REFLECTIONS ON GHANA

Jack, you arrived in Ghana in March 1962 and what did you find?

Initially the Caldwell family settled into an old colonial bungalow in Achimota, outside Accra and several miles from Legon, which was the old University College of the Gold Coast campus and resided in a forest of its own. It was there that we experienced the arrival of the searing Harmattan wind from the Sahara and not much later the Monsoon arrived with force. On the evening we arrived we were confronted by a mighty clash between two Ghanaians with cutlasses drawn. One was the servant who had attached himself to the empty house when we first arrived. The other turned out to be Prof Walter Birmingham’s old cook, Kodja, a man of infinite resourcefulness who had got word from the Birminghams (which was amazing as we had only just left them in Leicester University) that we were in need of a cook. With some apprehension we took Kodja on but he was to serve us mightily in our time in Ghana. He enjoyed nothing so much as travelling around Ghana on field trips and gathering ideas, experiences and cuttings from various cassava and yam plants with which he then experimented on his own plot of land and cross pollinated to achieve better results. In his own way, he was Ghana’s answer to Australia’s own plant scientist, William Farrer, but with the staples of cassava and yam rather than wheat. He also influenced my thinking about the dynamics of the West African family as he had four wives and numerous children.

The Ghana we landed in was remarkably optimistic and cheerful. It did not remain quite so optimistic thereafter, at least at the political level, but it was always cheerful. The exuberance of West Africa knows no equivalent even in East or southern Africa but Ghana has as well a very cheerful acceptance of plurality which means that there are fewer tensions than might be expected. Nor are there the racial strains that came with white settlement in Kenya and southern Africa. The most cheerful occasion I recall was one evening while driving through Ghana’s Western Region where we necessarily came to a stop as hundreds of pulsating dancing women swamped the car and we were coerced out to participate in mass dancing, all set about with the deafening beat of African drums. There is a certain frenzy that comes about from wildly uninhibited and all absorbing concentration on dancing which can be somewhat intimidating as darkness falls. The hundreds of women were dressed in a uniform shade of flamboyant pink, a colour shared by the flamingo. Typical of Ghana, these were the women of the Christian Temperance movement. They danced frenetically to the rhythmic sound of Methodist hymns but it took us awhile to hear the underlying melodic line.

All of this came as something of a surprise. To some degree, in those days, our view of Africa had been more shaped by Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* than by anything else. This was not helped by the recent events in the Congo and perhaps the Mau Mau in Kenya before that. However, it was more the thought that poverty and undeniable hunger should leave people feeling miserable – after all the word *kwashiorkor* for a condition of severe protein malnutrition is a Ghanaian word. But, as Ghana demonstrated, such is not the case.
When you arrived at the University of Ghana what did you do?

The Demography post was attached to the Sociology Department, initially under the headship of Nana de Graft-Johnson. From Frank Lorimer’s time the Demography Unit had provided a Demography major for second and third year Sociology students. I also ran a Masters program in Demography. Both the undergraduate and graduate students were subsequently heavily involved with the research effort. Three of these students, Pat Ohadike, Charles Ejiohu and Sam Gaisie, subsequently undertook PhDs at the ANU.

The research program, consisting of eight surveys, was developed to illuminate some of the findings of the 1960 Census. However, during the period of fieldwork, the Census results were not yet available but the sample frame was. The surveys sought to extend knowledge of the population of Ghana and of some of its social and economic characteristics. The research program as a whole was funded by the Population Council.

Underpinning your own research you mention the importance of the 1960 Census of Ghana. Why was this undertaking regarded as a priority by Ghana?

