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Sampling of Students' Reflections on the Symposium

*Abdulrahman Alazemi, Noah Aschemeier, Kylie Jones, Tenin Magassa,
Emma Mason, Mary Newman, Janaya Thompson*

Following the Global Voices Symposium, some faculty members asked their students to reflect on what they had heard. The following are a sampling of those reflections.

Abdulrahman Alazemi

I attended the “Unlocking Africa’s Potential in a Time of Competition between Rising and Global Powers” session by Dr. Landry Signé. The session presented a thought-provoking approach toward Africa's perception of the world and its position in the global economy. Africa is now an emerging economy, receiving renewed attention from the outside world. There is a juxtaposition of the idea of Africa as a poverty-ridden continent with many people living below the poverty line and the view of Africa as a nation blessed with natural resources and the potential to contribute immensely to the world economy. One example of this is Africa's Congo, which harbors seventy-five percent of the world’s coltan, which is used in cellphone manufacturing. How then is the continent poverty-stricken? Perhaps, it all has to do with Africa's recent marginalized history. However, the continent has gained global attention due to its fast-paced growth and potential.

The session emphasized Africa's potential in the global arena. However, the speaker does not shy away from acknowledging the African curse. The continent has the highest unemployment rate, with many more youths likely to be unemployed than in any other place on

earth. Dr. Signé sees this as a demographic curse. Additionally, Africa has a tiny percentage of exports compared to other emerging countries, such as Asian countries. Many trade concessions need to be made to ensure that Africa's business potential is maximized. Investors are now considering doing business in Africa. They are faced with the continent's advantage of being an emerging economy and the burden of Africa lagging in terms of commerce infrastructure. Majorly, only a few countries contribute to the GDP of the continent, namely, Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa. Hence, investors must include small nations in their development strategies. It is essential for African leaders to partner with global players.

The attention to Africa's growth is well deserved, as the changes that abound in the continent have a global impact. In the years to come, Africa will house the world's largest cities and be home to one-third of the world's population. Also, Africa's labor force is on the rise. Arguably, Africa is among the youngest of the continents, given that other continents such as Europe and Asia have already experienced a fair share of industrialization and technological advancements. Africa is also the fastest urbanizing region in the world. Hence, while over forty percent of people in Africa live below the poverty line, the continent is growing, and these numbers are bound to continue to change. African states are adapting to global technological and economic trends. Many more people are getting an education, and the continent is quickly rising away from poverty and underdevelopment.

Africa is a complex continent. It is inspirational that American learning institutions have begun to take notice and engage with the continent academically. Africa is on the move, and it is humbling that it was considered an area of interest to raise global awareness and consciousness among the college community. Dr. Signé presents the case for why Africa should matter to global citizens. However, the only glaring problem is whether this renewed interest in Africa will be detrimental or beneficial. It seems that the continent is the last frontier for global expansion, and people from different parts of the world are scrambling for the limited resources the continent has to offer. Much care needs to be taken to prevent Africa from plunging into neo-colonial tendencies. If Africa is to achieve global recognition, it must have equal investment partnerships to benefit its population. Overall, it is

inspirational that the African continent is now being recognized as a force on the global space. This Global Voices Symposium focus area was timely and eye-opening.

Noah Aschemeier

I attended the session called “Resetting Global Awareness During the Global Pandemic.” This session was extremely informative; it covered a wide array of issues and concepts that must be addressed to improve amid the aftermath of the Coronavirus. The event began with Dr. Corrine Brion discussing her area of study, that mainly being how gender either positively or negatively impacts leadership in Africa. From her presentation, one takeaway that I found important was the notion of masculinity vs. femininity. From her observations, she explained that persons of each gender act differently when they are granted leadership privileges and powers. For example, males act with a top-down leadership style, and make decisions for others in nearly every situation. This can apply to countries with vast gender disparities, where many issues can be traced back to a male leader in charge with virtually zero restrictions. On the other hand, females have been found to adapt to many different circumstances when making leadership decisions. With this outcome in mind, women in charge are able to empower girls while also acting as role models for girls to look up to. These studies from Dr. Brion emphasize the importance of not adhering to patriarchal practices in the future, emphasizing the idea that countries should not be afraid to change the power dynamics by having women in power.



