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**COCOA FARMING IN GHANA:
EMIC EXPERIENCE, ETIC INTERPRETATION**

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops the tension between emic and etic analysis, recounting the experience of life on a cocoa farm in Ghana, from the perspective of an urban youth with familial connections to the rural community. The dual perspective of living in the city along with frequent visits to and summer sojourns on the farm provided an “outsider’s” perceptions of the rural culture. Yet even these dual emic perspectives were insufficient to bring recognition of the underlying economic realities of cocoa bean production that depended partly on migrant labor. That etic insight came later in the United Kingdom, when studying similar economic systems in Southeast Asia. The story vividly illustrates the necessity of both an emic, insider’s understanding of culture and etic, cross-cultural, scientific insight. Both perspectives are required to have a complete recognition of how the encapsulated beliefs and mores of one’s upbringing depend on the underlying forces of production that drive society. Similarly, the shifting and multilayered levels of what is emic and what is etic in a particular context are addressed in the explication of these personal experiences.

Rural and Urban Ghana

In my¹ childhood, it was quite noticeable that the distinction between Ghana’s urban and rural territory was minimal. City area merged gradually to the country. To venture a mere 15 miles beyond the city limits placed the individual face to face with the traditional society. At independence in the late 1950s, Ghana’s population stood at six and half million, compared to about 20 million today. Then almost 80 percent of the economically active population made a living from agriculture and farm-related jobs. Much wild land existed even in Accra, the capital, where migrant laborers cultivated peanuts, corn, lettuce, tomatoes, and onions for additional income (cf. Obosu-Mensah 1999). Near their homes, urban folks raised livestock, mainly poultry, sheep, and goats. My own family lived in the capital where my brother kept rabbits and I raised poultry.

Elementary schooling was the highest possible academic training to which an ordinary individual could aspire. Because of expense, high school and college education were accessible only to the scions of wealthy urbanites and rural notables. Exceptionally-gifted rural students received local government grants or Cocoa Marketing Board Scholarships, although these were rare. Though the farmers’

income from cocoa exports supported a tuition-free national educational system, without this assistance the cost of room and board was prohibitive for the vast majority of high school students, both rural and urban. Accordingly, university education in the 1960s was the bastion of the privileged. The dons and their students constituted a tiny fragment of those who managed to complete high school. Ghana's premier university recognized the primary source of funding by creating a student's hostel called Akafo Hall (the farmer's hall).

Despite the similar landscapes, there was a clear disconnect between urban and rural culture. The former represented the modern, cosmopolitan enclave: the place of business and commerce and the abode of middle-class professionals who enjoyed comfortable residences, drove the latest automobiles, and manipulated the levers of political and economic power. The latter constituted the lifestyle of the villagers and farmsteads that formed the backbone of the agrarian economy, steeped in traditional values and practices. The Ivory Tower served as one important conduit between the two worlds, training highly gifted rural and urban youth for state employment.

Roots in City and Country

My parents were ethnic Akan from Akwapim, a district extending more than 400 square miles, north of Accra. Located on a ridge, this district contained 17 rural towns where some clans observed the avuncular system of inheritance while others practiced patrilineal control. My mother's folks favored the former, my father's, the latter. My parents divorced and both later remarried. My mother fully ensconced herself in rural life at Suhum as a cocoa farmer's wife whereas my father relocated to Accra to operate a general store. Now a city dweller, his elementary education served him well although he retained his rural connections. He owned a cocoa farm at Suhum, a rural area in the Eastern Region where many of his extended family members and friends still lived. Though my two siblings and I lived with our father, we had access to both parents, connecting us to both urban and rural environments, providing the rural-urban perspectives that shaped my adult life.

Each weekend, my father would drive his *Opel Kapitän* the 62 miles from Accra to his cocoa farm at Suhum. Hired laborers worked his land on week days while he was engrossed in his business. Typical of urban youth, I hated the farm with its muddy, soggy, slippery soils. The forest floor was densely littered with tons of rotting leaves, debris, and boughs severed from their trunks by lightning strikes, torrential tropical storms, and old age. Still, the rural life had its appeal, despite its traditional ways and laborious lifestyle. Sometimes, the rains came so hard that the

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soil could not absorb it all. Afterward, worms emerged from the soil and insects covered the ground and trees. My siblings and I pranced in the puddles and were awed by the crawling, swarming creatures. When thirsty, we cupped cocoyam leaves to drink from the swift, flowing streams that crisscrossed the farm. Thankfully, I was too young then to do much of the heavy farm work so my only responsibility was babysitting my younger brother and sister.

