knowledge to be of

use. In the birthing ward, the midwife looked utterly confused until the lady in the stall next to us started screaming in Ewe, the local language, that her baby was coming, and the midwife signaled for me to follow along.

Before I knew it there was a baby, washed and swaddled and placed on a counter in a side room; the midwife had again moved on, asking whether I wanted to feel intervaginally for the positioning of the baby in our next patient. As I adamantly shook my head no, I felt my old-school Nokia phone buzz in my front pocket. It was a text from Camille, who had been placed in a room mysteriously labeled "Small Surgeries." "How do you say 'throw-up' in French?" she wrote. All of the excitement in the birthing ward had left me a little queasy, and I was slightly relieved to know I was not the only one having difficulty adjusting to the extreme heat and pungent smell. Unfortunately, I was replying to the text at the exact moment the hospital's head of gynecology, whom the director of personnel could not locate earlier that morning for a proper introduction, chose to walk into the unit. With a scathing glare, she demanded to know who I was and what kind of professional I was, using a cell phone in her suite. I carefully tried to explain I was an American, there to conduct research and observe in the hospital, while my friend was sick in another service and did not speak much French, and . . . She cut me off with a glare, informed me again that phone use was unacceptable, and hurried off. At that point, I just hoped I would make it to lunch.

Luckily, my shadowing got much easier after the first day. For starters, I quickly discovered that the surgery and recovery rooms for C-sections were air-conditioned, and when I needed a break from the heat, the surgeons were more than happy to have someone to share their space with. As an added bonus, the efficiency, precision, and teamwork with which the surgeons worked was incredibly fun to watch tableside. So accustomed to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) laws back home, I was shocked that no patients were ever asked whether it was OK for me stand next to the operating table or to learn details about their private medical histories. The decisions of the surgeons in the hospital never appeared to be questioned directly by the patients, and as I was Caucasian and wearing scrubs (I honestly could not tell which mattered more), I was considered one of them.

My favorite days were spent in the cardiology clinic, held every Friday in a closet of a room used by a psychiatrist for the HIV/AIDS patients on

all other days of the week. That cardiology was my favorite came as a bit of a surprise to me, as I had no prior knowledge of or interest in the heart. Nevertheless, during mornings from day one the nurses entrusted me with taking the weights and histories of new patients. Although these were tasks of small importance, I always felt as if a great responsibility had been put on my shoulders—and was forever concerned, despite the reassurance of the nurses, that a piece of important information would be lost in my hesitant French transcription.

After the files for the day were complete, I would slip back to the consultation room to observe the patients' visits with the doctor. The cardiologist who staffed the weekly clinic was very young and energetic—a necessity, as he could see up to seventeen patients in the three hours he was at the hospital. The doctor was not bashful, either: after explaining to me that the local diet, which was very heavy in carbohydrates and oil, was responsible for the majority of obesity cases we were seeing, he exclaimed to a female patient, "You're too fat! I bet you crush your husband in bed!" It soon became painfully obvious that being a cardiologist in a poor country was challenging in ways that would be unimaginable in the United States. The hospital had no equipment for him to use: no electroencephalogram (EEG), no ultrasound, and some days even the blood pressure cuff was broken. Although he could prescribe medicine for his patients and make referrals to other clinics for tests, very few of them could actually afford anything aside from basic treatment because of the lack of insurance. While he would try to explain the importance of a balanced diet and daily exercise, he admitted that very few people would actually be able to make the necessary changes. Nevertheless, I was incredibly inspired by his work, coming back week after week, seeing the same patients, and trying to make whatever difference he could.

After the first two weeks spent getting my feet on the ground in the hospital, I began to use the afternoons to conduct interviews, both in the hospital and around town, for my research project. Almost all of my interviews had to be conducted with a local translator, as many people did not speak adequate French, and, as I quickly learned, my white skin created a cultural barrier that was often difficult to overcome. Even if the person I was speaking with spoke French, the presence of someone local helped the interviewee lose initial inhibitions. When conducting interviews throughout the city, I would often be invited into households and offered the only

seat and whatever refreshments the family had to provide. Similar to being at the hospital, most seemed confused about why I had chosen to come to Togo. "Peace Corps?" was a common question.