Noah Aschemeier

Dr. Satang Nabaneh covered the concept of resetting global awareness during and after the pandemic, guided by the foundation of human rights. Just a few issues that have resulted from COVID-19 include global interconnectedness, vaccine nationalism, and the rise of unprecedented social movements, just to name a few. The rise of social movements caught my attention the most, as the media continues to follow such movements, such as the Black Lives Matter movement

within the United States. This specific movement within America illuminates just one human rights issue that happens to exist globally: inequality. Inequality is a national and global crisis, as countless people are either granted or denied certain privileges depending on a great number of factors. These factors include race, sex, class, and many more. Together, each factor contributes to intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw. This concept explains that everyone will experience discrimination in different ways throughout their lives, resulting from the many factors which differentiate individuals from one another. The notion of intersectionality coincides with Dr. Satang's discussion on the challenges and implications of the Coronavirus. Other challenges to note include an increase in authoritarianism and repression, and the rise of fake news and anti-rights alliances which are particularly rooted in white supremacy culture in the United States and beyond. Dr. Satang wrapped up her discussion by emphasizing the importance of human rights education post-COVID, and how a revision/resetting of human rights practices themselves should be the goal.

Dr. Joann Mawasha provided numerous insightful points when she analyzed the impacts of the pandemic on a more local level. However, although her discussion was extremely impactful and educational, Dr. Maria Vivero's exploration on the effects of COVID-19 on the U.S. economy seemed to attract my focus more. This is because I am a current U.S. citizen, and, as I continue to grow, I will have to be much more knowledgeable about the economy and the hills and valleys that it tends to experience. One of the effects of the pandemic on the U.S. economy that Dr. Vivero covered was the fact that nationwide, revenues fell by 22% in April of 2020, around the peak/start of the Coronavirus in the United States. Within the same timeframe, unemployment rates nearly tripled from 7.9 million individuals to 19.6 million people facing unemployment. Accompanying such steep changes was the fact that poor, elderly, black, and Hispanic individuals were all "hit especially hard" by the effects of the virus in the United States. This is a result of unequal economic opportunities, where the previously mentioned individuals had much more difficulty in gaining their footing than a young, white male at the time. The unequal economic impacts of COVID-19 on the American population echo an idea that has long been tempered, which is that inequality continues to be an issue within the

country. To eliminate such inequalities, leadership changes and educational impacts, as discussed by both Dr. Brion and Dr. Nabaneh, could change the course of the United States for the better.

Kylie Jones

Through taking part in the panel symposiums today I have learned so much outside of the history of Africa. This panel allowed me to see a more contemporary version of Africa that is not often discussed within our society in the United States. As a woman, I also have a strong interest in learning and thoroughly enjoyed learning that African women are gaining more rights and an economic presence within Africa. This is a major progression, and it is amazing to know that women are receiving the recognition that they have fought for, for so long. As an education major, I have an interest in wanting to better understand the education systems that exist in other countries around the globe.



Kylie Jones

Through listening to Sangita Gosalia, I realized that there are a lot of opportunities to gain a better global awareness as well as ways to get involved through the University internationally. As a result of the presentation that she gave, I have an interest in wanting to grow my international awareness and possibly study abroad, hopefully in Africa. Hearing her talk about the faculty trips makes me look forward to continued education after college. I have a goal of eventually being a history professor, and this would be a program that I would want to take part in so that I can enhance my global awareness. I also would want to be well educated and traveled so that I can teach from experience to students who may not have the opportunity to travel and experience diverse global cultures.

Karla Guinigundo brought up a striking point about the fact that students who study abroad are predominately white. Thinking about the privilege that white students have compared to other students is disappointing, yet it leaves space for change. Through reflecting on this, I feel that it is the responsibility of white students who study abroad to share their experiences with those who are not as privileged or fortunate

to go on these trips. Going on the trip is just a small part of the learning experience and global awareness; the information that you bring back with you and how you share it with those around you is also crucial to getting the most out of your unique experience.

As I was listening to the information that Furaha Henry-Jones gave through her presentation, I had a growing awareness of the importance of travel for educators. The ability to have an increased global awareness allows educators to have a more open classroom and a welcoming space for all learners. Additionally, she spoke of the cultural differences between Africa and the U.S.

Before a speech takes place, the speaker gives thanks and recognition to those who came before them as well as those who influenced them. The way that Dr. Henry-Jones listed the people who had influenced her as an educator made me stop and think about those who have influenced me, and it made me want to learn more about the world around me and to be aware of those who inspired me to want to have a stronger global awareness.