I noticed the D.D.T. that my father and his farm hands sprayed liberally on the cocoa trees. The villagers depended on the advice of the state-sponsored farm research institutes; university-trained researchers proffered extension services to eliminate destructive pests (Danquah 2003). I was then in primary school and hardly understood the rationale for the aggressive spraying. I assumed naively that the chemical was meant to deodorize the farm. Only later did I realize that D.D.T., and subsequently Lindane, was the accepted means for suppressing the capsid infestation that defoliated and destroyed numerous cocoa trees (Danquah 2004). At four in the evening, work would cease and we would walk three miles back to the car. When in season, my father's laborers would load the vehicle with food such as bananas, plantains, oranges, cocoyams, and African yams. Tired, dirty, wet and hungry, the return to Accra was my favorite part of the entire farm experience. The visits to the cocoa plantations became more frequent during the harvesting and sale of the cocoa beans. The off-season provided some respite from the long trips.

During this down time we would visit my paternal grandmother who lived in a mud house on the Akwapim ridge. Here, women and children obtained water each morning from the village stream, about a mile away. Rainwater was an additional source of this precious liquid. There was no electricity then; light came from kerosene lamps, which on rainy days attracted swarms of insects. Fireflies were quite common. For hygienic reasons, a pit latrine was located in the bushes about a quarter of a mile behind the house. Using the facility at night was thus no small undertaking. In the dead of night I was terrified when I needed to use the hole-in-the-ground toilet with its rats and mice—and the possibility of large snakes looking for prey. Tales of witches and ghosts fired the imagination of a gullible child.

In primary school, Nature Studies, a rudimentary form of biological studies, became one of my favorite classes. My observations of the flora and fauna in my rural environment served me well, making it easier to understand elementary principles of biology. In high school, I disliked Physics and Chemistry and struggled with Mathematics. However, I excelled in Agricultural Science, Biology, Economics (particularly Agricultural Economics), and History. My rural

background complemented these studies that gradually expanded to rural societies, the cornerstone of my later career in academe.

Although my father eventually disposed of his cocoa farm to concentrate on his urban occupations, I was never personally disconnected from rural society. My parents' separate lives provided needed perspective. My father's financial success paved the way for my later university education. Meanwhile, I spent nearly all my college vacations on my mother's farmstead at Suhum. The farm functioned as my laboratory for observing the inner workings of rural society. One got to my mother's farmstead by bus—four hours to cover the 60 miles. The vehicle, which stopped often for passengers, would be laden with baskets, foodstuffs, and infants howling for their mother's attention. Disembarking, I had at least another five mile trek on foot through the forest cover to reach the farm.

The entire cocoa district at Suhum had many distinct subdivisions. My mother's farmstead was Praprababida. Others were Okanta, Adenya, Abesim, Adeiso, Teacher Mante, and Petroase. Cocoa plantations flourished along the route to my mother's village. Despite the intense noonday heat, laborers were always hard at work. It was required by custom to extend greetings to the workers: "*Adwuma, Adwuma!!*" (literally, Good Work!), and their response would be, "*Adwuma Ye!*" meaning, "it is good to work!" In reality, farm labor in the tropical forest was an incredibly hard life of toil, dust, and heat.

Many members of my step-father's extended family lived in a large mud-house that covered at least two acres of the farmstead. The population of the farm was about 30, including a migrant farm family from the Sahel region of West Africa. The farm hands accorded me great respect because of my college education. The educational system inherited from the British equated crass illiteracy with farm labor and other menial occupations. In short, scholars worked with their minds but illiterates must apply their muscles.

Over time, the farm became my escape from the mind-numbing boredom that attended my college vacations. Summer employment for college kids as it now exists in America was nonexistent in my homeland. At Accra there was nothing much to do but listen to the radio and read newspapers. Most often, I would remain on the farm for eight weeks. My favorite pastime mirrored my childhood games, meandering long stretches under the lush cocoa plantations and tall tropical trees, observing squirrels, birds, insects, and other animals in their interaction with the plants that sustained them. The cocoa plantations were interspersed with produce farms. The farm hands supplemented their diet by hunting wild animals. The women bought salt, fish, meat, and cloth from the nearest town market, a 15-mile

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sojourn. In the off season, some laborers distilled *Akpeteshie*, a local gin, from the fermented cocoa bean syrup. Village children performed vital chores—carrying water from streams, collecting firewood, and picking produce. Many farm children walked up to five miles, five days a week, to attend the village school, returning late in the evening for their domestic chores.