Nevertheless, everyone seemed to have something to say once I started asking for his or her opinion on health care. For some, the hospital represented the optimum standard of care—of European medicine and tests that were infallible. One of the most insistent and unexpected patrons of biomedical care I found was an older grandmother whose daughter had gone to medical school in Europe; subsequently, the *grand-mère* relied solely on the medicine her daughter mailed back. Others were quicker to mention the hospital's shortcomings—long waiting times, irritable doctors, and, of course, the cost. Most who leaned toward "traditional" routes for care were eager to get my opinion, to find out what I thought of these medicines. Just as I had my own stereotypes of them, they had theirs of me, assuming I looked down on traditional medicine—like all Americans, they imagined. For some, it was a surprise that I was attempting to be neutral about the issue.

Some of my favorite interviews were with the traditional medical practitioners. While I had conducted a lot of background research on the topic before the trip, interacting directly with these healers was what allowed me to see firsthand the many benefits of herbal medicine. My first interview with a healer, conducted a week into the trip, made the strongest impression on me. My translator and I really hit the jackpot when we knocked on the door of a shop in an area known to be a permanent place of business for many healers. Peeking our heads in, we saw a middle-aged woman reclining on a mattress to avoid the heat, surrounded by bottles of meticulously labeled natural products. She graciously offered us the only two chairs in the room and asked how she could help. As I explained my project and outlined the questions I had for her, she smiled and started to tell the story of the origins of her interest in medicine, listing reasons that sounded remarkably similar to my own. She became interested in traditional medicine as a child in southwestern Togo; while hanging out around the older healers, she would write down their cures in a little notebook so she could play healer when her own family members were ill. As she grew older, she received a formal three-year education in Benin; at this point in her story, she proudly pulled out her *diplôme d'aptitude à la pratique de médecine traditionnelle* and *diplôme de pharmacologie* for us to examine. After spending time

practicing in Benin, and then in Gabon, she returned to her homeland and set up the practice she runs today. Most of the patients she sees hear about her by word of mouth, following a diagnosis at the hospital and seeking supplementary or cheaper treatment. The majority of her patients visit for help with sexually transmitted diseases and infertility; as an example, she showed me a white powder, explaining that it should be mixed with food to increase the viability of sperm. The interview continued on in this vein for the next hour, as she carefully explained the inventory of her shop and how each plant was picked, dried, and crushed, then tested on herself for toxicity. I found it incredible there could be no labs, no government support, and no advertising, yet her business thrived.

For me, these stories of autonomy, determination, and tradition strongly embodied what I found to be the Togolese spirit of medicine. In a cardiology clinic where a Togolese doctor challenges tradition to get his patients to adapt their dietary habits or in the office of a traditional healer who embraces it, I observed how local medicine became a constant balance between the two practices. As the two categories of physicians existed independently of each other, they encountered many different challenges in their daily practices. Nevertheless, both clearly demonstrated their belief that they had the best interests of their patients in mind.

Benjamin Ramsey

I remember first hearing, during my childhood in France, about Médecins sans Frontières and how it sends doctors to crisis locations around the world. It seemed cool to think that a career of helping people might also be an adventure. Later, in high school, I was tugged in the same direction by the documentary *Invisible Children*. The film's directors, three college students from California, dropped into Uganda planning to document the war in Darfur but instead encountered child soldiers. I wanted to be like those students. I wanted to make a difference. I became active in my high school's Invisible Children club, but by the time I entered college, I was tired of simply fundraising. After reading Tracy Kidder's *Mountains beyond Mountains*, I became interested in the idea of health care as a human right, a more concrete version of the Invisible Children's principle that "where you live shouldn't determine whether you live." I wanted to be on the ground, ensuring that my time and effort were truly making a difference. Despite the

presence of significant health inequalities here at home, I wanted to make a difference abroad, outside my comfort zone. My excuse to myself was that those in developing countries need help more than Americans. And I wanted to go to an “exotic” locale, where I could be of help.

“Ben’s going to Africa this summer!” Africa. No, not Togo. Africa. How could my family or I have had expectations of Togo, when none of us had even located the country on a map until we heard of Duke’s Togo program? For all I knew beforehand, Togo could have been in the Caribbean. I chose to pursue going to Togo only because of the program’s connection with global health and the fact that Togo is Francophone. My only experience with Africa prior to Togo consisted of reading books such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* and viewing Hollywood films such as *Blood Diamond*, *The Last King of Scotland*, and *Hotel Rwanda*. Africa for me was a wilderness full of pickup trucks bearing blood-thirsty, machine gun-wielding warlords. Africa was rampant with corruption and crises. Africa was thirsty, and this thirst could be quenched even by a freshman college student.