I have said before that an independent Ghana was keen to study itself. The 1960 Census gave it the opportunity to provide the basic demographic backbone to a wider investigation of many parts. Some of these aspects were geographic – getting to know one’s own landscape, and this featured heavily in revised school curriculum. Some of it informed African Studies, which played a pivotal role in independent Africa and provided a basis for the development of Pan-Africanism. Much of it was intended to provide data to underpin the Seven Year Development Plans which played a key role in post-colonial development and, to some degree, the Census made up for the deficiencies of the Vital Registration system as well. The independent African countries spent vastly more per capita in price parity terms to carry out their censuses than did the developed world. Censuses were a national priority. It would not take long, however, for the Census findings to be at odds with the expectations of politicians and in some African countries the findings were drastically modified or indeed Census results themselves were sometimes pulped.

Although the detailed census findings were not released until after I had published my research, the early tabulations confirmed my own research findings and this was gratifying. The undertaking of the census had a particular advantage to me as it had created the climate in Ghana, and particularly amongst my students, that demography, and the collection of demographic data, was important. I worked very closely with my students in framing the research issues, the sampling methodologies, interviewing techniques and procedures, question design and in interpreting the results. We workshopped ideas around the clock and the students supervised local area interviewing teams. Without their input I could never have developed the colloquial style of questions that were to overcome the potential sensitivities of many of the research issues. Several of the students had been directly involved with the 1960 Census. Indeed, on some sampling techniques and aspects of their society students often taught me. I also have Dov Friedlander, my predecessor, to thank for the rigorous grounding that he had previously provided them on demographic statistical methodology.

I should add, as an afterthought for my last piece on why the Population Council chose Ghana for funding a demographic post. I talked about Frank Lorimer’s role and David Glass and LSE but as much as anything else, it had to do with President Nkrumah’s personal commitment to a demographic post in the University, support of which reassured the Council.
According to *Wikipedia*, the eminent black American sociologist and co-author of *Black Metropolis* (Chicago University Press, 1945)¹ St Clair Drake met Kwame Nkrumah in the forties, while undertaking research in Wales into African migration to Britain. As I recall, he once told me that he met Nkrumah at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where Nkrumah was studying for his first degree. This was in the late thirties. Whatever the truth of the matter, there was considerable contact between them subsequently and eventually St Clair Drake agreed to take up the post of head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Ghana, which he did periodically between 1958 and 1961². He played an important role in shaping Nkrumah’s policy positions, particularly on Pan-Africanism, not only during the period of his tenure but also previously, in the lead up to Ghanaian independence³. In his roles as spiritual advisor on Pan-Africanism and as a personal friend of Nkrumah, he advised on the need for expert demographic analysis of the forthcoming census of Ghana. This required a demographic post in the University to train demographers to be able to analyse the census results. Drake also visited the Population Council in New York advising them too of this need and seeking their help with both funding and recruiting for the position. So when Frank Lorimer was urging action on the Council, it dovetailed neatly with St Clair Drake’s plea, and both entreaties came forward within the context of Nkrumah’s support and Princeton’s desire to strengthen its demographic research reach into Africa.

**You threw yourself into demographic research in Ghana. Your first published research on Africa appeared in *A Study of Contemporary Ghana* which came out in 1967. What did this reveal?**

I had published a couple of articles ahead of the book coming out, but yes, the first major statement was in *A Study of Contemporary Ghana*. It was notionally edited by Birmingham, Neustadt and Omaboe and gave very little recognition to the actual authors. I wrote the majority of the second volume *Some Aspects of Social Structure*, in fact almost three-quarters of the text, which rested on the findings of the eight Population Council funded surveys and the first findings of the 1960 census. It laid out much of the demographic structure of Ghana and drew also from various other sources, including United Nations projections and such surveys as Friedlander and Raymond Smith, together with a study undertaken by Meyer Fortes. These sources allowed me to construct estimates on fertility, mortality, growth and immigration. From these it was evident that Ghana’s fertility was high and stationary, mortality was falling rapidly, and the growth of the population was about 3.5% per annum. Unlike the Developed world’s experience in the late nineteenth century, fertility showed little sign of declining despite the very significant fall in mortality rates.

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¹ It was the landmark study of race and urban life with the field work done in the late 1930s. It was an historical and sociological account of the people of the Chicago’s South Side, the classic black urban ghetto.