During the long summers, I sometimes joined the farm hands to harvest cocoa or to clear land, laboriously wielding a machete. The villagers practiced a form of co-operative farming called *nnoboa*, where different farmsteads helped each other during the harvesting and weeding seasons. With the harvest completed, we would bring the ripe cocoa to a central location to extract the beans from the pods. The beans would be fermented for three days before putting them out to sun dry for three weeks. Exceptional vigilance was required during this phase; the beans had to be covered when it threatened to rain. Wet beans would germinate, rendering them worthless commercially. The farm laborers then loaded the processed cocoa beans into sacks conveyed by head portage to a government cocoa-purchasing station. Virtually the entire five mile trip was traversed barefoot along a winding stone-laden footpath. For most farmers, it was the cocoa income that underwrote the costs of housing, marriages, funerals, education, health care, and village festivals. For a college educated urban youth, these summer interludes opened my eyes to the drudgery entailed in farm work. Having experienced this brutal lifestyle firsthand, I pursued my college education religiously. Like most Third World countries, higher education in Ghana is not a right but a rare privilege, to be jealously guarded. To most students from rural backgrounds, formal academic training was the escape hatch from the ubiquitous dirt and toil of the farm.

Clinical or hospital health care was a perennial problem for rural folks, who had to contend with poisonous snakes and scorpions, though fortunately these were rare. More common were malarial fever, skin rashes, and dental health problems. The university medical schools produced few doctors, and most stayed in the urban settings where government hospitals existed. Modern medical care was thus not easily accessible to the rural population who instead often resorted to folk medicine. The herbal remedies took many forms: the decoction, derived by boiling the appropriate part of the plant; tinctures for the skin, from pounding plants into a pulp; powders, various substances ground fine; and salves, so that the desired herb could be spread on the skin. The native or traditional doctor went on foot from farmstead to farmstead, selling the local herb remedies. The rural folks often discussed hypertension, which they attributed to excess accumulation of blood in the body. Adult males openly complained of their flagging libidos. For these and

many other ailments in rural society, folk medicine was the panacea. In fact, today Ghana's Ministry of Health, assisted by university researchers, has established a center for plant medicine to collect and analyze scientifically these traditional remedies for the population as a whole.

Luckily, no medical emergencies ever occurred during the times I spent on the farm. However, there was one episode when children en route to collect wood had come back running and screaming about a huge snake. It was a hot Saturday afternoon. They had seen the snake along the path but it had retreated into the bushes. My stepfather, barefooted, loaded his gun with a single bullet and walked slowly along the footpath about 20 yards beyond where the children first encountered the snake. Then suddenly he pulled the trigger! Much later, when I asked why he had not pursued the snake through the bushes, he replied that this snake, locally known as *Okyereben*, the black mamba, was fast, swift, and deadly. It waited along bush tracks in ambush. If it missed its prey, it would veer into the bushes in a semicircular route to waylay the intended victim further along the same path. My stepfather explained that he removed his sandals to prevent the snake from detecting the sound of his movements.

The large village compound contained herds of sheep and goats and flocks of ducks, chicken, and turkeys. The list of farm animals excluded pigs, which in much of rural Africa were considered filthy animals that harbored hookworms deadly to humans. Rarely were the livestock killed for food except on memorable occasions like childbirths, special festivals, or the celebration of Christmas and the New Year. The animals survived on scraps of food left over from the day's cooking. The children's diet was supplemented with fresh vegetables and corn from the farms wherever possible. On all other occasions, fresh water snails, land snails, crabs, fish, antelopes, mushrooms, and beans served as sources of protein.

Farm life for me was not all work and toil. A battery-operated radio kept me abreast of national and international news, relieving the tedium of the long, hot tropical days. Because I was only a summer visitor, the patterns of social conduct born from the traditions of rural life seemed odd compared with my urban experiences. Like the visiting anthropologist who observes a local custom that seems to make no sense, I actively questioned the day-to-day activities that seemed so "natural" to the villagers who had never known another way of doing things. For example, every morning greeting all other family members was mandatory for each individual. This ritual was designed to maintain healthy relations among all and sundry since cooperation was vital for individuals who lived in relative isolation deep in the forest.