After arriving in Togo, our group of students spent several days getting oriented in Lomé. I remember noticing large lizards crawling all over the place, like squirrels back home. I saw how all buildings, even the least wealthy, were built of concrete. And, of course, I was amazed at the relative absence of white Europeans and Americans—and of the resulting awkward eye contact with other expatriates. I was excited to head north by the time we loaded up in my professor’s car for the day-long trip. But why was I so eager to get out of the capital? I wanted to see the “real” Africa. I had explicitly chosen not to stay in the capital, instead wanting to spend the summer in a rural village with no running water or electricity.

As the weeks went by, I began to truly enjoy my summer. I learned to love rain—the way it cooled things down and its sound on my tin roof. As the corn and sorghum stalks grew, I became closer with my neighbors and familiar with faces at the market. I started to genuinely appreciate the people, how even in an area as poor as the village where I lived people were full of life and energy. As I met more and more individuals and became, albeit superficially, a part of the community, I began to imagine how villages of people, just like the one in which I lived, are what make up developing countries. My personal relationships reinforced my desire to make a difference. Developing countries were no longer dots on the global map in high

school history class. These global inequalities affect life at the individual, personal level.

I now realize how naïve I was in my reasons for going to Togo. Although I still enjoy visiting countries for the first time, adventure is much less of a factor in my pursuit of a career in global health. The personal relationships I formed while I was in Togo tore apart my Western stereotypes of Africa. In my mind, Africa is no longer a wild backdrop for crises and corresponding do-gooders. Africa is full of individuals—individuals just like my host parents and siblings.

Maria Cecilia Romano

I arrived in Lomé at twilight in early May. I remember looking out of the window of the plane and immediately registering that I was not flying into a glittering national capital. Instead of the familiar highways of red and white and the sprawling seas of winking lights, I saw a vast expanse of rusty brown, dotted with trees and what seemed to be small fires in the distance. The pinks and oranges in the sky were quickly fading to deep purples and blues, and before I knew it the door of the plane was opening. A wave of overwhelmingly warm, sticky, and humid air billowed in. “Welcome to Togo!” I had no idea what adventures awaited me, no way to know that the next two months would be the most formative, fulfilling, and memorable of my life to date.

In our now entirely too warm sweatpants and sweatshirts, two other Duke students and I were challenged in navigating the Gnassingbé Eyadéma International Airport—not because it was big but because our failure to pay the immigration officers a bribe meant we were the last in the crowd of people to receive our visas. Finally, we were handed back our passports, and we walked outside to meet the smiling faces of Professor Piot, who later insisted we call him Charlie, and Fidèle, a young and vibrant woman who acted as our guide in Lomé and friend throughout the trip. Soon we were joined by the other four students on the program, and after a few days of orientation and supply purchasing, and many Youki soft drinks, fried plantains, and “Lomé salads” (a specialty dish made with lettuce, pasta, eggs, and mayonnaise) later, five of us headed to the north, where we would be conducting research and living with host families in the villages of Kuwdé and Farendé.

The drive to the north was a long seven hours of dusty, bumpy roads, but when we finally arrived, I was taken aback by the beauty around me. As it was the rainy season, the tall grasses in the plains and the enormous teak tree leaves were electric green with new life. We lugged our backpacks up the rocky trail to Kuwdé, and after the sacrifice of a white chicken to honor our arrival, we all ended up in someone's homestead drinking *sulum*, the local beer, out of hollowed-out calabashes. A growing crowd of terrified yet curious children, enthusiastic teens, men tired from cultivating all day, and old women wearing far fewer items of clothing than I am used to seeing poured in to greet us with a friendly *Alafea weil* ("how's your health?"). I felt like I was in a movie or a picture from my seventh-grade social studies textbook. I was mentally and physically exhausted, yet exhilarated and eager to start learning everything I could about this beautiful and mysterious place.

My intention is not to distort or romanticize. There were definitely things that took time to get used to: the spicy food that seemed to turn my stomach inside out; the fact that I had to brush my teeth with bottled water to avoid getting sick; the many, many, many varieties of bugs that liked to visit my room; the periodic torrential downpours; the heat; the cold bucket showers; and the lack of electricity all reminded me how strange this place was compared with my home back in the United States.

