

CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE

EXPANDING

HORIZONS 2019



SCHOLARSHIP

REPORTS

Thanks to the generosity of a number of US alumni the College was able to establish the Expanding Horizons Scholarship Fund. The fund is open to all current undergraduates and graduates. In its inaugural year (2017) it provided scholarships for nine students to spend between four and eight weeks in the United States or a similar period of time in a non-OECD country. In 2018 eight students received a scholarship and in 2019 a further six students were supported. Each scholarship provides up to a maximum of £5,000 and offers the recipients an

opportunity to experience the United States or a non-OECD country with the aim of building connections to form a basis for greater understanding and shared purpose, allowing them to expand their horizons and hopefully have a transformative experience.

The scholarships have a wide remit and aim to provide broad educational value beyond the scope of the applicant's academic course at Oxford. It is hoped that the trip will also involve significant exposure to the local people and culture of the area/country. The sorts of activities that the scholarship cover include taking an academic course not related to the applicant's current degree, working for an NGO, doing an internship in a business or laboratory, volunteering or taking part in local project.

A number of alumni have generously offered opportunities to our young people to work or study overseas during the summer for which we are extremely grateful.

It is anticipated that we will fund at least three students to spend time in the United States and a non-OECD country during the summer of 2020 and our intention is to continue to raise funds to enable us to offer this scholarship in the years to come.

This booklet contains the reports of the 2019 Scholars which we hope will inspire both donations towards continuing the scholarship for the years to come as well as to enable current students to find out what is possible and to encourage them to apply for a scholarship which will, as the evidence shows, expand their horizons.

We are grateful to the following alumni for their generous donations to fund this scholarship:

Gerard Baker
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We are grateful to the following alumni for supporting our students in offering positions within their laboratories or internships within their companies:

Beth Lawrence (Anastasya Larasati)

We would also like to thank alumni who offered positions that we were unable to fill.

The recipients of the Expanding Horizons Scholarship 2019 were:

Olivia Cherry – second year English student

Tyrell Gabriel – first year Experimental Psychology student

Roman Kenny-Manning – first year Law (with Law studies in Europe) student

Anastasya Larasati – third year Law student

Allison Panelas – first year History graduate student

Jenny Sanderson – third year Experimental Psychology student

This September, I interned at news organisation Balkan Investigative Reporting Network based in Tirana, Albania. With outlets across the Balkan region, the organisation is renowned for its well-researched pieces, often following up on stories that are neglected by the mainstream news. They specialise in issues which display violations of the law and human rights – in other words, stories that the governments don't want published – and have partnered with international news outlets including Al Jazeera, BBC and the Guardian. During my time there, I not only honed my own journalistic skills, working on a feature piece for the organisation's international outlet Balkan Insight on the 2018/9 student protests (link here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/09/24/emboldened-albanian-students-eye-wider-change/>), but also learned at first hand Albania's unique political situation, the culture, literature and even a bit of the language as well. The journalists I worked with gave me an incredible insight into life under Communism and gave me an entirely new perspective on European politics. They are some of the most talented people I have ever made – one, aside from being a full-time journalist, is the Albanian translator of novelist Julian Barnes and Mary Beard. Meanwhile, through my interviews with students, I became aware of an entirely different mode of student life to my own.

I hadn't intended initially to go to Albania. I had been following Balkan politics for some time, following a trip to Croatia and being blown away by Misha Glenny's account *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, which tells of the paradoxical nature of the bloc's break-up, dominated both by racially-driven violence and callously pragmatic realpolitik. Balkan politics has little coverage in the UK press as a rule, and what reporting I had seen on the area had come from none other than Balkan Insight after being republished on their UK-based partner sites. Looking for something different, I contacted the central office on a whim, and they replied saying they had an opening at the Albanian office. I accepted immediately.

What I perhaps hadn't appreciated was how different Albania is from the other countries in the region, from their language (although part of the Indo-European group, it shares almost no systematic similarities with another language, the closest language probably being modern Greek) to their politics. Prior to my internship, my editor, Besar Likmeta, recommended historian Fred Abrahams' *Modern Albania*: a near summary of Albania's 20th century past and *Rumpalla*, a slightly absurd memoir (seemingly just as fascinated with Albanian women as with any aspect of the political situation), written by an American GI and journalist Peter Lucas who was the first Western visitor allowed into the country in the 1980s.

Both of these books stress how fundamentally unique Albania's situation is. Following the monarchy of King Zog, World War II had seen the occupation of the country by both Italy and Nazi Germany. Following the end of the war, the communists declared a revolution in the country under Enver Hoxha, who would remain the face of Albanian politics until his death in the 1980s. While the common assumption of the 'Iron Curtain' assumes some kind of uniformity in eastern communist countries, Albania had always retained a certain independence from the other blocs. Albania followed Yugoslavia out of the USSR in 1948 under General Tito, and fostered close economic ties with the bloc. However, relations soon soured after Tito grew distrustful of Hoxha and his more 'intellectual' peers, while it became apparent that Yugoslavia was systematically defrauding then country of raw resources. On their own, Albania then became closer to the USSR, although this did not last long, pursuing China as its key communist ally after the death of Stalin and the consequent softening of communist principles. Once more, this alliance faltered, after Albania saw Nixon's visit as a betrayal of their shared doctrine. From this point on, Albania were on their own, striving after

an ideal form of Communism that they felt their former allies had betrayed. As the country most famed and Man Booker-prize winning novelist, Ismail Kadare put it “ “

The effect of this is obviously far-reaching on Albanian psychology: while the Balkan region continually collaborate, almost everyone I speak to goes out of their way to dissociate themselves from the rest of Eastern Europe. Instead they call themselves a ‘Mediterranean’ people alongside the Greeks and the Italians. Kristina Voko, the co-ordinator BIRN Albania on my first day in the city, explained this meant they were an “emotional” people, while Besar, the editor, explains how the differential is more than just geographic. He recalled how during communism his father cannily fixed their television aerial so that they could pick up Italian television, then a phantasmal concoction of melodramatic love dramas and police thrillers. “Officers would come round,” he laughs, “and they would ask about the aerial – ‘Is it pointing towards Italy?’ – “No no sir, the wind blew it that way!”” Jokes like these about the former regime abound: those I meet seem to avoid any opportunity for self-pity despite the hardship and oppression that has been experienced by every adult citizen. But the visual reminders of Communist rule are unavoidable: from the bleakly impressive Pyramid to the House of Leaves, the former home of the Secret Service, where files on every Albanian citizen had formerly been gathered. Not least, of course, the hundreds of ruined prisons in the Albanian mountainside, where dissidents were jailed and forced to work to near exhaustion or death.

II

In December 2018, students at the University of Tirana’s architectural faculty were angry. Their faculty, under financial pressure, had already asked students to pay their yearly tuition fees a month early to cover costs. Still desperate for funds, the faculty had announced early a university-wide increase in costs for re-take exams. Within hours, students had mobilised to boycott of classes, and took to the streets. By the next day, thousands of other students had joined them in a wider protest against extortionate fees (Albanian tuition fees are the highest in Europe in relation to purchasing power), poor condition in the dormitories, insufficient libraries, corrupt professors, and a lack of representation for students in university governance.

The effect on the public was electric. Students I spoke to recalled traffic stopping (a rarity in Tirana – the zebra crossings and traffic lights, I quickly learn, have little significance in the Albanian capital), people shouting messages of support from their building windows, or massing at corners to clap the passing students. While Tirana is no stranger to protest, this was the first ‘spontaneous’ gathering in a generation: most protests are organised by political parties with paid-up activists making up the majority of the crowds. Protests like these are considered a nuisance by ordinary citizens, bringing violence to the streets and more about scoring political points against the opposing party than calling for widespread reform. It was immediately clear that these protests were different. Although older residents and professors later joined the protests in solidarity, the footage of the protests in those first days shows evidently inexperienced young people, the majority still clutching folders and bulging rucksacks. On the fringes of big groups chanting loudly are clearly shy members of the student body: overwhelmed by the whole experience, but sticking it out with the rest of them.

Student protests are taken seriously in Albania. The introduction of political pluralism, the collapse of communism and the rise of the Democratic Party was all due to the 1990 student protests coincidentally also in the month of December: an auspicious similarity not missed by anyone. While researching for my article, I got in contact with Fred Abrahams of *Modern Albania* to draw out parallels between the two protests. Although he wasn’t prepared to comment explicitly on the latest set of protests, he drew my attention to some notable similarities. Firstly, that the protests had originated, like the modern protests, due to the shared material conditions of the students, and everyone had slightly varying motivations.

