

REPRESENTING GHANIAN CULTURE TO A GLOBAL AUDIENCE: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE 21ST CENTURY TRAVELER

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RACE, GENDER, AND LANGUAGE IN GHANIAN VIDEOS AND TRAVEL VLOGS: VIGNETTE ONE

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

RACE, GENDER, AND LANGUAGE IN GHANIAN VIDEOS AND TRAVEL VLOGS



2. Ete sɛn?

How's it? | How are you?

Twi Speaking Lessons

25 Must-Know Twi Phrases for Learners and Tourists | Conversational Twi | Learn Akan



I am fine.

Me ho ye.
(formal)

TravelBank saves time & money
Don't make employees wait to be reimbursed for business expenses. Automate ...
travelbank.com

3:10 / 9:57

@goldcoastdebty

RACE, GENDER, AND LANGUAGE IN GHANIAN VIDEOS AND TRAVEL VLOGS

- These videos can be seen as acts of resistance – breaking the mold of the anglophone hold on a former colony. Both creators are making a space for a Ghanaian language to be taught and thrive
- If we want to decolonize ourselves and decenter whiteness and imperialism, travelers must learn some of the local language.
- Because of the virtual world, it has never been easier to find resources to learn a language or even some basic words or phrases. Traditionally with African countries, it has been white missionaries or white linguists owning these languages and using them for scientific study or proselytizing.
- Therefore, these Ghanaian content creators should be celebrated for teaching their languages online and giving the world access to them as well as thriving online, resisting, and rewriting a majoritarian story around language and travel.

RACE, GENDER, AND LANGUAGE IN GHANIAN VIDEOS AND TRAVEL VLOGS


- Content is out there, but intersectionality should be the norm and expectation, and the travel industry needs to support it at the highest level.
- These videos provide a counterstory to the narrative that travel is only for cisgendered, straight, able bodied, wealthy, white people. When we consider content creation, intersecting identities need to be at the forefront in terms of gender, race, ability, language, and sexuality.
- As a white woman and educator, I need to do better. I need to be more aware of my own positionality and look for content that is more intersectional and help promote that content. I will be more aware of seeking out more intersectionality in videos, sharing them on my social media, and encouraging my students to do the same.
- I can encourage outlets to promote these videos by liking them, subscribing, or even lobbying prominent travel outlets to promote more intersectional content.



SHOPPING AS COUNTERSTORY: ELLE LOKKO, THE STORE AND INSTAGRAM: VIGNETTE TWO

- Why do we want all these people from ‘shithole countries’ coming here?” -Donald Trump
- In 2022, I’m at the Japanese Consul General’s house for dinner. I’m carrying a clutch, and as I walk around everyone is complimenting me on it to which I reply, “Thanks I got it in Ghana.”




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SHOPPING AS COUNTERSTORY: ELLE LOKKO, THE STORE AND INSTAGRAM:








33 likes



ellelokko #nilhane x #bissaheritage
 #handbags and #lamps


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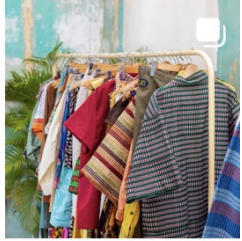











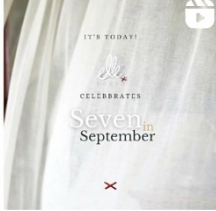






Most evidently.



SHOPPING AS COUNTERSTORY: ELLE LOKKO, THE STORE AND INSTAGRAM:

- The store is counterstory within Ghana which is known for being a patriarchal and morally conservative society, especially around LGBT+ issues. The store is owned by a young woman who is global, stylish, trilingual, and successful. Regarding LGBT+, on Instagram, they often push the boundaries of gender, including men in dresses or carrying purses.
- The physical store and its online presence are examples of what Kishonna Gray calls black digital feminism, which is political and resistant, and where there is simultaneous engagement with the digital and the physical to amplify voices which have always existed but need to be heard. In fact, by promoting African designers and models, it shows that fashion is not just something that white people do but is global, African, and exciting.
- Finally, I would argue that Elle Lokko is a counterstory in terms of what many travelers might expect in terms of shopping in Ghana. This is not a shithole store in a shithole country because Ghana is not that in the first place. Those thoughts are steeped in white supremacy. In fact, this store could be in Tokyo, New York or Paris. In fact, I wish it were in Chicago. It is one of my favorite boutique stores in the world, mainly because of the items you can buy, but also because of the story it tells.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: VIGNETTE THREE

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

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS



A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

- After much rumination, I don't think not posting, which is what I ended up doing, is the answer. I have tried to speak about Ghana every opportunity I am given, but I think I need to do more.
- Reflecting on what to post and asking permission are the first steps, but that cannot be the only way. I've been thinking about having some conversations around this with others I traveled with to hear their opinions and ideas.
- Because I often travel with students, I would like to come up with or look for a heuristic for them to think about before they post videos, blogs, and pictures. I think even having a conversation with students about these issues is worthwhile.
- Just like risk management and sustainability, how you represent the culture you travel to in different spaces is part of being a responsible 21st century traveler.

CONCLUSION

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

CONCLUSION

- I will say this: every American should go to Ghana. It's an incredible country and worthy to be on anyone's bucket list. It's safe, rich in culture, music, and language, and full of incredible, kind, and funny people. Most people are at least bilingual. One of the coolest world festivals is held there called the Chale Wote Street Art Festival. Now on my bucket list! I often dreamed about living in Accra while I was there. It's not a shithole country. It is a cradle of culture, civilization, and rhetoric. Americans need to open their minds and stop centering themselves. Why does rhetoric start with Europe and whiteness? Why not Ghana? These thoughts are not new, but bare repeating. Go there, go there, go there.

CONCLUSION

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

CONCLUSION

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