² While retaining his professorship at Roosevelt University in Chicago, a position he held between 1946 and 1968. Subsequently he was head of the African and African American Studies program at Stanford University from 1969 until his retirement in 1976.

³ Context is important here. Nkrumah spent several years being educated at Lincoln University (Pennsylvania), a black American college where ideas of black advancement were important. St Clair Drake’s father had emigrated from Barbados to the United States and there became a Baptist minister. He also became an international organiser for Marcus Garvey’s *Universal Negro Improvement Association*, which disseminated the views of its founder. Marcus Garvey’s views were to pervade African Independence movements, partly because he had championed the cause of black nationalism as an International movement and not one narrowly focussed on black US domestic concerns. The *Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World*, announced by the Association in 1920, perhaps kick-started the black consciousness movement into being a worldwide struggle and one that was not limited to American civil rights but included the wider struggle for African Independence as well.
Your next publication was a study on the Ghanaian elite. Why them?

It was partly the nature of British and French rule in West Africa. Both imperial powers discouraged white settlement in favour of developing an African governing infrastructure to rule on their behalf (and as West Africa had been known as “the white man’s grave” in the nineteenth century this approach was virtually inevitable). To have an African administering class required educating a limited number of the local population to replace Europeans in administrative roles. They formed the elite. The principle of indirect rule was articulated most fully by Frederick Lugard in his book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, published in 1922 and this provided the blueprint for West African colonial development.

In the Gold Coast Colony a kindergarten to matriculation school was established to develop an African elite. This school was Achimota College which was foundered in 1924 and opened in 1927. Matriculating students were expected to continue through to the British university system. By 1938 Achimota complemented this by providing some embryonic courses at tertiary level, mostly in engineering, which were convertible to becoming commencement courses in the University of London’s degree course. The school’s symbol was the piano keys which were to show the need for complimentary black and white keys so that full range of tonal harmony could be achieved. In 1938 one-quarter of the entire education budget of the Colony funded this school alone. It provided a secondary level education that was of commensurate standard with any in Europe or America. Achimota was a crucial crucible for forming the Ghanaian elite. Both Presidents Nkrumah and Jerry Rawlings and several other Presidents were graduates of the school.

In 1948 the initial idea of an education continuum was transformed into developing a separate tertiary level institution in the Gold Coast and this gave rise to the creation of the University College of the Gold Coast. It retained the connection with the University of London as a college of that institution. Achimota retained its role as the principle feed institution for the tertiary students, but they were henceforth to attend the University College (which ultimately, in 1961, was to gain full University status as the University of Ghana). The interconnectedness between the school and the University College was such that the latter commenced life on the campus of the school. Somewhat symbolically, the creation of the University required a new campus, which was built at Legon, about five miles away.

The construction of elites in British West Africa was a singular achievement. At independence Ghana was bequeathed with a fully functioning university whereas the Congo, in comparison, had but twenty graduates in total.
The role of the elite was crucial to the functioning of independent Ghana and in fact some serious work had already been done on them. To some degree the elite were the eyes into the wider society and a number of my students were largely drawn from their ranks. However, the theory, largely substantiated retrospectively, was that the changing behaviour of the elite could lead to wider changes in Ghanaian life. If the beginnings of fertility control were to be identified it would be from within the ranks of the elite. The elite were the vanguard for measuring the impact of urbanisation and westernisation upon its hinterland. Historically in the West, fertility decline began with those of higher socio-economic status and in Ghana it was sensible to search for change in the ranks of the more educated, namely the elite.

Although the research revealed considerable changes within the family, and changes in attitudes towards the raising of children and cost pressures arising from this, there was however no evidence of a fertility differential by economic class and no evidence of fertility limitation being practiced at that time.

In a two-year period you undertook eight different surveys. How difficult was the carrying out of those surveys?