No farm labor was permitted on Wednesdays, which were dedicated to the Earth deity, venerated as *Asaase Yaa* or Mother Earth. It was believed that whoever worked on the farm that day would encounter strange beings. To disobey the taboo was to invite harsh preternatural chastisement. Similarly, because felling large trees occasionally had caused fatalities, if it became necessary to chop down any large tropical tree, the farm hands would pour a libation to satisfy the tree's spiritual essence and avert harm. Also, women in their menstrual cycle were forbidden from participating in any household chores. They were strictly required to remain outside the farmstead in designated shelters until the end of their cycle. Such rural social customs constituted a microcosm of the larger traditional Akwapim society.

My most memorable cultural celebration was the *Odwira* festival observed every September. Commemorating the end of the harvest season, it represented purification of the state and thanksgiving to local deities. Most folks left the farm villages to observe the festival at Akropong, the traditional seat of the Akwapim state. During the week-long event ancestors are remembered, families reunited, and old grudges forgiven. It was the time for reconciliation, to memorialize and honor both ancestors and the newly deceased. In the weeks preceding the *Odwira*, no funeral rites were permitted and those who died received speedy burials. Drumming was sternly prohibited to prevent spiritual pollution. Once the celebration began, food and alcohol were plentiful and so were male-female liaisons. Throughout my college years, I participated in the September festivals. At the university, students study about African belief systems and rural societies in courses such as Rural Sociology, African Traditional Religion, and African Studies. In contrast, summers in the village made concrete the abstract lessons of the classroom. Thus, I was experiencing directly the tensions between the intellectual life of the university and the traditional means of production and survival on the farm.

An Etic Interpretation

After my college education, I taught in several high schools in Ghana, determined to distance myself permanently from village life. To me, the past was behind. I looked forward to a life of bliss. City culture then teemed with disco music, Afro hairstyles, suede shoes, Beatle boots, and bell bottoms. For two years, I resolutely aborted further visits to the farm.

This attitude, turning my back on my rural roots, changed abruptly during my graduate studies in Southeast Asian History in the United Kingdom. I read about the Dutch policy of *Culturstelsel* in Indonesia, rice cultivation along the Mekong Delta in Cochin-China, and the flow of Chinese and Indian coolies to Malayan

rubber plantations. These classes made explicit what I had never realized during my childhood visits to my father's cocoa farm, nor even my summers at my mother's village during my college years.

Perhaps the lens of emic and etic analysis is the best way to understand the multiple and overlapping realities of the story unfolding here. Anthropologists speak of the emic perspective as the insiders' understanding of the culture in which they are immersed, including beliefs, values, customs, mores, political ideologies, explanations for why and how things work—in short, how they make sense of the complexities of their experience. In contrast, etic analysis is undertaken from the point of view of the outsider: how to interpret the mosaic of community structures; the patterns of behavior; the networks of interactions; the multiple, overlapping sets of beliefs and values? More specifically, how do things mesh and what drives society?

Still, as Harris (1979, 1999) notes, the foregoing interpretation of emic and etic perspectives is overly simplistic. First, it is currently fashionable to ensure that qualitative analyses are faithful to the insiders' interpretation of their own reality. "Member checks" are commonly utilized, letting community informants see the analyst's reports and asking for corrective reactions. Which insider's reality is to be taken as "real?" There are multiple, overlapping, and often conflicting explanations of the "inside." Which of these positions is to be honored? Further, these discrepant interpretations exist simultaneously, at different levels of scope, all nested within one another. For example, in today's American society local community contexts are frequently colored by the larger world view and deep-seated values of liberals versus conservatives. Obviously there are other insider positions as well.

Second, which outsider perspective is the "real" one? The problem of multiple insiders is mirrored by multiple observers who can have quite distinct interpretations, especially when they come from different national backgrounds. Harris (1979, 1999) resolves this by suggesting that the preferred etic interpretation incorporates cross-cultural perspectives and scientific insight that reflect multiple cultures and valid explanations obtained through the application of rigorous and objective scientific training.

Third, what is emic or etic can shift from one context to the next. Most individuals participate in multiple settings that can have quite differing interpretations as to insider or outsider. These individual layers interact with community or even national world views that can also be quite discrepant. My own journey illustrates the complexity of these interwoven realities.

