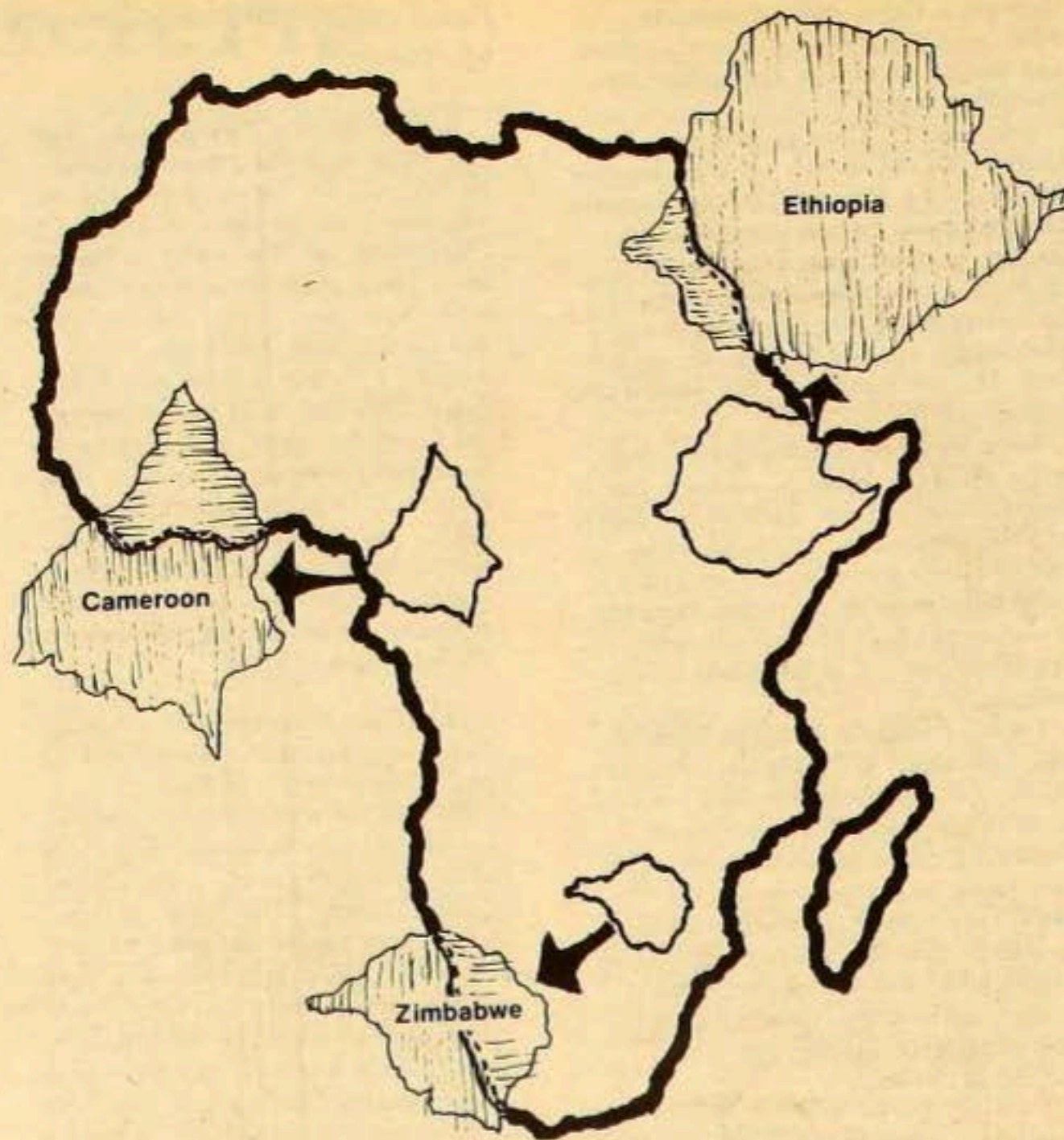


Cameroon

Freida Ekotto

Freida Ekotto, the French House R.A. and citizen of the Cameroons, is the only African woman on the CC campus. Exemplifying the problems of an educated woman in an underdeveloped and patriarchal society, she faces a singular battle when she returns (Equality and liberation are virtually unknown terms for African women). The native women experience life through marriage, prostitution, servitude, and hard, hard work. But Freida, absolved of such conditions, in her semi-elite position pays more attention to the questions of human dignity and the necessities of life. At the present she is looking towards an education that will give her the qualifications needed to become a potent force when she returns.

Her father is of the Ewodi people, centered on an island near the city of Douala on the west coast of Africa. Although her family now lives in the city, throughout her youth they traveled constantly. By age eleven she had lived in Senegal, Chad, Gabon, the Congo, and in the north of Cameroon. Her father, a Senegalese trained meteorologist, is a government functionary and entitled to comparatively luxurious government housing and supplies. But he never really accepted the benefits of his position. "My



be poor, I am going to suffer. And I know I am going to suffer because there is no way I can just give my life to those people who abuse me."