We had been cautioned continually ahead of the work that the nature of demographic research in Africa was sensitive and potentially embarrassing so we took much care in our approach. Survey questions required careful phrasing and on the whole successful questions sought to capture traditional idiomatic meanings but this did not mean looking for euphemistic wording. Indeed quite the contrary. We spent many hours working in teams translating and reverse translating each of the languages used (which were many) before we settled on the wording. In the end I was confident that a common meaning was retained across the surveys, irrespective of the language used.

We road tested many sites and in the process I met up with the relevant student responsible for undertaking the local area sample and we met formally with the chief seeking to reach agreement for communities to participate. These meetings involved the consumption of much palm wine, mostly out of half coconut shells, including the ritual spilling of a little on the ground as an offering to the gods. In the rural areas, where much of the focus was on migration matters, the chiefs, the District Commissioners, and the communities themselves regarded the issues being explored as paramount and cooperation flowed easily. Indeed many of these communities gave almost complete responses. At some sites, when we arrived to take up the challenge the main interviewer, always one of my students, had already arranged for a grand reception to greet us when we thought we were arriving incognito and were there for the challenge of gaining their cooperation. It should not be underestimated that students from rural backgrounds studying at university were men (mostly) of unusual capacity who had achieved outstanding success in the eyes of their community by even getting to university. They themselves were to be greatly honoured and the interviewing process enhanced their reputations. In many villages the progress of the survey through the village, and the forewarning about the next household to be interviewed, became part of village entertainment and way of life.

In some areas the appearance not only of a white professor but also his family had a huge impact. In the far north of Ghana the Wa-na, the paramount chief of the Wala people in Wa, was particularly delighted with Bruce (then aged 6) despite having 160 children of his own. But his wizened old mother was even more delighted. She jumped up and down with excitement pointing at Bruce and shouting to her coterie “there, I told you so! White people
too do have young ones of their own”. Bruce was given thirteen ceremonial guinea fowl eggs as an appreciation: this was to bless him with 13 sons.

This was in areas where the Frafra women wore only a string of beads around their waists for modesty. Even in those days it was unusual in Ghana to see so much nakedness and whose life had been so little affected by the obsessions of a hundred years of dedicated missionary work.

And at the other end of the portrait shot at the beginning.....

It was also in the north that we paid homage to the local fetish worship by meeting and greeting the crocodiles in the local pond. Even in retrospect I worry that the crocodiles might have preferred Bruce to the guinea fowl that they were diverted by. In the end he sat, safely as it turned out, on the back of one of them while other crocodiles watched on suspiciously. Our host, the high priest, was accidentally eaten by one of them in the following week. Perhaps the aberrant crocodile was harbouring disgruntled feelings of its own about “the one that got away”. However, these were the risks in gaining community cooperation and it was vastly informative.

Interviewing in the towns though was different. Often suspicious, and without traditional authority to legitimise the process, the poorer squatter areas – with high levels of illegal immigration – gave rise to rumours about our intention. But the role of the university, as independent from Government, usually gained the confidence required to carry out the survey. It was anchored in arguments about the value of identifying needs before they could be addressed and this generally won confidence. It required a good deal of personal contact, as well as that provided by students, and I doubt if that would be so easy to accomplish today. But in those days Ghana was a very cheerful and accepting community and despite the struggle for independence, somewhat contrarily, there was much less suspicion of the motives of whites.

What was Pat’s role while you were in Ghana?

Pat did of course always play a central role in the research effort. It was partly her early training in anthropological methods that led to the research directions that I was to follow. And she was always involved in the field work itself, as well as the many hours of analysis and discussion of the findings that followed. I was very fortunate to have a partner who not only contributed but who in every sense supported my efforts to the far corners of the world.
Leaving that aside, Pat gained a teaching position in the new language school that Nkrumah set up to teach Francophone Africa sufficient English and Anglophone Africa sufficient French for the concept of Pan-Africanism to go forward. It also taught a variety of other languages for the same purpose. It was one of Nkrumah’s pet projects heralding his vision of the new Africa. It aimed to complement the role of the university as Africa’s “leading university”, a claim to which Ghana was immensely proud. To some extent the language school did indeed strengthen the functioning of the university by providing students with greater linguistic skills in English. The Vice-Chancellor, Conor Cruise Obrien, somewhat humorously complained that the University campus was filling up with students who were increasingly speaking English with an Australian accent.