“The student movement was a marketplace of goals and ideas. Some participants were focused on political demands, and pluralism in particular. Others wanted democracy but could not necessarily articulate what that meant,” he said. “They understood that they wanted to speak their minds, read forbidden books, listen to banned music, practice their religions, travel abroad – all of which are fundamental rights. Some just wanted material goods – nice clothes and fast cars – and there’s nothing necessarily wrong with wanting a better material life.”

However, the “inexperienced, diverse and disorganized” nature of the protests, meant they were easily taken advantage for political purposes – be it Western secret services or, eventually, the Democratic Party, whose eventual membership was shunned by the majority of students. This was replicated in the 2018 protests: the Democratic Party, currently in opposition, tried to hijack the students’ protests for their own purposes, claiming that they were attacking the Socialist government rather than criticising the systemic issues at universities. Students were quick to dissociate themselves: screaming ‘Parties Out!’ while youth party members got short shrift from their fellow students. During my research process I visited the Student City, a hilly fortress of accommodation blocks in varying conditions of disrepair on the outskirts of the centre. All the students I spoke to were overly keen to express that their motivations were not political – the majority had not even voted in the last election. They even had no desire to see it widen into a larger political movement in its own right: “It will remain focused on student conditions,” said one English student I spoke to. “Students don’t worry about anything else.”

For former protesters, naturally, the feelings invoked by the 1990s student protests are ambivalent. While being “immensely proud” of their protest – a spontaneous outcry of democratic dissent, at least at first, - they were not without misgivings. “They are deeply disappointed by the result today,” said Abraham “The don’t believe the values of those times – transparency, accountability, solidarity – have prevailed.”

III

And for good reason. Albania’s politics since the fall of communism has swung between the two majority parties, the Socialists and the Democratic party. Although they are nominally left and right respectively, both are frequently subject to accusations of corruption and of relationships with organised crime. On my final night in the city, the journalists and I decamped to a bar to watch on television the former Minister of Interior and member of the Albanian political establishment in his own right, be charged with abetting drug smuggling ring run by his distant cousins, which was operating in Italy. Despite the case being essentially handed over to the Albanians by the Italians, the Minister was only charged with a suspended sentence for abuse of power and was not found guilty of the more severe charges of drug trafficking. Only 40% of the population regularly vote in elections, and the majority of these, as one student explained, are either employed by the state, or employed by private business with party affiliations – not voting the correct way could easily result in sacking or unexplained wage cuts. While I was there, politics was in limbo as the opposition had been boycotting parliament during the last set of local elections. They then declared these elections invalid, and announced their own set in October – which the government say they will refuse to recognise these either. Stymied by their own infighting, there is little space for consideration of policy or reform.

In this context, the student protests were entirely unexpected. I spoke to Geron Kamberi, one of the co-authors of a yearly study into Albanian youth, who said that the typical perception of young people was one of apathy and lack of political engagement. The apathy, he explained, arose out of a sense of powerlessness which had led to an avoidance of any form of activism. Although there had been student protests prior to the December demonstrations these had been far smaller, run by core handful of activists from the left-leaning Movement for University. They had been campaigning against the ‘neoliberal’ higher education reform was introduced in 2015, angered by the potential

for private universities to apply to the government for public funding, to the detriment of public universities. Despite getting headlines in national media, notably for egging the Prime Minister and putting ketchup in the Minister for Education's hair, they attracted little response from fellow students. One journalist and former activist recalled how even when a tutor allowed classes to go out and support the protests against the reform, the majority had just gone to sit in the cafes. Three years later, graduated and a news reporter for newspaper Panorama, she was completely astonished to see a crowd of whom the vast majority were ordinary students, without any political or activist history.

I met a group of three current students and activists in their 'social centre' on the edge of Skanderberg Square in Tirana. Set off the main Broadway, the centre is a peaceful, if slightly dilapidated, oasis away from the hooting cars of the centre, a two-story house set in a little courtyard complete with curling fig trees. What seems like an ordinary student space – the familiar sight of warming bottles of spirits on the sticky top of the 'bar' – turns out to be an impressively erudite political hotbed. A timetable on the board reveals weekly discussion groups on Marx and the Frankfurt School, across from the centre's impromptu library of assorted philosophy and politics, including a number of tomes from the unexpectedly omnipresent Mary Beard. A poster on the wall explicitly bans "mizogjinët, racistët, fanatikët, mizantropët, homofobët".

These activists were entirely taken aback by the protests. While they later became instrumental in the day-to-day organisation of the protests, mobilising students in individual faculties, organising chants, and speaking to news outlets, they initially had no idea that the architectural students' anger would prove so explosive. It was only when they started getting multiple messages over Facebook asking how to facilitate a petition against the extra fees that they noticed the opportunity for wider action.

"It's like it went beyond our expectations – we were not ready for that!" one activist, Bora Mema recalled. "We were like we will support them with the petition, we shall try to push them to boycott the class, and we were thinking, 'Should we organise a protest?', but thought probably not it's too soon, let's just escalate things...and suddenly we were like OK! We're not ready for that yet and it was massive!" Even as the protests developed, the protests remained largely 'leaderless', a deliberate move by the Movement for University activists so as not to alienate students who were sceptical of their left-leaning position, particularly their position on the higher education reform, which some students I spoke to considered irrelevant to the material problems of high tuition costs and poor living conditions.

Albania's student protests fit well within the new rise in 'leaderless' protests around the world. I spoke to Dr Victoria Hui, a commentator on the 'leaderless' nature of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movements. It is easy to read parallels between the Hong Kong movement and the Albanian one. While both have wider political repercussions, they are both rooted in shared poor conditions whether that be rocketing house prices in Hong Kong or poor teaching in Albania. They also operate on a similar "spontaneous, majoritarian" basis, usually facilitated over social media. One person pitches a protest provisionally – on Facebook for the Albanians and Telegram for the Hong Kongers – and others follow if they wish. Authority is ephemeral, validated only by acquiescent footfall on the street. Like the Hong Kongers, the Albanian students also stuck to an unchanging set of 10 demands that included an increase in the percentage of GDP spent on education to 5%, creating online libraries in Albanian, and implementing an academic evaluation scheme. The students collectively refused to meet with Prime Minister Edi Rama to discuss these demands. While students I spoke to believed this was a missed opportunity, the refusal ensured that demands were literally considered 'non-negotiable' and was uncompromising on their 'leaderless', egalitarian status by declining to choose delegates or representatives.

However, what really struck me about the protest was the disparity between my own student life and their experience. I heard stories of tutors who put English textbooks through Google Translate in Albanian, stuck their name on the front, claimed it as their own, and then compelled students to buy an almost incomprehensible version or fear failing the class. Student/tutor corruption is endemic, yet almost impossible to detect, given that any ‘whistleblower’ students would be under suspicion themselves. Albania has one of the most highly qualified workforces, with postgraduate degrees considered a requisite if you want to get any job beyond manual labour. Yet in a country where politics and private interest are so deeply intertwined, any suggestion of meritocracy is quickly dismissed. Political allegiance determines entrance into all public sector, and even private sector jobs, as businesses seek to cultivate close ties to the government to ensure that a stream of government contracts and complementary policy. One student admitted that they had lost their job over their political involvement, a dire situation given the struggle already to meet the cost of tuition and living costs. For these extremely articulate and intelligent activists, who have taken it upon themselves to criticise the government’s every move, the future beyond university looks uncertain at best.

I spoke to one student, Gresa Hasa, whose dream is to come to Oxford to complete an MSt in Women’s Studies. “I want to leave for two years, study abroad,” she said, “and in those two years I don’t want to shout in the street or in the media, I just want to be in the library, reading and doing research work and that’s it. And then come back. Because I miss that a lot. And if there’s something I want to in life, I want to go to proper university because I still haven’t had that experience of being a student, and I think that’s very beautiful.” For the activists, the painful irony of campaigning hard for the future of Albanian students means that their own student life has been completely sacrificed.

The future of the student protests is still unsure. However, the permanent legacy for higher education is incontrovertible. During the protests, and the consequent abandonment of teaching led to professors forming a union of academic staff at the University of Tirana, the first of its kind. While the concept of such unions may sound far from radical to us in the UK, the idea of a non-political organisation that nonetheless advocates on governmental policy is completely unheard of. Professors I spoke to hope to expand membership in the coming year, and to use the union as a means of holding university administrators to be held to account. Students also hope to emulate the structure of the unions in their own faculties, which would enable the sentiments behind the protests to be channelled into a more sustainable mechanism for implementing change. Whether this more institutionalised approach will gain the same enthusiasm as the protests remains to be seen, but even this current generation’s newfound awareness of the importance of democracy, accountability and good education will undoubtedly affect Albanian politics in the years to come.