Otherwise she belongs to her country, "Cameroon is a really lovely place to be. I love to go back, I feel so free, just hanging around, doing social stuff, going to talk to people." She often travels barefoot, with just a halter top, dreadlocks and lots of African jewelry. "In Africa I'm just African," she says. "People think I'm crazy, but I think it's so cute. I'm sick of being European, just wearing jeans."

Education, for Freida, will play a fundamental role in her future. However, after twelve years schooling in Switzerland and France, she ran out of money. Because she is Black, a foreigner, and because of the high unemployment rate in France, she was unable to find a job. Even with connections she was refused entry into Great Britain. After some months of uncertainty Freida landed a job in Minnesota teaching High School French, and learning English. At CC she is both teaching and studying-- but most of her money goes to support her brother, who is now at school in France.

Even with an education she faces extreme prejudice. "Being a woman in Africa people suspect me a lot. They don't like women who study, the men, because you are going to be like them." She wants to study a field that will give her the opportunity to impose herself in Cameroon. "If I studied Political Science I could somehow learn to talk for women,

More Africans at CC—Ekotto, Desta and Nkiwane

dad just decided to give up all this material life," says Freida. "My dad, he walks, he doesn't like cars. He thinks it is a waste of money, instead of giving us an education-- to buy cars." And his walking is done barefoot, by preference.

Freida reflects this disdain for a high lifestyle. She used to steal food from their supply, giving it to others and driving her parents crazy. They told her, "If you give everything away, then we cannot eat," relates Freida. "But still we used to have a basement full of food, and you have people who don't have anything to eat." Her private campaign went to extremes. "I used to give all my clothes, my books... I was taking everything from my house to give to people." They were people of what Freida calls the "really poor, poor neighborhoods."

With her father's position, the family even had maids. Says Freida, "I didn't know how to work hard, how to do those ugly things like washing clothes in the river-- people do that you know." So, at age eight, Freida would spend her Saturdays helping the nuns at the orphanage, tending children and ironing. Ultimately she

convinced her father to accept three of the kids into their own home. One is still with them and her father pays for his education.

At age eleven she was sent to school in Switzerland, like all her brothers and sisters. Culture shock for her was snow and an all-white population. But the greater shock is what happened to her friends who remained in Douala. In looking back she says, "I could have been in really bad shape. Now all the girls who used to hang around with me, they are all of them prostitutes. I guess I escaped that."

Freida describes the all-encompassing poverty, rich Westerners and Capitalist profiteers as the catalysts for prostitution. "Being in a city, Douala, it is very difficult for a girl to avoid prostitution." Sometimes they pay a girl as much as five hundred dollars for one night. "Almost all those girls have cars and nice houses. But when (these girls) see that 'Oh, I can have a house like that, I can live like those white people,' they just jump in. They don't even think for a second what's going to happen to their life."

Prostitution and sex hassles form the unknown side of the corruption running

rampant through Africa. Freida says that everyone, from passport officials to taxi drivers try to use their positions for sex-- otherwise they refuse to do their jobs. "Ok baby, you need a job, I have to sleep with you. At the university it is worse. To take your exams you have to sleep with these guys," contends Freida. And she cites a cousin who did, because she wanted to take her exams.

The effect has Freida disgusted. "I have to be away from that," she says. "Anytime I go home I am just sad to see what is going on." Her sisters tell her it is getting worse, but people refuse to acknowledge it. "They are doing stuff like that, but nobody tells. People don't want to talk about that because everybody in the system. It is very good for those men, this a patriarchal society." Her one attempt to mention the corruption, at a family meeting, got her slapped by her father. "What can you do?" she laments. "I'm always in trouble when I'm in Cameroon."

Such is the organizational condition of her society, regardless of a person's ability. "My friends convince me that if I come back, even with ten Degrees, I am going to

because I think it is about time, the women need it." But first she must find a source which will allow her time and money to complete a degree. Freida has no scholarship arrangement past this year.

But for Cameroon she remains convinced that something can be done. "We can educate those people, we can stop this prostitution from going on," she says. Her suggestion is a center to teach those girls something so that they can use their brains instead of their bodies. And with support from the men as well Freida believes they can help the whole country. By her passion for giving to people she substantiates her claims, but few people seem to be on her level. "Anytime I go to Africa I have my suitcase full of clothes," she relates. "And I am going back with it empty. People just don't understand that."

"I want to go back to Africa, because I think I can do something in one way," says Freida. "I don't want a revolution, I want to help people. I feel a lot for people."

Ethiopia

Abiy B. Desta

Abiy B. Desta, a CC freshman from Ethiopia, is intent on gaining a technical education during his stay in the United States. Today his country suffers from drought, massive starvation, and civil war. There is a constant outflow of the educated elites from Ethiopia, as the pressures of poverty, angry peoples and government restrictions drive them away. But A.B., who has already returned once, after five years in the West is resolved to return again. And this time he will return with the technical skills, biology and plant sciences, which are drastically needed in his country.