**And the analysis of the research?**

We had only one air-conditioned room where Pat, my son Peter (who worked solidly on coding and getting out the survey results all through the year that he was with us in Ghana) and I laboured around the clock. In parallel the students often occupied the living room and we discussed the meaning of the findings as a kind of continuous seminar (in between their formal courses), with the results feeding into the planning and design phase of the next survey coming.

Eventually, of course, I did the full analysis back at the ANU where I was pleased to take up an appointment as a research fellow in April 1964.

**The surveys were in some respects measures of societal change, I think?**

While surveying

They certainly were. Until the recent past, much of rural Ghana had been largely untouched by modernisation and the existence of the colonial masters was tangential at most. But social and economic change had been moving through the country. Education rates soared in the fifties so that by the 1960 Census two out of three children aged 5 to 14 were enrolled. Over the previous decade enrolments in primary, middle and secondary schooling had more than trebled, almost trebled and risen ten-fold respectively. These changes, brought about by economic opportunities, shaped the research directions of two of the surveys – on rural-urban migration and immigration from adjoining countries. It was the impact of education in shaping the views of the elite that underpinned two of the other surveys. Modern industrial society came late to tropical Africa, so late that many old men who were then still living had spent their childhood in societies which were in all essentials very similar to those existing in the region centuries before.
Against this has been the curious presence of European traders, hugging the coastline with fortified trading posts, for five hundred years. But while these stimulated trade, including in slaves, they largely left traditional society alone. It was the coming of the missionaries and later the spreading of schooling that set about a revolution in people’s thinking. But it did not lead then immediately to perceptible fertility decline and, even now, only to a limited extent. It has been the maintenance of high fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa that was to occupy a considerable amount of my later thinking.

**Early in your stay you moved from Achimota to the University’s relatively new campus at Legon. What are your thoughts about life at Legon?**

Achimota and Legon were not a great distance apart and in fact the only village of any significance on the way was largely occupied by our cook and his numerous attachments. While being a very traditional, largely Ewe village, later in our stay it hosted – to its own astonishment – a Pete Seeger impromptu concert/workshop where he got to know the real Africa. Kodja’s kids were enthralled and our kids were grilled by them about what we knew about Pete Seeger.

Legon in particular, and Accra more generally, had something of the feel of *Our Man in Havana* about it in the early sixties. It was a time when the Cold War was perhaps at its craziest and when competition for favour was at its most intense. It was a time too when African idealism over the coming of independence was giving way to some hard truths about the corruption of ideals when power is involved. It was a time of flux in history.

Shortly after our arrival the Irishman and notable authority on Edmund Burke, Conor Cruise O’Brien, was appointed as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana by President Nkrumah, in 1962, in recognition of his work for the United Nations in the recently proclaimed independent Congo. The appointment followed the bitter rift that had occurred within the Security Council consequent upon O’Brien’s UN military actions when he acted upon UN Security Council resolutions. O’Brien had sought to prevent the mineral rich region of Katanga from seceding by expelling Belgian, French and other western backed mercenaries. Because this action was deemed to support the Congolese government, regarded as communist by western interests, and against the interests of Belgium in particular (which was indulging in post-colonialist intervention in the guise of succession), Britain, France and the United States sought firstly to neutralise Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and secondly to dismiss O’Brien. They succeeded in both aims, perhaps fortuitously with the former who died in a mysterious air crash, and as a result the Security Council has never recovered its strength, purpose or prestige. But Nkrumah, and much of the Third World, was incensed. It was the *cause célèbre* of the emerging post-colonial world and became the dividing point in Cold War politics from how it was practiced before and after 1961. The world turned again the following year with the Cuban Missile Crises which, as seen from darkest Africa, was as frightening as from anywhere else. Conor was remarkably good company and, as an Irishman, he understood the colonial experience.