Tyrell Gabriel

Foreword

Over the summer of 2019, I was fortunate enough to travel to New York, America and experience the culture in all its many forms. I would like to begin this report by reiterating my gratitude to the Expanding Horizons Scholarship and the Amos Bursary for the joint effort in funding and organising this trip for me. In my application for this scholarship I wrote that I hoped to ‘learn about the world, develop a strong sense of relational identity and become independent’ but upon my return to the UK I realised that I achieved all of that and so much more. Immersing myself in a community and culture so different from my own has been a truly transformative experience and one which I can only try to convey the magnitude of within this report.

Introduction



For the last 19 years, I have spent my life living in one country, one city and one house. Whilst I have travelled to Europe and the Caribbean with family, I was acutely aware that travelling alone (to America especially) would be a completely different experience.

My journey officially started after an emotional goodbye to my family at Heathrow airport and was followed by an 8-hour flight to JFK airport in New York. Upon touchdown, the first thing I realised was the increase in security and the number of safety precautions - there was an interview stage where I was asked what the purpose of my visit is, how long and where I will be staying. This interview was also where I experienced my first piece of casual microaggression; me and my group were asked which basketball team we play for. So, although I wasn't off to the best start, it served as a reminder to which country I had travelled to and how there will be differences in behaviour. The Brownstone house in which I would be living in for the next month was situated in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, an area experiencing rapid gentrification. My first full day consisted of trying to understand the complex underground train system and a water taxi that took me around the Statue of Liberty with views of the New York skyline, the Brooklyn Bridge and the Jersey City skyline. I also visited the world trade centre and Ground Zero, it was shocking to see that nearly every American can recount exactly what they were doing at the time of 9\11. It is clear to an outsider how the impact of 9/11 has shaped American society and individuals at a subconscious level; 9/11 hurt American pride, elevated racial tensions and injected trust issues into American individuals.

On the second day we embarked on a tour of the United Nations Headquarters; which I learnt is not technically a part of the US as it is considered international territory to maintain equality within the member countries. Our visit to the UN was organised by Dame Karen Pierce, the first female British ambassador and the permanent British representative to the United Nations. Our tour started off with the history of the UN, why it was created during the increasing interest in nuclear warfare to maintain worldwide peace and the objectives they aim to achieve. We then went to the Conference Building to see the Security Council Chamber and the Secretariat Building to get an insight into the type of work they do there. The highlight of the tour for me was just touring the interior of the buildings and looking at all the traditional gifts from the respective members of the UN. When a new country joins the UN, it is customary to donate a gift or piece of artwork to represent their culture and country; for example, the country I am from, Jamaica, donated a golden steel drum set. It was also interesting to see the famous UN General Assembly Hall in session - I was even able to try out the special earpieces they use to translate the debates into all the different languages. The day ended with afternoon tea with Dame Karen Pierce in the British Ambassador suite, which had an original Andy Warhol painting, and some of her colleagues. We engaged in a lively discussion about the regional power dynamics that pose a threat to the development and progression of the UN and how governance may be the limiting factor in the economic development of emerging countries. After leaving the UN, I felt more



aware about the global problems we are facing and why it is not so straightforward to solve these problems without encouraging reliance on Western countries.

In the following days and weekends between working I kept myself busy and explored as much of New York as I could. Some of the highlights were visiting Coney Island, Six Flags theme park in New Jersey, a Mets baseball game in Queens, a rooftop party in the Bronx and regenerations projects such as the Highline and Brooklyn Bridge Park where I tried a roller rink for the first time. The number of new experiences I gained in such a short amount of time is staggering but I am sure I will remember all of them.



Living in Brooklyn

Exploring the area introduced me to the dominant black demographic, the vibrant cultural art pieces and just the general atmosphere of the community. Simply walking down the street itself was a whole experience, when people heard our British accent they wouldn't hesitate to strike up a conversation. Even the young entrepreneurs selling food on the street corner would tell us their story and their aspirations. I think that living within this neighbourhood presented me with a unique opportunity to observe and understand the culture at a deeper, more raw level. From the estate blocks to the vegan coffee shops, to the homeless and helpless to the edgy newcomers; Brooklyn is undoubtedly at a very pivotal time in its development.



One of the first things you will inevitably realise going into any new area, is the difference in jargon and accent.

I am someone who, in my own words, does not speak in a very posh manner - I grew up in London and regularly make use of colloquial terms. However, to almost every person I met, to them I appeared as if I had come straight from Downton Abbey and lived in Buckingham Palace. To me, I thought the main difference between UK English and US English is our pronunciation of words (it's like Americans take how you are supposed to pronounce English and distort it to fit their liking). Some of the New York regional slang I picked up was: 'bodega' = convenience store; 'deadass' = true, facts; 'mad' = very; 'periodt' = and that's final and 'word' = in agreement, just to name a few. While some may say the use of such extravagant colloquial terms is unnecessary and improper, I believe it adds character and fits in well with their culture.

Throughout my time in New York, I would jot down adjectives to describe New York culture and how it differentiates to my experience of UK and London culture. Some of the most fitting words and phrases I found were 'crazy, the city that never sleeps (cliché but very true), scary, relentless in every sense, diverse and full of hidden beauty'. At one point it clicked, and it became apparent that these differences stem from how expressive each individual is; they are unapologetically themselves and this is why it is so easy to fall in love with New York. Many people express their individuality in various ways, some through their untraditional clothing choice, some through wild hair styles, some through their art and some through their personality and interests. Whatever it is, it appears that if you do it with enough confidence, no one can tell you no and this is a code that New Yorkers live by, despite all the ramifications that come with it.

The Harlem Tour

After living in Brooklyn for a while, I could see that the area and appearance was changing and that it is at an important time in its development as it slowly succumbs to gentrification. The day out in Harlem was one which I was looking forward to because I have heard so much about it in terms of being the centre of black culture but also about the impact of gentrification in such an area. It seems as if Brooklyn is headed in a similar direction to Harlem, which has already experienced rapid changes to its appearance and scenery. The parallels with the UK in the context of gentrification in Harlem was interesting to see first-hand and points to a wider issue.



Gentrification can be defined as the process of changing the character of the neighbourhood through the influx of more affluent residents and businesses. Some politicians state that gentrification is a necessary evil through the potential for new jobs, the increasing property value and the renovation of neglected buildings. However, actually visiting these areas at a community level it was evident that these communities are conflicted about what stance they should take. On one side, some claim the renovation of communities to make them conform to middle-class tastes erodes the

existing culture and forces out low-income residents due to higher rent prices. On the other hand, regeneration projects can be seen to rejuvenate the community and sometimes the gentrifiers can be old members of the community who just want the locals to have a better life than they did.

Our tour guides talked about this topic at lengths over lunch/dinner at Sylvia's – a staple in the community and a must-eat restaurant in Harlem. I must emphasise that I am unsure whether what I ate was lunch or dinner because I ate so much, I couldn't eat again until the next day. Nevertheless, after our conversation and seeing the real-life impact of gentrification, I concluded that gentrification itself is unstoppable but that does not mean we cannot influence the way it is implemented. Rather gentrifiers should aim to modernise the identity of the town, not just the town's aesthetics, to create a fusion of cultures that recognises the qualities of all social groups.



The tour of Harlem also included visiting the Apollo Theatre, jazz in the park and famous filming sites. The Apollo Theatre is a key landmark in Harlem which saw rise to many of the greats in Jazz,

R&B and Soul music. The Apollo Theatre stage embodies historical importance through the show 'Showtime at the Apollo' which hosted acts from The Jackson Five, Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, Lauryn Hill and Destiny's Child just to name a few.

Golf Afternoon at the Hampshire Country Club

This day consisted of learning how to play golf by professionals and served as a powerful insight into how traditionally upper-class activities can be a tool for networking and much more.

It was the first time I had played a 9-hole golf course and I enjoyed it much more than I had expected. One of the guides for the country club also brought their child who was around our age, it



was interesting speaking to him about his experience at school and how it differs from mine. Their education system seems to give an advantage to those from wealthier backgrounds - this made me realise how grateful I am that I live in the UK and grew up with these unrealised privileges. However, while my experience was largely positive it also was the second place where I experienced a microaggression. Some elderly ladies who heard our accents asked if they could get our photo because they thought we played for an English football team. Hence, I understand why these institutions may be lacking black representation but despite this, the only way to change these misconceptions is to increase exposure in these spaces. In addition, I do believe these are problems faced more from

black Americans rather than black British individuals because in America the presence of black individuals in sport is greater. For example, the basketball industry and athletics is highly populated with black individuals resulting in these assumptions. Linking back to my observation on how Americans unapologetically express themselves, this is a prime example of when it goes wrong. Therefore, the discrimination and microaggressions black Americans experience will tend to be more frequent and severe than those I may experience as a black British individual.