Freida Ekotto

Born and raised in Addis Abba, A.B. has spent the whole of his Ethiopian residency in the city. He is of mixed ethnical heritage, but his main bloodline is Amare, peoples of the Addis Abba region. His grandfather was a christian orthodox priest, a religious lineage that dates to the time of the Byzantines. His father is a microbiologist with the armed forces, a position that places the family in an elite status in Addis Abba society.

Under the reign of Haile Selassie the Destas were well off. A.B. attended the Entoto school run by the Kings granddaughter, with British teachers. "I had it pretty easy compared to the other kids," says A.B. But with the Marxist revolution the school was shut down. At age eight they moved to Washington D.C., where his father attended George Washington University under a World Health Organization sponsorship. They did not return for five years.

A.B. missed the revolution, leaving when the bloodshed started and returning, "pretty much when the government was under control." Not that things were as easy as before. Says A.B., "When I came back there was

dissatisfaction, kind of a tension. There was always just enough food to keep you going, but not enough to make you comfortable enough to say, 'I can relax now.'" The generally friendly Ethiopians now kept to themselves. "There was a tension of mistrust between neighbors, a fear to speak out in front of another," the direct result of the government policy of wiping out a whole neighborhood for any instance of anti-government activity.

However, on return to Addis Abb. A.B.'s father went to work for the military. "Because of the position of my father, I got to go to a school which was run by Americans," says A.B. "I had the freedom to move around and was not restricted like other students." All his friends and

classmates were the children of Ethiopia's leaders.

But one prank landed them in serious trouble. During an OAU conference last year the delegates stayed in the hotel across from A.B.'s school. Security was tight. As A.B. tells the story, "A couple of wisecracks decided to bring binoculars to school, trying to see some of the African leaders through the windows of the hotel. But we didn't know there were government people around the building trying to keep saboteurs and others out. While we were trying to spot a leader through the window, somebody spotted us and decided we were up to something."

"It was a pretty nasty situation for a while. The government came into our school. They couldn't find us so they decided to take all the students who fit the description. We ended up in the back of a truck in the military depot." Their fathers, with the power of their positions, came and vouched for the innocence of their sons. But it was no less scary. Says A.B., "We had to confess what we did and got a lecture on that. But we were expecting something worse, a bullet or something, with the way we were treated."

After graduation, A.B. and his classmates joined a government literacy campaign, marking his first contact with the rural Ethiopians. With sixteen others he lived two months in a village three hundred kilometers from the city, teaching peasants reading, writing and elementary mathematics, up to a third grade level.

They taught hygiene and practical subjects as well, like the sterilizing of drinking water by boiling and the siting of toilet facilities. "But there was always this



Abiy B. Desta

feeling of hatred," relates A.B. "We speak, speak and they listen and say they understand, but really we never know if we have gotten through to them or not." He was convinced they could do some real good. "If they could just see that it's not us. We came trying to help them, not trying to impose anything on them." Once the people learned enough to satisfy their needs they left off any further effort.

Labour is a question of priorities in Ethiopia. A.B. pegs the average income at thirty dollars per month, just enough to

either feed them or to cloth them, but not both. Aid from the outside consists mainly of arms and grain, with little technical assistance in industry or agriculture. To correct the plight of the Ethiopian peasant or worker, this is what needs to change. "They give us aid," comments A.B., "but what I think we really need more than the grain or the arms they give us is to help us grow our own grain or help us with our own industries."

Herein lies A.B.'s commitment to his country. "As an Ethiopian, I have to do something to help," he relates. "There is widespread starvation. Possibly with the help of international cities, we can get the kind of crops that will grow under drought conditions (and on poor soil) and teach the farmers to farm in a better way. And that's why I'm centering my major on biology." His experience in the literacy campaign convinced him that there are, "...lots of things which could be done that are not being done."

Part of the problem is having lost many intellectuals and educated peoples to the developed and luxurious West. "There is this feeling that if a person goes out he might not come back," says A.B. When he returned from America the first time his friends asked, "Why'd you come back for? You were living in America. Why would you want to come back here?" There is a fear in the government, "that those people who are exposed to Western things might think they are better off than the Ethiopians." Another reason they haven't returned is fear of revenge by the poor people who suffered under the rule of Haile Selassie and these same elites.

After some 2 thousand years of independence, A.B. does not fear for the Westernization of the Ethiopian culture. They have never been ruled by the white man, except for a 5 year invasion by the Italians, and retain a tight knit and highly religious community, despite the recent Marxist government. He sees cooperation with the developed world as ultimately beneficial. "All in all people will be able to live better and after that I think the people themselves will have to choose if they want to mix their culture, or forget about it."

"At the present Ethiopia is the third poorest country in the world. It is not a very attractive place to be in," he contends. "But if things could change... If the foreign policy of America or Russia would not be to give this country aid because it is an important military and strategic place, but give aid so that we will be able to become self sufficient, Ethiopia might be able to improve its standard of living. I think that is what will benefit most Ethiopians at the present. Thirty dollars a month is not enough." And to that effect A.B. says, "I will return."