Alan Nunn May was appointed Professor of Physics at Legon in 1961. He was famous in the fifties for his conviction for being a Soviet spy when working for the Manhattan Project, to build the atomic bomb. Arrested in 1946, his actions, coming early in the transitional period when Russia went from being an ally to the enemy, resulted in the United States giving Britain the cold shoulder on sharing atomic research advances until Britain’s security arrangements fell in line with American policy. This having been achieved, MI5 turned their
attention on Nunn May upon his release from prison in 1952, and he was blackballed by all British universities thereafter. One consequence of American hostility was that Britain was forced to produce its own nuclear weapons. At Legon he was simply known as Alan May and he lived a quiet reclusive life trying to live down his notoriety. He did not leave until 1978.

In 1963 Norbert Elias, having retired from the University of Leicester, became departmental head of Sociology at Legon. He is now famous in Sociology for his theory of civilizing processes whereby the particular individual psychic structures are moulded by social attitudes (that is, his study is about the level of personality characteristics which individuals share in common with fellow members of their social group). The key to his studies is that there is an ongoing process by which a group’s social attitudes transform the individual member’s behaviour over time and within the social group the boundaries move progressively so that the reform of manners and behaviour by all individuals within that group leads to the progressive advancement of civilised attitudes. The key point here is that social groups have a hierarchical impact of shaping the values of the social group below them thus eventually changing the behaviour, and indeed the personality, of the entire society. Attitudes to violence, sexual behaviour, bodily functions, table manners and forms of speech might all be so regarded as an ongoing civilising process. These attributes were gradually transformed by increasing thresholds of shame and repugnance, working outward from a nucleus of court etiquette. Elias had been regarded as an ageing figure until his retirement from the University of Leicester in 1962, and then through his subsequent attachment to the University of Ghana, having written only a single book, and even this having been published in German before the War. However, this book (*The Civilizing Process*) was translated into English in 1969 and was then rediscovered by a new generation of scholars in the 1970s, particularly on the Continent. To everyone’s astonishment, after our time, he went on to become one of the most influential sociologists of the era.

Two American lawyers were expelled from the country in late 1963 for being spies, one was ill and on a stretcher. Ghana was by then paranoid, and particularly its government under an ever increasingly autocratic president of a proclaimed one party state. Whatever the merits of the charge, it left a large gap in the lives of our kids who were close friends with their children.

The university doctor was something of a crotchety Scot who had become accustomed to colonial life. His son, William Boyd, eventually wrote a book about his father entitled *A Good Man in Africa*. The son is now a major British author and most recently has written the latest James Bond book (with many of Bond’s new characteristics being based on those of the author’s father rather than that of the original Ian Fleming creation). The father treated us all for malaria at different stages of our stay in Ghana. The son came out from Gordonstoun School during holiday periods and, encouraged by Colin and Grahame, he being somewhat younger, was persuaded to provoke the crocodiles in the University pond. Despite his naivety, he somehow survived to be the author he is today.

Hanna Reitsch, the only woman awarded the Iron Cross First Class, was a pilot and was a centre piece of Nazi propaganda during the Third Reich. She was the ace German test flyer of new aircraft during the War, including supervising the testing of the V1. She also excelled at gliding. At the end of the War, as Red Army contingents were closing in on central Berlin, she landed on an improvised airstrip in the Tiergarten so as to support Hitler in the final struggle (her part was prominent in the German film *Downfall* (2004)). Captured shortly after flying out of Berlin hours before the final collapse, she was interrogated and it was her
testimony that revealed the existence of the Bunker. In 1959 Nehru invited her to India to establish a gliding school. Tiring of the idea, he then gave her to Kwame Nkrumah in 1961 as a gesture of good will between fellow non-aligned allies. In Ghana she established the first black African national gliding school and reputedly became close to Nkrumah. This certainly seemed to be the case when we attended a private club at Tema Beach in 1964 and they turned up together. We were greeted by both, Nkrumah patted Bruce’s head, and Hannah attempted a smile which faded into a squirm. They then departed for the private compound.