But soon the strange began to seem familiar and the familiar, strange. I stopped reaching for the nonexistent light switch when entering my room at my homestay; I learned to wash my clothes by hand; and I became accustomed to waking up at sunrise and going to sleep soon after sunset. By contrast, encounters with commonplace luxuries such as SUVs, ice (and cold things in general), and toilets became entirely out of the ordinary. It even became jarring to encounter other Caucasians. "Seriously, what are they doing here?" we would ask in unison whenever we saw other foreigners in nearby Kara or at "our" market in Farendé. I gained a new mom, a new grandmother, five new sisters, and five new cousins—a family that stole my heart and with whom I keep in touch to this day. People in the village began to greet me by my Kabre name, Essosolom, which means "liked by God," and I learned enough of the local language to be able to greet them back. I also became passionate about my research within the community, and as people came to learn what I wanted to study and why, many went out of their way to support my efforts. Even though the excited choruses of

"Anasara! Anasara! Bye, bye!" (White person! White person! Goodbye!) from village children never really subsided, I slowly began to forget that I did not belong there, and Farendé became my home, a home I hope to return to one day soon.

For my research, I knew I wanted to explore the migration of youth out of the village, but I had no idea how exactly I would do that. I had read some material about fieldwork methods before I arrived, but I mostly learned by doing. The following are some of the most crucial lessons I learned about field research. I have tried to include only those that might be universally applicable and not location-specific, but they will be most relevant for students doing research in small communities with whose culture and language they are unfamiliar. Half of the fun was figuring these things out for myself, but I hope that these musings might still be helpful for other students living in new environments and conducting community-based research for the first time.

1. *Learn everything you can about the location you will be in.* This should include the predominant ethnic groups and religions, the government structure and leadership, the current economic situation, cultural norms, the health care and education systems, and anything else you can get your hands on. Even if it does not seem immediately relevant to your research topic, you will be surprised at how interconnected all of these things are. For me and the other students I traveled to Togo with, it was helpful to take an independent study with our professor the semester preceding our trip, but in retrospect I still wish I had researched even more before arriving. The more you know, the better off you will be. Your background knowledge will help put things into context once you start gathering information. If you will not have frequent access to a computer, consider printing out some literature that you can refer back to when necessary.

2. *Make an effort to learn the local language.* Learn what you can beforehand, and once you arrive continue to ask people to teach you key words and phrases. Stop worrying about getting things wrong and sounding foolish. Practice with locals. You will improve faster and it will mean a lot to them that you are trying. In fact, people are likely to be more willing to help you and answer your questions. If you hear the same words come up again and again in interviews or conversations around you, ask what they mean. Ask how to say things you wish you could convey to people, even if it is just

"This fufu is delicious" or "How was the market?" or "No, I am not married (or looking to be married)."-A little genuine effort can go a long way. It can make all the difference.

3. Put some thought into your research design. A useful way to start is by producing a map—a strategy by which you ask multiple people in your community, young and old, men and women, to help you "map out" the village, highlighting the location of schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure; water sources; different religious or ethnic groups; the homes of important people; main roads; marketplaces; and whatever else they deem important. The objective is to get a sense of how life works in your community, how and where people interact, who has access to which resources, and so on. If your research design includes interviews, make sure you talk to a representative sample, including people in minority groups and people who live in far corners of your village that are difficult to get to. You do not want repetitive information from a homogenous group. Strive to learn about your topic from many different viewpoints. You will learn more, and your research will be more accurate, even if the complexity means the data take longer to analyze and understand.

4. Foster a good relationship with your translator. If you are working with a translator, put time and energy into getting to know him or her, even if you do not become the best of friends. The quality of information you are able to get will reflect this effort. Get a sense for where he or she comes from and what kinds of biases he or she might have based on class, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and so on. Ask yourself how this might affect your interviews with certain people and plan accordingly. In general, it is useful to just be aware of these potential biases so that you can separate opinions he or she might express from more objective information. Remind your translator that you want him or her to *translate*, not *interpret*. At the end of the interview, you can ask about his or her opinions, impressions of the interviewee, whether he or she trusted the information given, and any other questions you have. Take what the translator says with a grain of salt, but this commentary is often useful and very interesting. Further, the translator's job is an extremely difficult one, so be aware of how he or she is doing and take breaks as needed, especially if you are working in a difficult environment.