These speakers had a huge influence on how I as a future educator want to have a stronger global awareness so that I can have a welcoming classroom for all my students. I hope that I can possibly study abroad next summer or participate in an international mission trip so that I can learn from and serve people from different cultures. Through listening to these amazing speakers, I also thought about my high school English teacher who left my high school the year I graduated to go teach in Morocco; when thinking about him and his work that he does now as an educator, I am inspired, and hopeful that that type of experience could be a possibility for me in the future.

Tenin Magassa

The symposium was very enriching and definitely interesting. Many subjects were discussed, for example, how does Africa handle the pandemic? Yet, I was also very interested in the talks on gender inequality, especially in Ghana. There is a lack of representation and experiences of women leaders in low- and middle-socioeconomic countries, and developing countries need a better education for their children. Children are the leaders of tomorrow, and not seeing enough women being represented compared to men does not help them to

develop an inclusive outlook. It unconsciously creates limited beliefs in the kids' minds, particularly girls. However, nothing starts easily, and change can happen.

There is this proverb that says "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation" (African proverb, Fante tribe, Central coastal region of Ghana). Moreover, it is a fact that over the years women have proven themselves able to do all the things men do. Not that they had anything to prove, but society needed to hear them and realize how women can in fact change things for the better.

Through the meeting, many things were discussed about this subject. One of the speakers, Corinne Brion, reflected on the understanding of experiences and perspectives of life of twelve women based in Ghana. How does gender positively or negatively influence those women's leadership in their everyday lives? In addition, what type of policies are needed in order to start the eradication of systematic patterns of injustice toward women?

The twelve women that Dr. Brion talked about are school principals. They educate children; they have a leadership role they must handle in order for people to actually listen to them. However, they cannot fulfill their role if they are being persecuted repeatedly by men:

It is not easy to be a female head teacher because the male teachers, the chief, and the community members are not respectful.

I want to let the men know that we can lead, no matter what I have a position, so I can decide to do something or not.

Intimidation is there.

Those are testimonies of the women. There is a lack of understanding and sadly, Ghana is a patriarchal country just like many others.

Being the target of discrimination interferes with those women's everyday jobs and their everyday lives. It creates a sense of uncertainty with others but also with themselves.

Women are an essential factor in society. They bring something that no others can. Women have a different leadership style; we all know about the maternal sense women usually already have so they bring a motherly love, the type of love kids need and the society needs. These twelve women are sensitive to cultural differences and know what they're doing. They are a model for many and help empower many girls.

Emma Mason

After attending the Resetting Global Awareness African Symposium, the biggest takeaway I got was the idea that global awareness requires new thinking. I have a passion for learning about different countries and ethnic groups from around the world, specifically various European and Jewish groups. During the presentation, it was said that now is a better time than ever to educate yourself about the continent of Africa, due to the era of the internet that we are living in. The internet is all around us, and in less than five minutes we are able to read about any topic imaginable. It was claimed within the meeting that with the internet, being ignorant about a continent like Africa is more of a choice than ever before in history.



Emma Mason

While I agree with the speaker's claim that education and new thinking is the best way to best understand and learn about Africa and all it offers, as an African myself, I believe that actually visiting an African country is the best way to go. When you lived all your life in the West; a region rooted in white supremacy both inside and out, you will never be able to fully understand Africa because of how large and diverse the continent is. Africa is a continent with 54 countries, 75 languages, and over 3,000 ethnic groups. Due to the West's rampant and dangerous white supremacy, you will never get the real and right information about Africa, unless you set foot on African soil.

Last winter was my first time as a Liberian-American to visit a part of Africa, specifically West Africa. Before setting foot in any foreign country, it is important to read up on the country, even if one already has family in the area. You can never learn too much information. I watched countless videos about Liberia. I watched videos about daily life and the history, culture, and politics of the country over the years. However, no amount of reading could have totally prepared me for my new life for two weeks. My dad grew up in what was once peaceful grassy terrains with little to no inhabitants. However, due to both the war that lasted from 1987 to 2003 and the corruption that followed, it became so much more that information on Google and YouTube would have not prepared me for. I had a wonderful experience spending time with family that I had never met before or haven't seen in years. The nice sun beating on my skin rather than shivering from the cold that many were experiencing in the West was God sent. And I enjoyed revamping my diet to fresh, grounded, and natural food rather than fake and processed foods that was in every turn in America.

