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2023 SKJ Pre-Dissertation Fellowship Report

On the morning of July 1, 2023, I landed in Heathrow Airport ready to begin the first leg of my preliminary dissertation research. My 28 days stay in England went by faster than I expected, after which I left London for Accra to complete the second part of the preliminary research. This shuttling between continents— from North America to Europe to Africa and then back to North America— in a little under two months is a privilege that very few students have, and I am honored to have received the SKJ Award to offset the cost and facilitate my smooth research experience. This preliminary dissertation research has indeed been tremendous to my dissertation topic. I am a PhD student in the African History program researching intra-Africa migration and how internal diasporas shape our understanding of the African continent and its peoples. More specifically, I am tracing the making of one such internal diaspora in Accra, a town called Nima, and how its residents shaped the city as it is known in African (urban) history.

I arrived in England with a set agenda: visit the National Archive in Kew and the special collections in the School of Oriental and African Studies, explore the archives in the British Library, and present my findings from an earlier preliminary research at the Urban History Journal Conference which was convened at the University Leicester. I did not stray much from this agenda, but what I did learn was how expansive the archival research process gets as you look through endless catalogues that redirect you from one archive to another and from one borough in the city to the next. I was very open to the many directions that the new findings, particularly in the National Archive, took me geographically, in terms of where else to find related and useful materials, and in terms of the central themes of my dissertation topic. By the end of my stay I had visited other places that were not on my original list including the Black Cultural Archives where an exhibition on the Windrush Generation was ongoing and the Imperial War Museum with its remarkable archive which houses both primary and secondary data that were important to an intended chapter in my dissertation on migrants in the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF). Having extensively scoured all of the archives and libraries I planned to visit, I spent my last week synthesizing the data I had collected and making final trips to confirm or follow-up on new ideas for future visits. I left London on the evening of July 29, and after a 2 hours and 55 minutes layover in Casablanca I arrived in Accra at the crack of dawn.

My time in Accra was spent conducting oral interviews and carrying out archival research. Most of the archival research was done in the first and last weeks of my visit, and in-between those

weeks I relocated to Nima for a two-week stay while I conducted my interviews. I paid my old research participants regular visits and snowballed for new ones. It was an exciting period for me because staying in the town allowed me a level of familiarity that was absent during my previous visits when I used to commute from my family home some 10km from Nima to conduct interviews. By the third day of my stay I was known to many residents in the town who became more open to me and very interested in my research topic. In the days that I stayed in Nima, I conducted interviews early in the morning or at night depending on my research participants' availability. This contributed to my ability to interview and engage with a lot more research participants than I would have had I lived outside of the town. Nima was less than 20 minutes from the central business district by trotro (the commercial minivan) and so in the afternoons, and on days when my research participants were not available, I went to the National Archive which was in the same vicinity as the Information Services Department and had a sizeable archival collection mostly photos on the early days of independence. In one striking image I found in the Information Services Department, Ghana had just passed the Aliens Compliance Order and many foreign nationals from neighboring African countries were en route back to their countries because they had been mandated to leave Ghana. Such visual evidence of these moments in the country's past serves as continuous reminders of Ghana's complicated relationship with intra-African migrants. The other key archival sites that I visited included the Institute of African Studies Library and the Balme Library, both of which are on the University of Ghana, Legon, campus.

At the time of my trip to England, I had started reading for my comprehensive exam which is scheduled for December this year and so my time in Accra was also spent assessing the data I had collected and figuring out how that will shape my dissertation proposal for the exam. Since my return to the US on August 28, I have continued this process of synthesizing the data and incorporating my findings in my proposal, meeting with my advisors and committee members to discuss the trajectory of my dissertation in light of the new data, many of which promise to truly reshape my dissertation topic. With that said, I want to end my report with a reiteration of the crucial role the SKJ award played in my preliminary research and my overall PhD journey. As I prepare to take my exam I am confident about my dissertation topic and proposal as much as I am about going back to the field next year for my research fieldwork, and I owe much of that to the benefactors and facilitators of the award.