As with the other glamour girl of the Third Reich, the film director Leni Riefenstahl, in later life Hannah experienced a Road to Damascus conversion when it came to black African masculinity. Even so, she said at the end of her life in the 1970s “I still wear the Iron Cross with diamonds Hitler gave me but today in all Germany you can't find a single person who voted Adolf Hitler into power”.

W.E.B. Du Bois was an American black hero who greatly influenced the young Kwame Nkrumah when he was studying in America. In 1900 Du Bois had attended the First Pan-African Conference in London. In 1909 he jointly founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As the first black American to gain a doctorate and as a professor of sociology and history, he was highly influential in the civil rights movement. In 1921 he attended the second Pan-African Congress in London which, under his direction, insisted on racial equality and that Africa should be ruled by Africans. He edited the NAACP’s journal. Later in life he became a peace activist and a supporter of nuclear disarmament. He proselytised on the merits of Pan-Africanism and his views resonated around emergent Africa. At the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, Du Bois met a young Nkrumah who, when President of Ghana, was to invite Du Bois to come to Africa. He was to attend the Ghanaian Independence celebrations in 1957 but was unable to leave the United States because his passport had been seized under McCarthyism. In December 1961 Du Bois finally arrived in Ghana, aged 93, to edit the *Encyclopaedia Africana*. He remained in Ghana because in 1963 the US Government refused to renew his passport thus exiling him in that country. He died in Accra, aged 95, but not before he had discussed with Peter the nature of the struggle that he had led with others to liberate Africa, the struggle that had been the passion of his life. To put it into context, when Du Bois was born, Africa was still being actively explored by Europeans, and Stanley had still to meet Livingstone. Du Bois made the point that from these trips of exploration of the interior, during his own lifetime, Europeans were now being sent back to their home countries by the Africans. He had a spritely energy, despite his age, and his life illustrates to anyone with a sense of history the African achievement of gaining its independence.

The Americans were losing their grip on the United Nations as African and Asian countries progressively gained independence and joined the organisation. So increasingly they sought favour, perhaps with no more fervour than in Ghana. Because of its early independence, Ghana led the African branch of the non-aligned movement and joined forces with India, in particular, to reshape the nature of the Cold War. As Conor Cruise O’Brien noted in his book *To Katanga and Back*, American foreign policy moved from “the Manichean and dramatic mind of the late John Foster Dulles” under the Eisenhower Presidency to one where America was required to woo support under the Kennedy administration. An odd consequence of this was the arrival of John Glenn’s space capsule in Ghana for a goodwill visit. Being the first

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4 On *Q and A* on the ABC of 9 June 2015 a wise old Afro-American who gained his doctorate from Princeton in 1943 - Cornel West - stated that Du Bois’s passport was cancelled “because he was black”. It occurred in the days before the Civil Rights movement got into its stride.
American space vehicle to orbit the globe it was treated reverently by Americans and it was a rare honour for Ghana to get to see it. Hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians visited, including the Caldwell family.

And the Canadians responded with their own cultural exchange event that probably generated more excitement in anticipation than the Glenn capsule had. For days ahead of the event the Canadian High Commission released statements of the pending arrival of an Eskimo who was coming to visit Ghana. The High Commissioner was himself something of a celebrity entertainer. The local papers added their own sense of occasion by publishing photographs of the exotic people of the Arctic, fully clothed, with huskies, igloos, icebergs and glaciers. All Accra awaited his arrival at the airport and this included ourselves. Cheers welled as the plane taxied and the aircraft’s door opened and the stairs were rolled into place. And the Eskimo appeared at the top of the stairs fully clothed in a business suit and moreover the Eskimo turned out to be a young woman. The crowd turned as one and departed the airport and Canada’s reputation was tarnished thereafter. The High Commission tried to ameliorate this disaster with a reception held later for the elite where she was forced to appear in full Eskimo regalia, sweating under the atrocious steamy tropical conditions, but although this impressed my son Peter, it added nothing to Canada’s reputation amongst the vast majority of Ghanaians.