The Work

One of the primary goals of my trip was to gain theoretical and practical knowledge about the American market and how it interplays with the UK market. The internship was at Linklaters, a 'magic circle' law firm, and was over the course of three weeks.

Coming from a Psychology background, I was somewhat unfamiliar with some legal terms and the various types of work they do but I was interested regardless. When I arrived on the first day, the street was clearly business centred, for as far as I could see there were offices and buildings dedicated for large firms - I was clearly in one of the world's most powerful cities and there was Linklaters in the middle of it. For the first few days, they made me perform some training and gave me an induction into the protocols they must follow when opening a new matter. They started off by giving me some online courses on how to use Excel and Word with their company formats and then an introduction into their company messaging service. I also learnt about the conditions Linklaters subject their clients to before they agree to represent them and then the processes involved in representing a client and how the different divisions work together.

From then on, they began to set me assignments and projects to work on; some of the work I did ranged from the marketing of their business, to schemes increasing internal efficiency, all the way to helping manage how they interact with their clients. Although, due to the confidential nature of legal industry I was quite limited in the way I could work on actual matters, but they did put on various networking sessions where I could talk to some lawyers and partners to discuss the type of work they do. I was also quite lucky since the HR team set up an informal meeting with the Firmwide Managing Partner, Gideon Moore, where we talked about his progression into his role, the future of the legal industry and the challenges involved with managing such a large global company under a partnership board.



Because I was spending over three weeks working in New York, I wanted to gain a better understanding of how the legal and finance industry are linked. I had a friend who was interning at KPMG, who is a client of Linklaters, so I got him to organise a tour of his offices and a chat with some junior associates on his team. After this conversation, I found that having background knowledge of the industry your client operates in is essential to providing the best service. In addition, working within this type of companies and then working on the legal side may give you a competitive advantage and a more complete perspective of the work you do.

Overall, the work I undertook in New York was extremely fascinating and insightful into the type of work they do in this industry. The conversations I had and connections I made through networking will provide a strong base for networking into any career I wish to pursue.

Weekend in Washington

My last weekend in America was spent travelling to Washington DC from New York, which took about 5 hours by coach. On the first day, I went to visit the National Mall which is a landscaped park hosting many museums detailing American history from every perspective. I was excited to visit the National Museum of African American History and Culture so that I could try to piece together why my experiences as a black British individual differentiates so much to black African Americans. The museum traced African American history from slavery and the struggle with liberation to how it varied between the US and the UK;



it even discussed modern issues faced by African Americans today such as stereotypes, institutional racism and police brutality as well as the impact famous black individuals have on society such as Beyoncé, Oprah and Obama. They drew interesting parallels between how the way in which black people were liberated meant that they were never truly accepted by society despite the laws enforcing so. I believe that this is where the difference in experiences originates from as although the UK was involved in the slave trade, the UK did not rely on slavery to boost its economy to the same scale.

The next day in Washington, we were welcomed into Howard University by Mr. Howard himself (the official face and representative of Howard). We were given a tour of the university and the history associated with this university; Howard is one of the largest and oldest historically black college



universities (HBCU). For this reason, the majority of their student population is black, ensuring that the college's rich cultural history is maintained and thrives going into the future. I managed to make some friends who then invited me to Howard's traditional 'All White Party' which signifies the start of the school year. I really enjoyed the party, especially given that it was an alcohol-free event, and I could see how parties here were different to those in the UK. At one point, the fraternities and sororities made a grand entrance and performed a short dance routine; it was quite a weird experience

and one that left me feeling as if they are viewed as the elite. Whilst some view the fraternity system as a means to make long lasting friendships, to me it seemed as if their only purpose is selective social exclusion and to give their members a sense of superiority. I can only wonder the impact this has the other students who are not part of a fraternity and be thankful that UK universities do not follow this system.



To end this packed weekend, I travelled to Capitol Hill where I had a tour of the Supreme Court of the United States and saw the US Capitol, the Library of Congress and the Federal Triangle. Other places I saw included the White House, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln memorial. To conclude, Washington DC has a completely different feel to it than New York - New York is constantly changing and growing whereas Washington is stagnant with its history woven into its aesthetic.

Reflections

This summer I travelled to the US for the first time, with no familiar faces, full of new experiences, casual microaggressions and the constant threat of crime, it was tough, but I don't regret a moment of it. I got the opportunity to connect with family I never met before, visit historical landmarks, art galleries, ride the subway, see some celebrities at Times Square, run through Central Park and work in the New York Public Library. The New York experience really was transformative and will continue to impact my life as I enter this new stage.

One of the most important things I learned about myself was my sense of identity; I am more than just the sum of my origin and where I live, it is also composed of the experiences I collate across my life. Travelling alone, whether it be international or local, is something I will be doing more of in the future and I view myself as a testament to the benefits. Understanding and embracing other cultures allows you to learn about the world, develop your ability to be relatable and learn about yourself and your interests. If you take anything away from this slightly lengthy report, it is travel, be independent and expand your horizons.



Roman Kenny-Manning

During the summer, I got to spend a month in Nosy Be, an island off the North Coast of mainland Madagascar. I volunteered on a marine conservation project, with a particular focus on turtles. My time on Nosy Be was undoubtedly one of the best experiences of my life. I had always dreamed of going to Madagascar, so to combine that dream with my passion for environmental conservation was very special for me. This was all made possible thanks to the Expanding Horizons Scholarship.

Whilst in Nosy Be, I had the opportunity to experience a different culture, one which was completely different from that back home. The minimalistic lifestyle built around reliance on the local environment made me appreciate the simple things in life. Much of my enjoyment of the project was often spent without technology, just appreciating the natural beauty I was so fortunate to be surrounded by.

The experience gave me the opportunity to meet lots of different people. Most of the other volunteers were British, but even so, it was a unique opportunity to see the paths that had brought all of us together. Meeting the local people was one of the major highlights of my experience. I felt over the course of the month that I had integrated with them and that there were many more things we had in common than I first would have imagined. For example, one of the guys I met, who was the same age as me, aspired to become a lawyer practicing international law. It was great to see how easily I could bond with the local people despite us growing up in such different environments.

I learned to scuba dive whilst on the project and had the opportunity to dive in some of the world's most stunning and marine bio-diverse locations. It was a truly unforgettable experience.

One of the most striking things was to see, first-hand, the problems developing countries experience with climate change and environmental conservation. The people of Nosy Be, once they

understood what was happening to their environment and how they could help, showed a great willingness to get their hands dirty and help contribute to the cause. One example of this was the eco-brick scheme which we, as volunteers, helped introduce to the community. This involved filling plastic water bottles with the vast amounts of single use plastics that usually just wash up in the beaches and forest areas. From the outset, I learned that the plight of plastics and chemicals that wash up in the beaches are adversely affecting the populations and sex of sea turtles, in particular the endangered Hawksbill, only found in a few locations across the world. Participating in regular beach cleans felt like I could provide some little assistance in resolving this problem.

My experience in Nosy Be was undoubtedly one of the most memorable experiences in my life, and I am truly grateful to the Expanding Horizons Scholarship for affording me this opportunity.

Anastasya Larasati



Politics

I arrived in DC on the first of August, the evening of the second round debate for the Democratic Party presidential primaries. I also arrived two days before the successive mass shootings in Dayton and El Paso over the weekend, unhelpfully stoking my parents' fears over the

safety risks of visiting the US.

As an outsider, it was somewhat surreal to arrive in the capital city of a nation in the middle of yet another national gun debate - in fact, one of the first conversations I had at my internship was about how the agency was heightening security in the building. It soon became clear to me that there is a distinctly high level of political engagement in people living in DC - whether they worked near Capitol Hill or not, and both inside the walls of my internship office and out. A Joe Biden life-size cut out smiled aggressively down at me every time I passed the office next door on the way to the lifts. One of the cleaners of the AirBnB I was staying in spoke to me for an hour long about the 13th Amendment, and how it effectively provided free prison labour, legally succeeding the American slave trade.

But as the literary assistant I worked beside - Jay - told me, a running joke in the city was how no one here is actually *from* here. Of course, she pointed out, there *are* plenty of people born and raised in DC, but they are often marginalised and pushed out of communities due to gentrification. 'Collateral damage' of the political class growing outwards from downtown DC.

