



a collection
of
student reflections

issues 2010



Front Cover and Inside Photos: Sarah Zvesh, English and History of Art, BMC 2012
Empowerment: Ethics and Efficacy of Educating Women in Bangladesh, Asian University for Women
Chittagong, Bangladesh

A compilation of visual and written works by Haverford and
Bryn Mawr College interns sponsored by the Center for
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My Friend Larry, The Artist



In the outskirts of Accra, down a little lane of white houses and palm trees, lies Larry's studio. It's just a room on the left side of his house, crowded with easels, flecked brushes, and jars of imported paint. The walls are lined with overlapping paintings. There are figure paintings, jazzy musician scenes, and the works Larry is known for: layers and layers of rainbow colored *akwaaba* fertility dolls and other *adinkra* symbols. The closer you look, the more you see: the shape of a bird, a woman's face, a new line of symbols.

Larry is also known for his vibrant use of color. Recently, he has been experimenting with all-gray canvases embellished with a single shade of gold.

When we met, Larry looked just like his profile picture on Facebook: mustache scruff tinged with gray, and a young smile. He took me to the Artists Alliance gallery in Accra and his studio in Nungua. I was sitting on his couch flipping through his old photographs, and he approached me with a plate of crackers and a bottle of Alvaro pear soda. "You are invited," he said, which is

the Ghanaian way of saying, "Please eat."

He told me about challenges for artists in Ghana. Supplies are expensive and not readily available. Training in school is more vocational than art-focused. Even successful artists have trouble finding buyers. They have to look to Europe and the West, where prices are marked up, but that extra profit doesn't go back to the artists. Ghana has a rich historical culture of painting, music, and dance - yet artists have trouble finding support from the public or government. Larry was supported by his family, but many aspiring artists are not. Young people sell generic paintings on the street or dance outside for tips, but breaking into the professional art world is extremely difficult.

Still, I looked around me, and I could not help but smile. Larry's studio was filled with art books, newspaper clippings, and flyers from gallery openings. Despite a relatively contained art community, he's produced amazing work, made a name for himself, and gathered quite a following. He and the other artists I met are establishing spaces for art in Ghana and abroad. They are teaching student artists and paving the path for the next generation.

That evening, Larry walked me back to the *tro-tro* station. He made sure I was paying attention so that I'd recognize the path. I would be back.

The last time we spoke, I was at Kotoka International Airport. My cheap cell phone rang "doo-doo-doo" while I was washing my hands in the bathroom. "Larry Otoo" flashed on the screen. "Have a safe flight, greetings to your fam-

ily," he said. I sighed as I put away my phone. "Goodbye," I thought.

I got to my gate, and four bright market lady paintings lined the wall. Could it be...? I went up to read the plaque and there was the name: Larry Otoo.

Robin Riskin, English, HC 2012
Supporting Urban Youth through
Arts Education
The Junior Art Club
Accra, Ghana

english. & singing



The girls who lived at Thanh Tam Women's Shelter during one of our English/singing lessons.



*Laura Gilroy, Anthropology, HC 2011 Reproductive Health with
Underserved Women in Southeast Asia, ELD Associates
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

My project with Solid Ground this summer was centered around an urban farm project in Seattle. Marra Farm is located in a low-income neighborhood that can be classified as a "food desert" - the only place that residents could conveniently access fresh produce was through the produce Marra Farm grows and provides at the food bank (all of the produce grown is donated - over 40,000 pounds a year!).

Ensalada de Betabel

Because not all residents grew up learning to cook vegetables, and many of the immigrant families are unfamiliar with vegetables like beet greens, volunteers (like myself), would do cooking demonstrations at the food bank with the Marra Farm veggies. Our hope was that if they knew how to cook all the vegetables, they would be less hesitant to take unfamiliar ones, and more likely to eat fresh produce. Every couple weeks I would write up a recipe in English and Spanish (there is a large Latino community in the neighborhood), and hand out recipes and offer samples of the dish as families walked through the food bank line. Here is one of those recipes. Enjoy!

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Enjoy!

Isobel Brad, Sociology, HC 2011 Urban Farm and Food Access Equality
Solid Ground, Lettuce Link Program, Seattle, Washington