One of the major culture shocks that I experienced during my trip was when I visited the countryside of Liberia. The countryside was bare, agricultural, and to the eye of a Westerner, poor. It was a sight that I could have never prepared myself for. This was the lifestyle and the conditions that my great-grandmother was living in, and I had mixed feelings. It has been two months since I experienced being in Liberia, and I'm still processing what I saw. In a brief summary, my experience made me both count my blessings and enjoy the little things in life, such as an education and the ability to eat global cuisine. The West is very much materialistic in its outlook. We all want more rather than enjoying what we have now. We're always worrying about the future, rather than living and enjoying the present. Give thanks for living another day. Those few out of many of the experiences I had had could not be found through simply reading on the internet. And this was only within West Africa. North Africa, East Africa, Central and South Africa all have their own culture, history and lifestyle that are vastly different from West Africa. Every region of Africa must be experienced on foot rather than from afar. The internet can only make you think, feel, and see so much, which pales compared to what real life experiences can bring. After visiting Liberia, I feel not only closer to my family but also to my

African roots, a feeling I have been wanting to feel for the last three years.

Mary Newman

For the Global Voices Symposium, I attended two sessions outside of class time, the global education session on Wednesday afternoon and the keynote speaker Wednesday night. For my reflection I would like to touch a bit on each.

I was interested in the global education discussion, because I have been making an active effort to seek out more education on a global



Mary Newman

scale. I wouldn't say it has necessarily been difficult for me to do so, but I have been left with the feeling of wanting more or craving better quality. For example, I am really interested in African religions, both modern and traditional, and I really want a guide to help me learn about them but UD does not have a class on African religions, only African American religions, which needs to be recognized as a separate distinct subject. That being said, I probably found the discussion of traveling abroad the most interesting. After researching

African religions and philosophies during a summer at UD, I have been interested in traveling to Africa to really experience the things I have read, as I felt I was missing a large aspect that could only be gained in person. Unfortunately, I am not entirely well-versed on the travel landscape of Africa, on which places hold what and which places are better to travel as well as the age-old concern of safety. I largely agree with one student who cited COVID-19 as a major hindrance to traveling or studying abroad. It suddenly made every location unsafe as well as shutting down programs, which I feel had a great effect on the advertisement and availability of information on these programs. When I tried searching for information, programs would just come up as cancelled and thus even the general information about these programs wasn't available or advertised, since there was no possibility of going at that time. The University also wasn't advertising international travel opportunities, which made it hard to try and learn how to find programs,

information, and help. I found it really refreshing to see other students also looking for these opportunities and information, as I don't readily know anyone searching for that.

Moving on to Dr. Signé's presentation, I have to admit I am not extremely economically well versed, in that I am not very educated on global and business economics. I have a general understanding, but it is definitely not my forte, so I was not in a place to critically evaluate the information he was presenting. I was processing the information at a surface level, but even then, I felt the information was not inaccessible for people of my level of understanding. Sure, there was room for a higher level of understanding, but it was not out of my reach. I specifically enjoyed how digestible the information was presented in the numbered observations. I think this enabled a more general understanding, in that the audience was not asked to maintain attention on one specific topic or point for too long but also allowed him to go into detail on multiple different points. Also, even as he had many numbered observations, I felt he did a good job of connecting them all to present overarching themes such as the underdevelopment of Africa and China's influence and presence in Africa. I also found myself quite amazed by his political knowledge and influence, as I knew he would be well studied and knowledgeable about his research but did not understand how large of a figure Dr. Signé is and the presence he has had with regard to active change. This distinction is important to me to recognize, in that research and studying can have some effect as far as change and progression, but is mostly dependent on what others do with your published information and findings. However, being involved in the political scene, providing input and appropriate, educated solutions, stimulates active change and progress that is not dependent on others instigating the use of your work.

Janaya Thompson

The continent of Africa is filled to the brim with resources that have been sought after by the most powerful countries around the world for decades. It is a hunt that marked the colonization of Africa by European countries, which is critical for understanding the present condition of the African continent and the African people.

This year I have taken two courses on Africa—*19th-century African History and Human Rights and Development in Africa*—

and I attended UD’s Global Voices Symposium, “Africa in our Century.” I have a deep interest in the continent of Africa. It is where most of my ancestors came from, yet I have no connection to it at all, which makes me want to try to find my own connection. I read up constantly about the history of Africa and take courses on the subject whenever I can. These experiences have given me new insights, which I share here. In the U.S., we often consider African countries as underdeveloped. I believe the true culprit is the ghost of colonialism that lingers throughout the African continent, and because of this, I don’t view Africa as underdeveloped but just slightly behind, through no fault of their own. It’s time that our view of Africa changed.