Museums & Exhibitions

My trip was primarily organised around an internship with Ross Yoon Agency (RYA), a non-fiction literary agency near Dupont Circle. But I had also come to DC with the view of visiting several exhibitions I was personally interested in: *The Warmth of Other Suns* exhibition at the Phillips

Collection, *Vietnam, Past is Prologue* exhibition by Tiffany Chung in the National Portrait Gallery, and the *Power in my Hand* exhibition in the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The exhibition at the Phillips Collection was a particularly noteworthy experience; it is a beautifully curated show exploring stories of migration, from the refugee crisis in Europe, the border crisis in the US, and the plight of refugees from post-Arab Springs Middle East, amongst many other stories of displacement.

The Warmth of Other Suns also reminded me of the *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition at the Holocaust Museum I visited. The museum painfully detailed the immigration quotas set by the US and anti-Semitic rhetoric spewed by American isolationists, as Jewish peoples from across Europe sought safe refuge from the Nazis. There were also displays on the Japanese internment camps in the Holocaust Museum, and how not even American citizenship could protect those of Japanese descent from being rounded up and fenced in. It's a trite saying that much of the 'liberal media' have been repeating over the past couple of years: that the current state of politics right now does not represent the America [they] know and are proud of. But after viewing these exhibitions on US history, it's clear how inaccurate this statement is.

Having said that, the mere existence of these exhibitions are a testament to the enduring activism of many in the country. In fact, one of the literary agents mentioned being at Lafayette Square, right opposite the White House, on Tisha B'Av for the 'Jews Against ICE' rally. On that day, many at the New York equivalent of the rally were [arrested](#) for their participation in a sit in of an Amazon bookstore, protesting against Amazon's financial ties with ICE. I read in *One Nation Under Trump* (by E.J. Dionne J.r., Norman Ornstein, Thomas Mann, who are represented by RYA) that perhaps one positive outcome to take from the President's time in office is the surging rise in political activism and engagement throughout the country.

Ross Yoon Agency

It is actually the explosion of political discourse that has been happening for the last three years in this country that made my internship at Ross Yoon Agency incredibly timely - non-fiction readership and interest is at an all-time high. It was somewhat of a double-edged sword, as another agent described to me, because for however well the industry was doing and however high sales went, she would rather the state of US politics to be in a better place.



Ross Yoon Agency is an intimate and encouraging workplace housing only four agents, a literary assistant, and a literary manager and officed in a spacious, modern building next to a law firm, of which Gail - the President of RYA - is also a name partner. Being in a workplace where (a) most of the work we were doing could be done at home, and (b) it was the end of summer vacation before school started, meant that the office was often pretty empty with some agents working from home, and others on holiday.

The majority of my work was sifting through unsolicited manuscripts of mainly non-fiction submissions - occasionally, I would have to read through some sci-fi/fantasy as one of our agents, Dara, also represented some literature in that genre. One of my favourite things I learned about the industry was how each agent has their own 'feel' in terms of what kind of book they're looking for. This became apparent to me swiftly as on my first day, Anna (a Corpus alumnae now at Ross Yoon

Agency) handed me a guide for the type of authors each agent tended to represent. From memory (and from my own assessments), the list went like this:

1. Gail: high-profile politicians, high-profile journalists, high-profile people.
2. Howard: big business, economics, some history and politics.
3. Dara: history, Judaica, quirky feminism, progressive sci-fi and fantasy. 'Ravenclaw' books.
4. Anna: anything morbid and/or brave. Particularly books about death and feminism - sometimes both.

Whenever I found an interesting submission, I forwarded it over with a memo to essentially outline its pros and cons to the agent I thought suited it best. It was difficult knowing that some proposals might slip through the cracks - a danger I especially knew was lurking since I am a very picky reader - and that that would be my fault. But I eventually learned to trust my instincts (and also I asked advice from Jay, our literary assistant whose desk area I basically co-opted during my internship.) Unfortunately, only one of the proposals I read made it in the long run as far as I am aware - a parenting book written by two former CIA agents that Howard signed.

On the other hand, a handful of the proposals I turned down/commented on really stuck in my head. Examples include:

- A. A proposal which ended with many attached photos of the writer's several appearances on Fox News. The photos were completely unrelated to the book, which was to do with sex trafficking.
- B. A proposal about Reiki/meditation/EFT as a cure for cancer and alternative medicine's compatibility with Christianity. A notable mention from the proposal was how tumours send out electro-magnetic pulses (EMPs) that affect phones.
- C. An email that aggressively asserted that it would take a brave and highly intelligent literary agent to represent their proposal. And also 'challenged' my rejection of it.
- D. (I wrote a memo on this one:) A proposal about luxury water, with tasting notes and recipes for soup used by Michelin starred chefs involving mineral water.

Non-fiction Industry

The non-fiction book industry is relatively small, and I learnt a lot about the way things worked; a writer had to look for an agent before looking for a publisher, an editor would usually be found by the agent who had a roster/contacts and a feel for what an editor would be interested in working with, book proposals (which a writer is meant to submit to an agent, and later publisher, rather than a manuscript of a complete book) can take up to two years to perfect with an agent before submitting to a publishing house.

There are also certain details that seem obvious but hit home once I started working. For example, you virtually must have some sort of platform to even begin to have a marketable proposal - for the most part, no one wants to sign on an unknown. If your writing is really *that* good, it makes more sense to write articles first and build a brand and following that way. This unfortunately put a large dent into my far-off dream of writing some sort of memoir or book of essays at some point in the future - your best bet is to actually have a career as a journalist, and write for a household name paper/magazine/online medium. Also to have an original idea, too. Another thing I sadly learnt about the wider industry was how instrumental Twitter is. Social media in the UK - as far as I'm aware - is more centred around Facebook or Instagram, but in the book industry (as it is in politics nowadays), many turn to Twitter to accumulate a following. Another dent in the dream.

On a positive note, I did learn that my law degree had some use in the book industry due to the heavy presence of contracts between writer-agent-editor-publisher. This was something Gail - who works as a media lawyer - is an industry expert in.

Advance royalties - paid for by a publisher to a writer usually on signing a book proposal - were also incredibly interesting to learn about. Often these advance royalties given are not matched by the book sales themselves, but sometimes this is done on purpose - as with many high-profile memoirs. For example, the Obamas' made \$65 million in advance in a joint book deal, and this was a costly investment by Penguin Random House. There's a possibility the publishing house might get a good return from this deal - the Clintons rapidly earned out their \$40m deal - but this is in any case a nice trophy for Random House to showcase. In fact, New York Times Best Sellers get \$10k each week they're on the list, and I think *Becoming* has been on the list every week since it came out (at writing, it's been on there for 41 weeks!!).

I really enjoyed learning about the non-fiction industry and how it worked, and I believe that in these times it's imperative that authors from all sides of the political spectrum keep writing honestly and constructively. I also believe agents and publishers have a strong duty in helping to shape and advance these narratives for readers, a duty Ross Yoon Agency has been performing in spades.

As one of the agent's memos pointed out, honest and powerful story-telling, more so than technology or research or ideological and political sentiments, can change the narrative of today's society. For example, we know climate change is a scientific reality, but how are we going to tell the facts with urgency? We know X administration is doing Y wrong, but how are we going to write about this in a way that mobilises everyday people to become activists? Ross Yoon's motto is that 'books change lives', and nothing could be truer or more important for society right now.

Conclusion

It was fitting that towards the end of my trip, I decided without previous planning to visit the Georgetown campus on the day freshmen students were moving in for the first time. As I have just recently graduated from Corpus (the ceremony was a week before my flight to DC, in fact), it was a strange reminder of how quickly my time in CCC passed by, and all of the different opportunities that being at Oxford offered me.

I am incredibly lucky and eternally grateful for this opportunity to visit DC and work at Ross Yoon Agency. I would like to thank all of the alumni and sponsors who have enabled me to take part in this experience in a part of the world I've never visited before, in particular Anna Sproul-Latimer for letting me intern at her office!

Books I read in DC, all authors represented by Ross Yoon Agency;

- *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*, by Lori Gottlieb
- *One Nation Under Trump*, by E.J. Dionne J.r., Norman Ornstein, Thomas Mann
- *Irritable Hearts*, by Mac McClelland
- *Guyland*, by Michael Kimmel
- *Once More We Saw the Stars*, by Jayson Greene

Allison Panelas

Almost ten years ago, before I started my journey into higher education, I was working as a cashier at a soup restaurant in San Francisco. Feeling like I was smarter than the people around me gave me credit for, and desperate to learn more about the world, I decided to start reading the newspaper

every day. Shortly after I made my resolution, the Arab Spring swept across the Arab World. I remember pouring over articles about Egypt and Tunisia and later Syria, never fully understanding what was happening but unable to get enough information. It was this curiosity that brought me to community college for the first time to study Middle Eastern history. Desperate for more knowledge of the Arab world, I registered for intensive Arabic classes immediately upon transferring to UC Berkeley a few years later. After the equivalent of two years of Standard Arabic, I could struggle to read an Arabic newspaper with a dictionary, but couldn't really speak to anyone.