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In Ghana, despite being somewhat of an outsider (an urban youth with familial connections to the farm), my level of awareness and questioning of rural traditions had not been deep enough to extend to the economic realities that drove those patterns. My true emic sense of reality was grounded in my urban upbringing and college education. My immersion in the daily routines of rural life was limited to weekends and summers. Yet my story of the fundamental pressures to survive and the concomitant trappings of this lifestyle—the drudgery of farm work; customs, folkways, and mores; the seasons of planting and harvest; family traditions and reproduction cycles; school and friendships; festivals and celebrations—all of this and more represented my emic, insider’s understanding of rural culture. To the audience for this work, this clearly has the authenticity of an insider. Yet my “emic” interpretation is a city dweller’s take on rural life, a sometime visitor accorded privileges and honor that other young men of my age cohort, whose entire life was subsumed within village traditions and farm labor, could not hope to attain.

In contrast, my “etic” interpretation of farm life, for all the recognition and questioning generated by being a visitor, by “seeing” beyond the cultural traditions that the villagers accepted unquestioningly as “natural,” by having familial claims to acceptance that other visitors did not possess, had not generated Harris’ (1979) level of scientific etic insight. Without being aware of it, I had accepted unquestioningly the underlying economic basis of this way of life. My dual perspectives (urban life and schooling, summer rural experiences and family background) had given me just enough awareness to examine the differences between these two parts of my life, but nowhere sufficient to see that there was another, deeper, economically-based interpretation of my reality.

My graduate classes in England changed my level of consciousness. Parallel to the economies I was reading about, the cocoa farming practices in Ghana had survived partly with contributions from migrant labor from the Sahel regions of West Africa. These cross-cultural, scientific accounts of reality in my readings provided a more fundamental etic interpretation, connecting the values, beliefs, and customs of my youth to the underlying macro economic system of cocoa production upon which the micro and middle range experiences of village life depended. Even more nuanced, which etic lens is appropriate? It is easier to *say* “cross-cultural” than to find some universal interpretation that truly represents the extant realities that differ so dramatically from one country to the next. To wit, how much of my understanding of Southeast Asian agricultural labor practices was shaped by the prism of the British colonial system and a British university? Would my understanding of the parallels to the migrant labor in Ghanaian cocoa farms have

been different had I studied in Germany? Japan? The former Soviet Union? Think of the caste system in India and slavery in the U.S. To what extent does any university system reflect its heritage, warts and all? Even after peer review, note the differences in this regard from one scholar to the next.

A further note on these multiple realities is apt. Insider-outsider depends on an international perspective as well. The citizens of the United States, Great Britain, and other industrialized nations perceive themselves as cosmopolitan, at the pinnacle of the global order, while the developing countries are seen as part of the vast agrarian, pre-industrialized world. The localized distinction of city youth visiting family farm is lost at this broader level of the emic and the etic. Undoubtedly my sense of who I am and what I represented was quite different from the perspective that my professors and classmates in Great Britain held regarding myself and others from Third World countries. It is likely that our idiosyncratic histories of wealth, culture, or rural-urban background had little impact on their perceptions.

Coming to America

More than twenty years ago when I entered the United States, I was determined to focus the rest of my graduate studies on agricultural history and rural societies. The U.S. higher educational system that I experienced first at Athens, Ohio, and later at Ames, Iowa, facilitated this academic transition. The combination of urban upbringing and farm experiences in Ghana, along with my academic preparation in England, proved quite useful. The vast reaches of the United States reinforced my rural perspectives from practical, intellectual, and philosophical vantage points. Driving through the American Midwest, the red barns, silos, mechanical harvesters, John Deere tractors, and International trucks embodied themselves as symbols of rural life.

My only direct encounter with practical agriculture in America occurred during a summer internship at Living History Farms in Des Moines, Iowa. My eight-week exposure to American agricultural production was a brief stint compared with my overall farm experiences. The Living History Farms represented a laboratory wherein North American agricultural forms telescoped across time and space, connecting to my experiences back home in rural Ghana on my mother's homestead. During the summer internship, I was working on July 4, Independence Day, with tourists streaming to the farms from as far afield as Canada, Belgium, France, and England.