The Russian Embassy, not to be outdone, sponsored a showing of Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Ivan the Terrible* at the University to demonstrate the innate superiority of Soviet culture. Its timing was awkward as Ghana was descending into authoritarianism, intimidation and a state of fear. As happens in countries which practise state terrorism, protest needs to be muted and oblique. The student body turned up *en masse* and as the film unwound they progressively turned their back on the depiction of the Tsar and students departed the film one by one in protest at Ivan’s methods until the film was being shown to an entirely empty cinema.

Also as part of cultural exchange were visits by the folk singer Pete Seeger (presumably to demonstrate the multidimensionality of American culture or to emphasise that the era of McCarthyism was over). And the Royal Shakespeare Company called and where, in an outdoor evening performance of *Twelfth Night*, a young Viola passed out prematurely, while on stage, from the heat and was scooped up by Duke Orsino before they were meant to discover their mutual love – but it made for a touchingly romantic rewrite of Shakespeare and, albeit unintentional, it rather suited the hot and sultry tropical night.

We did not feel isolated from the world in Ghana. Indeed the *Observer* was flown in under special arrangements on Saturday nights and distributed through communal effort so that we could read it at Sunday’s breakfast. But this too came with difficulties as first the censors at the airport had to rush through the papers seeking out articles that might be negative to the image of Ghana (the number of articles then being more frequent than one might now imagine) and, with scissors, removing them. Usually one copy would have retained the original article so Sundays were spent moving from one house to the next in order to read the missing article. Secretive worlds rather invite Kafkaesque responses.

Ultimately, the cultural Cold Wars became ridiculous when America sent out as its ambassador Shirley Temple (1974-76), a Gerald Ford decision.

Finally, I recall that Peter taught boys at the Achimota School to swim in the school’s pool. His assistant at the time, a senior boy in the school, was a cheerful student by the name of
Jerry Rawlings. Years later he made his mark, first in a coup as a temporary President before handing back power to civilian rule and then subsequently, after another and much bloodier coup, as an imposed military strongman. Eventually, he became an elected and successful President. It was he who turned around the fortunes of Ghana and propelled it forward to its current economic success. But it cost Ghana a certain loss of innocence in the process.

**And finally, was Ghana a good country with which to start your research into African demography?**

Yes it was. Apart from an excellent class of students, a cooperative department, stimulating colleagues both within and outside Sociology, as an open society Ghana allowed the development and testing of ideas. Some of those ideas took some years to bear fruit, and I have touched upon those aspects that ultimately led to wealth flow theory. But one aspect I want to highlight – the presence of *kwashiorkor*. It is at the heart of West African malnutrition. As I said, this was a Ghanaian word but to the outside world it was identified as a medical condition by Cicely Williams in 1935. She was an Oxford trained, Jamaican doctor in the colonial medical service of the Gold Coast. She identified this as a condition of dietary protein deficiency associated with the premature weaning of a child that came with the birth of the subsequent child. It relates to the unsuitability of the pap provided to the weaned child that was composed of cassava (or to a lesser degree yam or maize) in which the starches have not been adequately broken down by the use of an alkaline agent such as limewater or lye so as to release the protein content. The resultant condition displays red hair (from which the condition gets its name) and grossly swollen bellies.

Two things are relevant. Cecily Williams deliberately used Ga words to make a point that it was well worth listening to what people themselves might have to say in order to understand causality. You never know, they may be right. Secondly, as I pondered the cause of the condition it led me to hypothesise on the purpose of postpartum abstinence and I realised that Ghanaians were not seeking to limit their family size through abstinence but quite the contrary that were seeking to maximise child and infant survival instead.