The Arabic language has been spoken for such a long time and is spread across such a wide geography that different Arabic dialects differ so greatly that a Syrian would not be able to understand Moroccan spoken Arabic. The Arabic taught in universities is Standard or Classical Arabic, a language rooted in the Koran and used in written sources, but only actually spoken by newscasters. When I discovered how greatly spoken Arabic differed from the Arabic I had been learning in class, I grew disheartened at learning the language. When I would struggle to speak the language I had put so much time into learning, I occasionally found very patient, educated Arabic speakers who would engage with me, but many would laugh at how ridiculous Standard Arabic sounded out loud.

The opportunity afforded me by the Expanding Horizons scholarship allowed me to travel to Beirut and take an "Urban Arabic" class, which focused on the Arabic actually spoken in Levantine urban centers—mostly Beirut and Damascus. I took a five week beginner class at the Saifi institute which has a full curriculum for teaching Lebanese Arabic. Because of my foundation in Standard Arabic, many parts of the course were quite easy for me to catch onto, but the differences between Urban Arabic and Standard Arabic were extensive (differences in pronunciation of certain letters, different words used, different short vowel sounds on similar words, and "mood markers" for conjugation). Within a week or two I had a much better understanding of words I could use in my daily life in Beirut.

Some of the things I took from my time in Lebanon were quite tangible: a pair of earrings a classmate gave me for my birthday, cedar beads from a sweet vendor selling them near the cedar forest, a page with my name written in Arabic calligraphy by my Arabic teacher. Other things I took with me from Lebanon were slightly more abstract: a better knowledge of spoken Arabic, more Eastern Mediterranean dance moves (the trick is it's all in the shoulders), and stronger ideas about Hellenic antiquities and their relationship to twentieth-century nation-state building. But the most influential things I took with me from Lebanon were the relationships I built and the connections I made. I found that my relationships with other people—hearing their stories and experiences and listening to their thoughts and hopes and dreams—had the deepest impact on me and my understanding of the world. My memories of people, whether it was an experience we shared or something they told me about themselves, are the things I continue carry with me. These stories, experiences and memories are the way I build context for the world and compassion for other people I meet. Geopolitical events, stories and histories mean so much more to me when they affect people I've connected with. Thus my experience in Lebanon can only be understood through the stories of the people I met.

I lived in an Armenian neighborhood of Beirut, down the street from an Armenian church. Signs were spray-painted on many of the walls saying "Turkey is guilty of genocide." Large numbers of Armenians from Anatolia ended up in Lebanon after the genocide and death marches of 1915 and strong communities of Armenians remain especially in the Bourj Hamoud area of Beirut. Most of my neighbors were Christians but not all were Armenian. Our little neighborhood was perched at the top of the hill in Ashrafieh, with winding stairs draped with vines from small trees leading up to brightly painted buildings with balconies. Many of the older men in the neighborhood would sit on folding chairs on the street playing *dowla* or backgammon and greeting everyone as they walked by.

While few of my neighbors spoke English, they were very patient with my Arabic, greeting me with *ahlan wa sahlán* and *keefik?* as I walked by. While my Arabic never got good enough to have in-depth conversations with my neighbors, I developed a friendly relationship with the older couple who ran the small grocery store on the corner, the gentleman who lived downstairs from me, and the man on the street with a big personality who always told me he was going to go to the gym with me one of these days.

Towards the end of the course, I learned that my Arabic teacher lived down the street from me. Ala'a is a Druze man who came from the Golan Heights region of Syria. He had worked in tourism until the war when the Syrian government demanded that he rejoin the army, despite having finished his military service. Knowing that returning to the army was a death sentence, he fled with his wife and his son to Lebanon and began working as an Arabic teacher. Living without formal permission to reside in Lebanon, Ala'a and his family need to pay four hundred American dollars per year to renew their Syrian passports and hope that they are not discovered by the authorities and deported back to Syria. When he invited me over to his house for tea one evening to meet his family, he reminisced about meeting his wife in his village while they were growing up and then moving to Damascus and getting the opportunity to spend time with her one on one outside the sight of prying elders. He assured me that Damascus was quite safe these days and he was part of a tour company that takes people to visit Damascus from Beirut. He was deeply invested in showing potential tourists that they could safely return to some parts of Syria as he would not be able to fully resume his work as a tour guide in Syria if the tourists didn't feel safe coming back.

The friends I made in my Arabic class were somewhat privileged people who were either of Lebanese descent or were interested in learning Arabic in order to work in Middle Eastern or European NGOs in refugee policy or settlement. There was the Colombian woman who had been brought to Lebanon by a birthright trip which sought to bring the Lebanese diaspora back to Lebanon, the man who identified as Lebanese but grew up in Nigeria and felt embarrassed that he still didn't speak Arabic, and the Danish woman who had been adopted from Lebanon during the civil war who had returned to Lebanon desperate to learn more about her biological family. There was also the French woman who moved to Beirut in order to do research for her PhD in sociology on Lebanon's refugee policy, the Australian man who had recently finished his masters in International Relations and wanted desperately to find an internship at an NGO in Beirut, and the Irish eye surgeon who was using his substantial savings to support himself while working as a medical volunteer in a refugee camp south of Beirut. All of these people cared deeply about Lebanon and the Arab world as a whole and were aching to learn and connect to the culture.

There was also the Turkish man who came to Lebanon to learn Arabic in order to work in his father's business selling plugs, sockets and electrical equipment produced in Turkey to the Arab world. He would explain to me that he couldn't go to Bourj Hamoud (the Armenian district) because they always somehow found out he was Turkish and then they would spit in his face and refuse him service. But at the same time I noticed that he constantly spent time in Bourj Hamoud and seemed to make many Armenian friends there (some spoke Turkish) who would help him find places to live and give him discounts on rental cars. On the outside it seemed like there would be such strong historical animosities, but his friendly demeanor and openness to connecting with everyone seemed to break down barriers and open doors for him.

I went on a date with a Syrian man who worked in a cafe near the language school. I had originally thought that he was in his late twenties or early thirties, closer to my age, but then discovered that he was only twenty-three, appearing aged far beyond his years. He was from Homs and told me about working distributing medical supplies throughout the war zones before coming to Lebanon to avoid going into the army. His dream was to open a seaside bar like the ones in Byblos, but in Syria.

Just a relaxed place where he could live and make friends and serve drinks. When the war ends. *Inshallah*. God willing.

I also found myself dating a man who worked as a diplomat at the American Embassy in Beirut. Due to numerous bombings during the civil war in the 1980s, embassy workers were only allowed to leave the compound in an armored vehicle with a body guard. He was able to request two six-hour trips outside the embassy per week and could join trips with other embassy workers, but beyond that was confined to the compound. It was a large piece of land complete with a tennis court, a pool, a hotel, a restaurant, a gym, and furnished apartment buildings (complete with machine guns on the roof). It seemed like a life in a gilded cage, where he had everything he could want or need, except the freedom to leave and explore Lebanon as he wished.

One night I spent the night with him at the Embassy while he was on call for “citizen services,”—in case an American citizen in Lebanon experienced an emergency and called the embassy. We were awakened at three in the morning by a phone call from the US State Department calling for information about an Israeli drone that had just exploded in a

Hezbollah-controlled neighborhood of South Beirut. He quickly got up and went to his office to give them as much information as he could find and then was deluged with work for the next few weeks reporting to the US government on the tit-for-tat shellings between Hezbollah and Israel across the border.

Many of the foreigners worried about a deteriorating security situation because these strikes were the first direct ones in years in Lebanon. But no one died. And local people seemed unconcerned. The hot war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 had devastated a lot of Lebanese infrastructure, but Lebanese people continued living their lives. “The tourists keep coming,” Ala’a said, always concerned about violence affecting the tourist industry. The Lebanese economy is quite small and dependent on outside assistance. The Lebanese diaspora sends a significant amount of money back to the country, and many people from Gulf countries buy property in Beirut, driving up prices. Lebanese Lira and American dollars are used interchangeably. You might pay with a fifty dollar bill and get change in both dollars and Lebanese Lira.

The outside investment in the city meant that the aesthetic was a bit strange. A cement building still riddled with bullet-holes from the civil war would stand right next to a new shiny high-rise. While the government struggles to maintain infrastructure (electricity in Beirut is turned off for about 3 hours a day, and other places in Lebanon will go out for 12 hours at a time), chain restaurants and stores are everywhere. All American and European products are easy to find in the malls of Beirut, imported at a pretty penny, like everything else.