Many visitors inquired whether I was enacting the role of a slave on the farm. Perhaps these queries were because Iowa was never a slave holding state, so that independent black farmers in the northern Midwest are far less common than in the South. More likely, these questions reflected the remnants of beliefs about race, servitude, and ownership in the U.S. Not having grown up in America, this episode served as a window into just how powerful and enduring are the legacies of slavery and race in the United States, and the deeper connection to the economic system of cotton and tobacco production that depended on slave labor. Again, my formal academic training, coupled with the experience of an internship, had served as the explicit etic trigger to a deeper understanding of my emic, personal experiences of rural life, this time in America.

Again, however, the overlapping layers of emic and etic experiences are germane. I was an intern in this historical reenactment of American farming practices. City-based visitors from the U.S. as well as those from abroad saw me as an insider. Intellectually, I visualized them as outsiders, totally uneducated about American rural society. Yet I was in many respects more “alien” to these practices than the visitors, my own experiential base being the cocoa industry from a developing country in Africa, filtered through the more primal experience of an educated urban youth, in many respects “privileged” compared with the many in Ghana, particularly the rural villages. With respect to the racial overtones, my sense of being Black was almost totally etic during that period (an outsider to American culture), having been in the country only a couple of years and that as a foreign graduate student.

Going Home

Six years ago when I visited Ghana, I had lived in America as a student and college instructor (African and Asian History) for almost twenty years. Although I had not revisited my mother’s farm when I had returned to Ghana after my studies in Great Britain (despite my new consciousness of the economic underpinning of the cocoa industry), I was now determined to observe whatever changes, large and small, had occurred in city, town, and country. I visited Accra, the Akwapim ridge, and my mother’s farmstead at Suhum. Change in urban life was the most astonishing. Since my childhood days when Ghana’s entire population stood at six million, Accra alone had exploded to more than three million people. Industrial complexes, comfortable residential homes, and a flood of vehicles choked the city. Life in small towns such as those on the Akwapim ridge where my paternal grandmother had lived and died years ago had only somewhat changed. The mud-

built homes were dilapidated and many households still used the age-old pit latrines in the bushes. A few houses had electricity and some had their own private toilets. There was piped water, but this was interrupted frequently. The townsfolk supplemented the running water by visiting nearby village streams whenever necessary.

Finally, I was able to revisit my mother's rural home. Here, the changes were both tragic and profound. Large sections of the mud wall enclosing the farmstead had broken down. My stepfather's younger brother had died and his two wives and children had left the village. A much younger male relative who shared the farm years ago had died much earlier. His dwelling unit and rooms stood vacant because his wife and only daughter now lived in town. The migrant family from the Sahel region who had helped them twenty years ago had decamped to their ancestral homelands, probably due to old age. Of the 30 people on this farm some two decades ago, only my stepfather and his three wives were left. He had only two daughters despite his three wives. My half-sister had moved to town where she worked as a nursing aide in a government hospital. Widowed, she had three children. Her half-sister had five daughters.

Several significant changes had occurred, starting with the widening of the bush path to accommodate vehicles for transporting cocoa beans to town. Cocoa production, still labor intensive, continued to depend upon the traditional system called *nnoboa*, which like corn-shucking in America before mechanical corn pickers, combines available labor among the surrounding farmsteads to aid in harvesting, processing, and marketing. All the farmers contribute money and labor to maintain the bush dirt-road upon which lorries haul the rural produce to market centers.

It was striking, however, to note that much of the land had been taken out of cocoa planting and consigned to food farming. The reasons are many. Aged cocoa trees were either dead or diseased and altogether unproductive. Undergirding the change was the urgent need for cash among the farmers. Food crops like cassava, bananas, peanuts, plantains, and yams produce yields within months, quite unlike cocoa that demands at least three years of intense cultivation and a ready labor force even for the early-bearing progenies to produce fruit. The government no longer sponsored fee-free education at all levels of schooling. Similarly the costly state-financed universal medical care from the early days of Ghana's independence had been replaced by an emphasis on *laissez-faire* individualism that shifted burdens from the government to the population mass, particularly farmers, who constitute the bulk of the labor force in a predominantly agrarian economic system.

The change to food crops was reinforced by another phenomenon common to many rural areas in developing countries: the construction of a new middle school. Built with cement and equipped with wooden furniture, this structure served the children of the rural dwellers much better than the dilapidated mud-walled rural schools of yesteryear. However, my maternal uncle lamented that with a better education and rising expectations, the students, upon graduation, immediately abandon the cocoa farms for the city-centers in search of nonexistent jobs where, unfortunately, the majority end on the street aggressively hawking merchandise to passing motorists.