5. Set up interviews in advance. If there are specific individuals you want to speak to, seek them out and ask to schedule a convenient time to return

and interview them. Be mindful of the fact that people are busy with their daily tasks and will not always be ready or willing to be asked questions when it happens to be convenient for you. If they are willing to talk to you right away, make sure they know how much time the interview will take.

6. Speaking of time, do not expect people to show up on time, or at all. Indians call this "Indian standard time"; Thai people call it "Thai time"; and the Togolese call it "West Africa time." Being late is not seen as, or intended to be, disrespectful; it is just a cultural difference. Sometimes things come up in people's daily lives that are more urgent than the interview they promised you. Perhaps your translator has a family emergency that he or she needs to take care of before helping you. Be flexible. Do not despair. Keep trying.

7. Build rapport. Put yourself in your interviewee's shoes. If a stranger came into your house and started asking you potentially invasive questions about your life, health, family, or other things, you would probably be a little hesitant. Make sure you introduce yourself and explain why you are doing the work you are doing and how you will keep your subject's responses confidential. People might not want to talk to you. Respect that. If they do, make sure they feel comfortable with you. Start out by asking them about themselves, their family, and what they do; then continue into your actual research questions. Know that people might not tell you the truth, especially about sensitive issues. Getting to the bottom of things might require triangulation of information with other people in the village or a re-interview, or both. Have patience.

8. Be honest. If you do not think the results of your research will help your interviewee or his or her community directly, immediately, or at all, do not lie and say they will. It is common to be asked questions such as, "Why are you asking me this?" or "How will this help me?" In these situations, I remember immediately feeling terrible about what I was doing and useless because I did not have the power, resources, or depth of knowledge to really fix the problem I was learning about. My professors and mentors have since advised me not to feel bad or ashamed but simply to explain to my interviewees that I am a student and that I am trying to learn from them and their community. Be sure to break down any misconception that you are better or smarter or more able than your interviewees. They have knowledge about a particular problem you are interested in learning more about. Do not belittle them or let them belittle themselves. Sometimes I like to add that it is my hope to one day know enough about this topic

to be able to inform policymakers directly or indirectly in their efforts to address it.

9. *Prepare to hear things that might be upsetting.* I had to hold back tears once as a woman in Farendé told me that six of her eleven children had died and the other five had migrated and left the village. Her youngest daughter left with a hustler when she was eleven and was “treated like a slave” and sexually abused by her employer until she was found and brought back to the village. Every situation is different, so there is no uniformly tactful way to handle difficult situations, but putting down your pen and notebook, looking your interviewee in the eyes, and showing your sincere empathy is always a good place to start.

10. *Let people ask you questions.* My favorite part of interviews, and something I highly recommend, is to conclude by letting interviewees ask me questions. I tell them the questions can be about anything—my life, culture, home, school, and so on. Expect them to be curious and be ready to be honest. After all, the experience should not be one-sided. You should offer, not just extract, information. This is sometimes informative and often hilarious. In field interviews I have been asked why I and “my people” are so white, where the water in my home comes from, and why I am not married yet. (I am currently twenty-one.) The questions asked really show what that person cares about and speak to her or his worldview.

11. *Write everything down—gut reactions, questions to ask later, and suddenly lucid insights.* I know I personally forget these things if I do not, so I always, ALWAYS have pen and paper handy. Try to write about your findings intermittently and adapt the entries as you continue to learn more. Getting your preliminary conclusions down on paper early on will help you identify holes in your research, questions to which you still need answers, and ways to proceed. If possible, type up and organize your fieldwork and interview notes at the end of every day while they are still fresh. This way, things that you remember from your interactions but may have forgotten to jot down will still be in your memory. I also recommend keeping a personal journal. Your experiences will be so new and different—and, at times, overwhelming—that you will need a way to reflect.

12. *Consider collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.* I got the most information out of my qualitative interviews, but in the end I realized that I really wanted to know the quantitative scope of youth migration from Farendé, so I did a door-to-door survey of a percentage of the homes in each

of the three sectors of the village to try to map out how many young people (age nine to twenty-five) had left in the previous five years, where they had gone, and for what purpose. This information is often painstaking to collect, but it allows you to make numerical comparisons, chart and graph information, and examine your findings in a different way. The analysis of your quantitative information can also inform or change the questions you ask in subsequent interviews.