There are no trains or buses in Lebanon, but there is an ad-hoc system of privately-owned vans that go in general directions. When getting in a van or a shared taxi, *servees*, I would tell the driver where I was trying to go and he would either beckon me into the vehicle or answer with a click of his tongue and raised eyebrows—a sign meaning no, he wasn’t going in that direction.

Because there is no form of transportation other than car, there is constantly tense traffic in Beirut and the pollution is almost visible. Sitting on the *Corniche*, or the seaside walk in downtown Beirut, I would watch the sun fall toward the horizon only to disappear behind the smog line before finally setting. And I could feel the density of the combination of heat, humidity and pollution every time I tried to go for a run.

But as anyone in Lebanon will tell you, the most beautiful parts of the country are outside Beirut. My friend Johnny, who I met in undergrad, came from a little Christian village in the mountains which proudly proclaimed to have the largest lit cross in the world. When he picked me up and took me to the mountains near his village, we noticed that the top of every mountain had a cross on it. He

laughingly explained that Christians in Lebanon like to make it very clear that you're entering a Christian area. Johnny's mother was Armenian and father was Eastern Orthodox, but he had grown up in Dubai, coming back to Lebanon annually to see family. He had returned to go to medical school and talked about how very different the community he had grown up in in Dubai was from the groups of people he found himself in in Lebanon. In Dubai, he had many Muslim friends and friends from all over the Arab world along with many from South Asia. In Lebanon, he only ever found himself around other Lebanese Christians. The religious divisions of the country had resulted in deep segregation of religious communities. But he loved the fresh air of the mountains near his village, the smell of the cedar forests, and proud legacy of poets who had come from his village.

Some of my experiences in Lebanon were a bit more physical than intellectual or linguistic. While sitting at a seaside cafe in Tyre in South Lebanon, my French classmate got into a debate with my Turkish classmate about feminism and gender roles in marriage. Not wanting to participate in the complicated cultural-gender clash, I walked off by myself along the beach. The sky had turned a bright orange with the setting sun, and although the air was starting to cool off, the water was still warm. I gently walked into the sea, feeling the waves push me back and pull me out little by little. I lay back and let myself float, the salty Mediterranean making me feel weightless. I pointed my toes up to the sun-streaked sky and listened to the sounds of families laughing and playing in the water around me. For a moment it felt like I was flying, with the waves moving back and forth under me, the sunlight dancing in the sky above me, and the horizon, standing steady straight ahead.

I'm not sure how much of the Arabic I learned I'll retain without actually living in an Arabic-speaking country, but as Arabic is a language I seem to hear spoken to a greater or less degree everywhere I go, I hope to be able to follow more of it, and be able to understand more of what my Arabic-speaking friends say to each other. I also hope to be able to maintain long-term relationships with the people I met in Lebanon. I hope that my time in Lebanon has opened me up to greater empathy and understanding of individual people and cultures as a whole. I hope to maintain a long-term relationship with Lebanon, and I hope to return and continue developing my Arabic language skills. I also hope that my time in Lebanon facilitates me visiting other Arab countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. I would love to visit Jordan and Egypt specifically, and I hope that I find those trips easier to make because of the language skills I've developed, the connections I've made and the time I've spent in Lebanon.

Jenny Sanderson

Summary

In September, I volunteered in Senya Beraku, Ghana, for 3 weeks working in a temporary school during the day and helping at an orphanage in the evening. I also had the opportunity to go to a herbal centre which doubles up as a mental health clinic. Having studied Psychology, the different culture and attitudes were very interesting especially towards mental health and physical disabilities.

A population of approximately 22 million people is widely spread across the country, encompassing various different groups, languages and dialects. The effects of poverty and poor infrastructure can be spotted everywhere. The roads, as one example, would certainly benefit from government funding. Experiencing the bumpy tracks to the orphanage is an interesting journey, especially when there are 5 of you in a two-seater tuk-tuk. More concerning, or impressive, was that 40 odd children could be packed into a mini-van with 12 seats for a 10-minute daily journey to and from the orphanage.

People

Ghanaians are well known for being friendly to everyone they meet, especially volunteers. They pride themselves on their hospitality. People, especially children, will run up and say “hello” wherever you are and ask, “what is your name?” Another common phrase directed towards volunteers is “oburoni.” For most Ghanaians, an oburoni refers to any person with lighter skin or straighter hair than a dark-skinned Ghanaian. Oburoni are considered an amusing sight, especially in rural areas, where children often follow around the foreigner chanting the word. The concept of time for Ghanaians is also very different from the West. Teachers would regularly turn up hours late, or not turn up at all. The same applies to buses and taxis so I learnt to book the latter at least an hour before I needed it. While we often live by the clock, Africans have a more relaxed attitude to timekeeping and punctuality.



Language

English is the official language in Ghana, but there are around 80 languages spoken. In Senya Beraku, Fante is taught in their schools but Twi is also spoken by most of the people in that area. This can make it difficult for the children who interlace around 5 different dialects. More troubling was the level of English taught in the schools; the teachers often would spell words wrong or not understand basic material themselves. A favourite example was ‘bell’ included in a list of ‘three letter words’ that the children obligingly copied. The system seems counter-intuitive, with many children not being taught how to write before they are expected to read and copy notes. There is a great disparity between the children’s verbal ability and their ability to write and read the words. It was not uncommon for a child to point to an object and name it e.g. table but they could not read, nor write the word. However, what is apparent is the children’s eagerness to learn and their capacity for other languages. It was warming teaching them ‘hello’ in different languages for them to remember these greetings for weeks after. In return, they taught me a mixture of basic Twi and Fante.

Interestingly, the non-verbal language is also important and good to understand if one visits Ghana. You should never use your left hand to do anything: it’s impolite. The national handshake is a shake, clasp and a snap of each other’s fingers – something that is tricky to do smoothly without practice!

Orphanage Home Project - Becky’s Foundation

Becky’s Foundation is a local non-profit organisation located in Senya-Beraku, an historic coastal town in Ghana. They work to improve the quality of the most vulnerable children and to support deprived communities. The Orphanage Home started when a local schoolteacher, Seth Asiedu, noticed an increasing number of his pupils dropping out of school due to neglect, teen pregnancy, child slavery and extreme poverty. He subsequently set up an after-school program in Senya-Beraku for children who needed extra emotional care and basic needs met, such as food, clothing and school supplies. His effort now has international attention and volunteers are keen to get involved.



Nowadays, local authorities, international volunteers and benevolent organisations (including Exceed) have supported building a comfortable facility. Despite this, the staff is still limited to 4 people (2 cooks, 1 nurse and the manager of the orphanage, Matilda). The severe lack of support for

the children means the support of the volunteers is necessary. Recently they acquired new beds for the children, so they all have somewhere other than the floor to sleep. The building currently hosts 53 disadvantaged children (21 girls, 32 boys). Despite the unbelievable and appalling circumstances leading to their stay at the orphanage, they are amazing people. They are very respectful, always willing to learn and entertaining.

Daily work for the volunteers, including myself, was needed in helping the children with their homework after school, cleaning the orphanage and helping cook for the children. Ultimately, a volunteer helps take care of children who do not generally receive as much as attention as would be desired. In addition, I helped with the running and maintenance of the orphanage, as well as organising games and activities after school. This could be a challenge and very physically demanding at times, given the volume of children to entertain but always enjoyable. Often you would find three children hanging off you at once, making balancing difficult especially when you're expected to play football and teach homework at the same time.



Education Teaching Project

Also based in Senya Beraku, Becky's Preparatory School consists of day care, primary and junior high-school. This is where I worked during the day before going to the orphanage after school. The school is mainly attended by the children at the Becky's Orphanage home for free. The general community members can enrol their children to fill up available vacancies. However, they pay school fees to support the day to day operations and the salaries of the staff. The total enrolment currently stands at 417 students. Working with volunteers, especially international volunteers, helps improve the quality of teaching, learning and extracurricular activities. The building is temporary and they hope to build a permanent school closer to the orphanage, which will replace the wooden structure where the children attend school currently so that they can cut transport costs and improve health and safety.



As an education volunteer in Ghana, I was generally expected to help and sometimes conduct lessons in English, Maths and Science. I helped the local teachers with large classes, ensuring that pupils receive more personal attention and tutelage. By setting an example of English pronunciation and grammar every day, one creates improvement in the pupils' language skills that can be tracked.