Africa is changing. Since 2017, the Global Voices Symposium has aimed to create global awareness and promote global engagement. This year’s symposium focused on “Africa in Our Century” with five thought-provoking sessions, including a student session on their perspectives on the impact of global education. The event was hosted and planned by UD faculty with expertise in African history and contemporary culture. The symposium examined the growing importance of the African continent for our present and future.



Janaya Thompson

One of the first speakers of the Global Voices symposium was our Alumni Chair in Humanities and professor Dr. Julius Amin, who focused his presentation on China's Involvement in Africa. I was struck by the map Dr. Amin showed, which displayed the difference between the GDPs of Africa and China in 1980 and 2016. In 1980, the GDP of almost every African country was higher than China's GDP, but the map of 2016 was completely flipped, wherein China's GDP was higher than nearly every African country. What caused the shift over the last forty years?

In the keynote address, "Unlocking Africa's Potential in a Time of Competition between Rising and Global Powers," Professor Landry Signé clearly articulated a new narrative which showcases the changing dynamics of Africa. He noted the significant shift in global opinion about Africa in the last twenty years. As an example, Dr. Signé used an article published by the *Economist* back in 2000 which read "The Hopeless Continent," referring to Africa. By 2011, however, the *Economist* had changed its tune, characterizing the continent as "Africa Rising." So, what has changed? Dr. Signé detailed why people may be beginning to change the way they see Africa. For example, the amount of consumer spending in Africa has significantly increased, with no signs of stopping. A rise in urbanization has also been seen in recent years, as countries in Africa have seen an extremely fast, growing trend of increasing population in cities. Industrialization has also happened very quickly, despite the need for more advanced technology and infrastructure. These are essential things that are helping to bring African countries up to speed with the rest of the world. Africa is beginning to compete with global powers through urbanization, industrialization, technological advancements, and the overall increase of GDP in African countries.

My perception of Africa: What I take away from learning about African history and Africa today is the challenge to our way of thinking and the negative perceptions of Africa in the U.S. These are not just attitudes or views. In what Chimamanda Adichie calls the "single story," these perspectives have slowed down Africa's development. While some people blame the underdevelopment of African countries on its peoples' own doing, I believe that this stems from the legacy of colonialism. While I do not pretend that conflicts and problems did not happen in Africa prior to colonialism, the effects of colonialism have exacerbated

the continent's challenges to date. The post-colonial perspective of Africa is one-dimensional and continues to present the continent only through the lenses of war, poverty, deprivation, disease, and corruption. Instead of helping Africa to move forward, colonialism has led to exploitation, where most of the continent's resources are exported while essential goods are foreign imported. We should question why coastal countries in Africa need imports of seafood from across the world, or why a country such as the Democratic Republic of Congo has almost no access to the precious mineral, coltan, which is found in its own country?

And these dynamics extend not only to past colonialism. I also think that much of the rapid development of China is largely due to the growth of China's economic presence in Africa, which is associated with securing the continent's natural resources. I struggle to understand how countries today outside of Africa can take whatever resources they need to advance their societies, while African countries are left with little. This is despite the fact that while the majority of countries in Africa are considered to be developing countries, they have an abundance of resources that make countries outside of the continent some of the richest countries in the world. How is that fair? It was pointed out that China's involvement might not be mutually beneficial to Africa, though there continue to be polarizing debates about the benefits of China's involvement and its role in the underdevelopment in Africa.

Personally, I came to the conclusion that the global competition focused on Africa is due to the fact that African countries are beginning to catch up to the foreign countries that once exploited them. The reckoning is coming, and any prospect of lack of access to Africa's resources scares most, if not all, of the global superpowers.

In sum, I have realized the need to critically engage with the perceptions of Africa that have been largely driven by Western media and which reinforce negative stereotypes of the continent. While serious problems need to be tackled in Africa, we also must recognize the tremendous advances being made. In my opinion, Africa's potential has already been unlocked. From outside Africa, I ask, how do we actively support the creation of positive narratives about the continent?

The question isn't whether we should assist female educational leaders, but rather how we can better support these professionals, given their dual roles at work and at home.

Many recommendations were made, and I think for all leaders in Ghana, there is a need for systematic leadership training and leadership standards. Because of their dual position as leaders at work and at home, female principals require special training. Training for men and women should be required, to make sure people understand each other's positions and roles. I think one key takeaway is that women need to feel supported and equipped to equip other girls and women for leadership roles.