Thus, several crucial factors are relevant in the changing economy of the rural setting: while farmers are aging and dying, their would-be replacements are disinterested in rural life. This is exacerbated by a law passed in 1970 that restricted undocumented workers in the country. Although directed against urban capitalists, it dried up the flow of migrant cocoa farm workers, many of whom returned to the Sahelian territories to the north for fear of government retribution and imprisonment. The reduction in state services put a premium on cash crops with quicker return on labor and investment. The requirement of a shorter cash-flow cycle and increasingly scarce labor may lead to the gradual demise of cocoa bean farming and its possible replacement with aquaculture or other high yield foodstuffs.

During my visit last year I observed a brand-new well equipped with a hand-pump to serve the farms in the vicinity. This supplemented the rainwater cisterns linked to the ageless but unreliable streams upon which rural families had always depended. Now if the streams occasionally dry up when the rains fail, the rural population has access to a reliable water source. This well also reflects the current *laissez-faire* economics, as the local village farms, not the government, had been the impetus and source of financing for the well.

About five years ago, word reached me that my stepfather was dead at 78. What would happen to the farmstead? For the answer, I turned to my maternal aunt who now lives with her American husband in Columbus, Ohio. Born and raised in the core culture of rural Akwapim, it was her academic aspirations and a chance meeting with an American Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana that brought her to the United States some 25 years ago. She explained that the matrilineal system of inheritance required all of my stepfather's three wives and children to vacate the farm. The avuncular system of property rights specifies that a nephew of my mother's husband must inherit it. That is the tradition, mandated by the culture and altogether immutable. The farmlands belong to the ancestral spirits who constantly

watch that the earth be used according to custom. By his death, my stepfather had entered the world of the ancestors from whom the living inherit the right to land use. My mother, now in her 70s, can no longer endure the incessant pain of farm labor. Today, she lives with my younger sister and survives on what her own four children, myself included, can send her.

Education as Empowerment

Farming anywhere in the world is laborious. The production of food and industrial crops to sustain the world's populations and factories has engendered debilitating physical work among farmers and rural dwellers across time and space. In my part of Africa, urban populations, as elsewhere on the globe, contain generations of families never exposed to farm work and rural life, a statement true both as I was growing up and still today. Ghanaian cities, like most others in the Third World, also include many first generation urban migrants determined to escape the toil, grime, and poverty so deeply embedded in their rural background (Danquah 1994). It is notable that while there is considerable rural-urban migration worldwide, the reverse is hardly demonstrated in historical discourse.

Because I have directly observed both rural societies and urban settings, and have been fortunate to live in two vastly different countries and study in a third, I often reflect on the unique blend of experiences that have made me what I am. My identity reflects my emic upbringing, both urban and rural experiences. In essence, life in urban Ghana helped shape me into an academician with some exposure to rural values and farm labor. Yet it took exposure to the intellectual capital and in-depth historical and economic analyses of the university for me to recognize the multilayered reality of my life and Ghana's stratified society. Both the emic insider's understanding of values and culture and the etic cross-cultural, scientific insights regarding the fundamental impact of the production system were necessary to have a complete sense of these complexities.

Societies are quick to credit improved technologies engineered in universities for their role in the modernization of rural landscapes. Technology is typically recognized for its potential to improve the lives of the world's countless rural masses who are trapped in a world of interminable drudgery. In contrast, the public, and even universities themselves, are less likely to give credit to the power of ideas to cause change for the poor, the uneducated, or rural inhabitants. My own story makes explicit the inevitable transformation as etic analysis becomes self knowledge.

It is no accident that Freire (1996) trumpeted a literacy program for the peasants of Brazil that was expressly focused on empowerment to counter the economic control of elites. Nor was it surprising that he was banished from his home country for his efforts, as the ruling party recognized the threat to its power. As Harris (1979, 1981) has demonstrated, theory based on etic analysis can help the individual see beyond the limited experience and encapsulated understanding of one's local circumstances, making clear the linkage between the emic mores and beliefs of society and the underlying economic mechanisms of modern, stratified societies. That is the power of ideas and education, the recognition that comes from both emic understanding and etic insight.

Note

¹First person pronouns refer to the senior author. The emic-etic analyses were completed jointly by the authors.

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