Healthcare Projects in Ghana

Within the clinic one can work at the maternity, records, the lab, assisting with triage in the outpatient department and outreach activities. I was fortunate enough to help with the outreach activity, helping to do check-ups in the herbal centre giving my Psychology background. Herbal medicine is the first line of choice for the home treatment of nearly two thirds of children with high fever from malaria in Ghana. Ghana has been relying on herbal medicine for curing and healing different diseases for several decades. Most people in Ghana opt to use herbal medicine over prescribed drugs because they understand that natural cure has fewer side effects compared to the prescribed drugs; it is also a result of ignorance and the belief that herbal medicines are more effective in curing deadly diseases. Herbal medicine is also cheap and readily accessible compared to pharmaceutical treatment. Observing the great cauldrons with open fires burning beneath them, with various herbs bubbling away felt quite medieval, verging on surreal when there was a rogue goat overseeing their equivalent of a chemistry laboratory.

Many people in Ghana suffer from severe mental health disorders, with even more suffering from moderate to mild mental health disorders. The treatment gap is 98% of the total population expected to have a mental health disorder. Furthermore, the majority of care is provided through specialised psychiatric hospitals that are close to the capital and only services a small proportion of the population, with relatively less government provision and funding for general hospital and primary health care-based services. I was really surprised that in their mental health care centre, there was not a single psychologist or trained professional. Their children were left to roam around a poor environment. Even in the clinic itself, there is no doctor, only nurses. The outreach project from the clinic only concerns those who have been referred to the clinic and prescribed drugs. During the meetings with the patients at the herbal centre, the only ‘counselling’ they would receive involves asking whether the drugs are working for them and how they currently feel rather than any type of therapy or long-term programme. More shocking was the consistent one-week prescription of antidepressants that, in the West it is commonly acknowledged takes around 3 months for people to start to see a positive effect from them (if at all). This boils down to the expense of course, but also the education. The nurse prescribing these drugs was entirely unaware of the research that has been uncovered.

Furthermore, Ghana’s 1972 mental health decree strongly emphasised institutional care to the detriment of providing mental health care in primary health care settings, contradictory to both national and international policy directives. Procedures for involuntary admission in the 1972 law also did not sufficiently protect people against unnecessary admission. Indeed, serious mistreatments of people with mental disorders – some have been involuntarily locked away in institutions for decades – have persisted under this legislation. It is difficult and hard to see and hear about. One positive surprise was the quantity of courses that the Ghanaian universities had in Clinical Psychology and the mental health nurse I worked with was keen to further his understanding.

Travelling

Ghana gained independence in 1957 from British colonial rule, as often heard sung by the children. There are still many remnants of the colonial era, including the old slave forts in Elmina and Cape Coast. I managed to visit both slave forts on one of my weekend breaks which was both a sad reminder of former times and an impressive spectacle.



Ghana also boasts rainforest and gorgeous beaches. Kakum National Park’s canopy walkway was lovely, although it is evident to see the tourist industry hasn’t taken off here, or indeed in the rest of Ghana. This can be as equally refreshing as frustrating. Established in 1931 as a reserve, the area is covered in tropical forest and lies in the coastal environs of the Central Region. While we didn’t see any African elephants, we did get a brilliant bird’s eye view of the vegetation through a canopy walkway. The canopy walk was designed by a pair of Canadians. Looking to increase tourism (specifically ecotourism) in the largely ignored national park, the designers wanted to create a unique feature that would attract people. Opened in 1995, the walkway consists of seven separate bridges that hang 130 feet above the ground. The downside to less tourism, is the unstandardised prices which can mean you end up being asked to pay more depending on the mood of the ticket officer or waiting 2 hours for a meal.



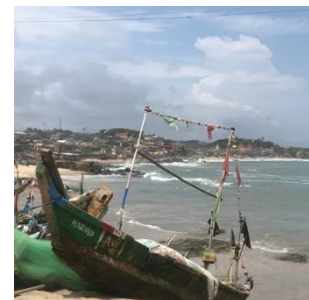
I certainly couldn't have left Ghana without exploring a little bit of Accra, the capital. The capital's hot, sticky streets are perfumed with sweat and life. There is a quickly evolving arts scene in the centre and cuisine from all four corners of the globe. However, the people are definitely the best part. No matter how busy the streets of Makola Market, the market ladies will always engage in conversations. Jamestown was my favourite area of Accra, its oldest

suburb, where you'll find a mix of corrugated iron shacks and clapboard houses along the seafront. It offers a sobering look at the poverty and hardships people face there, while having a brilliant energy about it.

Although I think the lack of nature in Accra could take a toll if one was to move there, the food and nightlife options are abundant. West Africans love music – every bar and lounge in the city can turn into a club. People will simply get up and dance, often creating bustling street scenes. Moving through these streets might take a while though; Accra is suddenly huge, so you need to plan for traffic. Hundreds of brand-new suburban developments mean that people leave home before 6am and leave work after 8pm to avoid spending hours in gridlock.

Food

Ghanaian food has many influences, including Indian flavours. If you visit, expect to eat lots of rice and banku (a corn-based dough with a consistency like mashed potato) as a staple evening meal. These tend to be served with fish, beans and meat, in stews or curry sauces. Some meals were more familiar, interestingly spaghetti Bolognese has even made its mark deep in rural Ghana. This was often the children's favourite food when asked.



Street food is often very cheap and popular with Ghanaians who don't have hours for food preparation. Driving along you will no doubt see women carrying great baskets on their heads filled with plantain chips or Fan Ice (a great source of cold in the heat that are like ice lollies). Vendors commonly sell jollof rice (a mildly spicy, flavoured rice) with chicken or fish. Other snacks such as groundnuts and popcorn are especially common, and of course tropical fruit is plentiful. Traditional foods such as red-red were often included in my diet during my time in Ghana. This simple stew is based on black-eyed beans that get cooked in oil and tomatoes. It's topped with fried plantain pieces. If you like tomatoes, you'll probably like Ghanaian food. Traditional local foods are nearly always based around sauces, soups and stews. However, the caveat (especially for me) is that they often use a generous helping of chillies.

Daily Life



Living in a volunteer house, 5 minutes walking from the school was lovely. It was very different to home though with no running water and no mirror. So, showers, laundry and the toilet ran by hand pouring water that were stored in nearby large buckets. While being on the coast, there are still many water shortages so we were sometimes left with no water for many days. Of course, there was still drinking water available. The most affordable drinking water comes in a plastic sachet. You opened these by ripping a corner with your teeth. It caused simultaneous amusement and difficulty

to try and master how to do this without squeezing the bag in the process causing water to spill everywhere! The plastic waste from these is noticeable in the community with wrappers dumped all over the sides of the roads.

The currency used throughout Ghana is the cedi (GHS). While travelling around is relatively cheap, remarkably the cost increases when the ATM does not actually provide the amount of cash that you have asked for, despite charging the full amount.

Public Transport

Taxis are the primary form of public transport in Ghana. There are generally more taxis than private cars on the road, so you rarely have trouble finding one. Finding a taxi in decent condition is another matter though.

Unfortunately, a stereotype of westerners, especially white people, is that they are wealthy so police often target taxis with foreigners in them, not to mention taxi drivers often try charging more than they would ask from a local. For longer journeys, for example to nearby towns, one can take “tro-tros” – essentially minibuses – which you catch at tro-tro stations. Fares are generally very reasonable, if it turns up.



We took several taxis from Senya Beraku to both Accra and Cape Coast and were surprised at the extent of police barriers. I felt these to be aimed at taxis particularly those with travelling foreigners. It seems clear that instead of ensuring the safety of motorists, the police officers were more concerned with lining their own pockets. Pulling over a taxi for a minor infraction (whether real or imagined) often results with the driver paying a bribe to the officer and being allowed to continue. This is determinantal on multiple fronts; firstly, there is an unnerving culture of mistrust towards police as they are serving their interests, and drivers are encouraged to keep their cars in poor condition as paying bribes is likely cheaper than either a formal fine or the cost of repair. Thus, this creates a more dangerous and less welcoming environment for foreign visitors, which is a shame given how wonderful Ghana is.

A notable experience took place driving to Accra airport. We were pulled over and our taxi driver failed to have his license with him. We were left waiting for 20 minutes by the officers, while they attended to other vehicles. Tellingly when we mentioned to the officers, we had no money, as we were volunteers, we were on our way within minutes and the threats of arrest were in the past. There seems to be a culture amongst the police officers; two were conversing when we were stopped. Also, talking to local Ghanaians it seems that the bribes are shared with each other – this is a self-perpetuating problem that really needs addressing.



A final word...

Ghana is a gorgeous country with amazing people. It is one of my favourite places I have been, with music constantly playing and people always willing to strike up a conversation. It was often heart-breaking and frustrating to witness the poverty and hardship but I am glad I had the opportunity to give what I could and got to know the people living in Senya Beraku.