13. *Make use of useful people.* If someone is particularly friendly or helpful, accept her or his support. A reliable contact who knows the community well is invaluable. He or she is likely to be an important source of information, but even if the individual does not have the specific answers you are looking for, he or she can probably put you in touch with someone who does. Having a local on your side also shows others in the community that you can be trusted.

14. *Du courage.* Sometimes it will be too rainy or too cold or too hot or too windy or too bug-infested to conduct interviews effectively. Sometimes people will be hard to find or uncooperative. Sometimes crying babies or meddlesome goats or other things will get on your nerves and make it hard to hear and think straight during interviews. Do not get discouraged. In the end, you will be proud of how you have pushed yourself. All the same, be kind to yourself. There is only so much you can get done in a week, two months, four months, or even a year. Distinguished academics spend whole decades studying single communities and are still learning new things. Setting unachievable goals will make you very unhappy. Follow your gut and follow your leads. If you encounter something strange or something you do not understand, ask about it. Then ask some more, or ask someone else. There is a solution to most every obstacle.

15. *Respect cultural norms.* If it is not appropriate to go out after dark, or consume alcohol, or wear shorts, or wear shoes inside certain places, do not. Women especially must take care to dress and act appropriately, as different cultures have very different notions of what is and is not culturally acceptable for women to do and wear. Sometimes it is frustrating, but ignoring these cultural guidelines could have serious repercussions in regard to your work and your relationships with people in the community. It is also very easy to be judgmental about things that are culturally acceptable—among other things, corporal punishment, child marriages, polygamy, and four-year-olds drinking beer with total impunity. Be as open-minded as

possible and put your own cultural biases aside. You are not there to pass judgment on people; you are there to learn from them.

16. *Take part in community activities and remember to have fun.* Your experiences outside interviews and formal research can be equally enriching. Play soccer or traditional games with children and other young people. Attend marriages and funerals and other religious ceremonies and rites of passage. Try cultivating in the fields, or pounding yams into *fufu*, or carrying water from the well on your head, or sweeping the courtyard with a bundle of reeds, or whatever else might make up daily life in your research community. Share your culture, too. Show pictures of your family; cook food for people to try; let them listen to your music. Remember that you are representing your culture: the people you encounter probably will never have interacted with someone like you. One of my favorite moments of living in my homestay in Farendé occurred when I cooked chocolate cake for my host family. The Togolese diet does not include sugar, and they went nuts for my Nutella, M&Ms, and candle-covered masterpiece. We had a great time figuring out how to cook it within the limitations, which included the lack of a real oven.

17. *Give back.* Even if I could not solve the problems of youth migration, child labor, and child trafficking, I wanted to leave the village better off in some way. I did not want to leave people wondering and asking what, exactly, I had been doing in their midst. Even more so, I did not want them to feel as if I had taken their life stories and personal information and simply disappeared. We decided to organize a conference about youth migration and to include teachers, parents, young men and women, chiefs, religious leaders, and others we had spoken to during our two-month stay. The idea was to give everybody a chance to voice their opinions and learn from one another and from our findings. Although the conference may not have gone exactly as intended (there was sensitive information that people were unwilling to discuss publicly), I think it brought to light an important issue and got people thinking and talking about how they could address youth migration as a community. In addition, I decided to donate the laptop and a solar panel I had bought with my grant money to be used jointly by three groups in the community that work toward village development, women's issues, and education. I also left a written report of my findings in French so people could read about what I had been able to discover. Your contribution can be anything you see fit. Organize a meeting, a dinner, a dance,

or even an exhibition of pictures you have taken. Show members of the community what you have learned from them, and take the opportunity to thank them.

Working in Togo was one of the best experiences of my life. I pushed myself to adapt to a completely foreign environment and really came to love my new home. I grew a lot as a person and made friendships that I truly treasure. It was rewarding to study a topic that was important to this community, and one that few have really explored at the micro-level of a single village. I loved my first taste of research in the field so much that I went on to do very similar work in India and China. I would encourage anybody to take advantage of a similar opportunity, and my advice, in sum, is to have fun and to not get discouraged by the many challenges you will encounter. Your perseverance will be well worth it in the end.