Raw Beet Salad

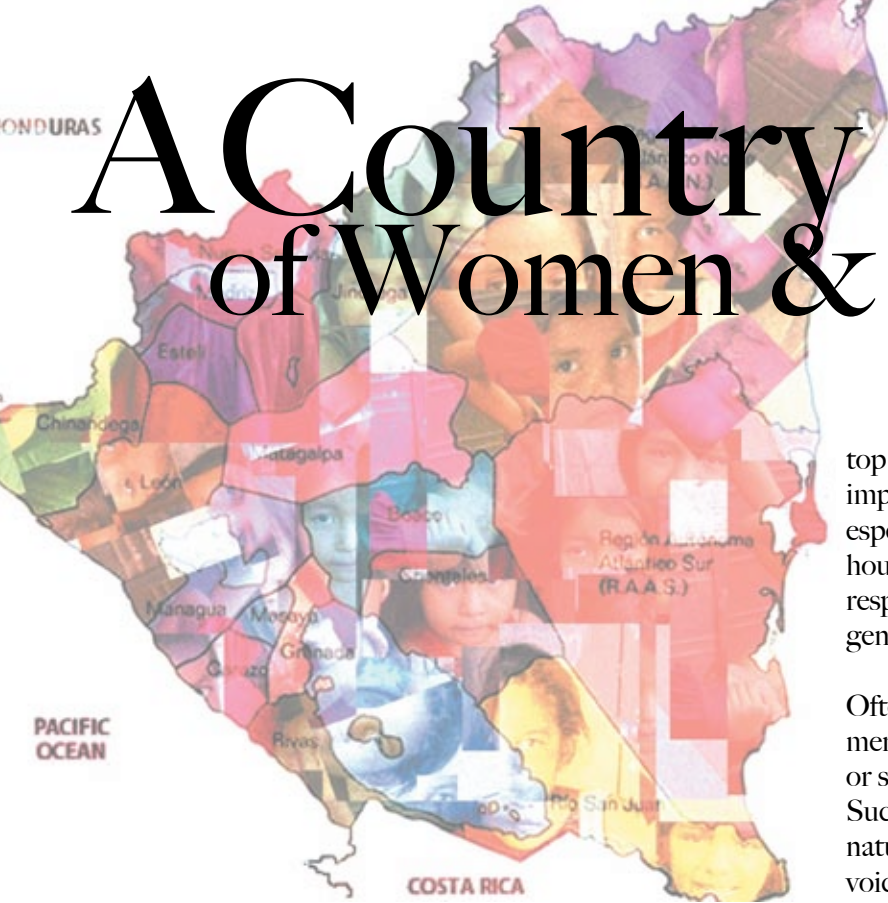
Ingredients:

- 1 pound beets, grated
- 1 large shallot or onion
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 tablespoons vinegar (balsamic, red wine, etc.)
- Minced fresh herbs (parsley, dill, chervil, rosemary or tarragon)

Directions:

1. In a small bowl, stir together mustard, olive oil and vinegar.
2. In a separate bowl, stir together beets, onion, herbs, salt and pepper. Add dressing to vegetables and toss well.

A Country of Women & Children



top of this, stay looking and smelling wonderful. I was impressed by how women balance all these expectations, especially while generating an income and completing housework. I was also saddened to learn about the lack of respect they receive from their male partners and society in general.

Often, a woman's efforts are disregarded since Nicaraguan men tend to express deprecation through verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, and sometimes also through infidelity. Such behavior is accepted as "normal" and part of "men's nature," although the typical enthusiasm found in women's voices often dwindled as they shared experiences of abuse and infidelity.

Unfortunately, women are not the only victims of family violence. As they grow, children from such households grow accustomed to and acquire the same roles: violent male or submissive female. They learn from parents, societal expectations, advertisements, music, dance, and television. This behavior repeats itself generation after generation.

When I was staying in Nicaragua, my neighbors were a twenty-one-year-old woman, her partner, and their three children. Late one night, the father returned intoxicated and beat his wife. My host family heard loud thumps, the mother's screams, and the children's cries. Because such episodes were common in that household, my host family did not call the police during the attack. Later, however, they did threaten to call the authorities if he beat her again. One can only hope their threat was enough to scare him.

This past summer I volunteered in Nicaragua, a country permeated with poverty and *machismo*. The Acahualinca Women's Center in Managua, for which I volunteered, works to relieve the detrimental effects that poverty and *machismo* have upon women and their families. The Center provides health, legal, psychological, educational, and financial support to women and their families in Acahualinca and other surrounding neighborhoods. One of the services the Center is able to provide with the help of CPGC volunteers, ProNica, and other donors, is sterilization procedures for both women and men. According to some courageous people I interviewed, these procedures are life altering.

There are high expectations for Nicaraguan women. They must care for the house, cook, work for pay, and on

Besides injustices against women, child neglect is also a common problem. Cases of child neglect tend to be worse in households with numerous children. The Women's Center lawyer shared several cases with me in which parents use children for income. In these cases, parents send children into the streets to beg for money, sell small objects, or steal. Her stories were brought to life for me when I observed two very talented young boys juggling fire cones in a dangerous intersection. These children learn to adapt to street life in order to please their parents, who stay home and expect money as their children return. If they return with empty hands, repercussions can be severe. A large family can also force older siblings to fill parental roles. Many girls care for younger siblings while the parents neglect them. By assuming adult roles at such early ages, they are robbed of their youth.

One of the solutions to these problems that the Centro de Mujeres Acahual provides is sterilization procedures: tubal ligations and vasectomies. The Center serves several *barrios* (neighborhoods) such as Acahualinca and La Chureca (the latter is Managua's open air dumpster). All of the mothers I interviewed were grateful that the Center covered these expenses. This procedure costs \$75 US and the Center provided 45 sterilizations in 2009 and 35 more by June of 2010. The Center also conducts important field-work in the community by teaching about sterilizations, pap smears, and healthier lifestyles.

According to my interviews, the sterilizations effectively control the size of a family, and many interviewees even disagreed with existing sterilization taboos. The interviewees said that they felt no pain and were able to function normally after thirty days. They recommended it! This contradicts preexisting myths of never being able to be sexually active or experiencing massive amounts of pain. Men are especially hesitant because they fear their *hombría*, or manliness, will be lost. The one man we interviewed disagreed. In fact, he recommended vasectomy because many men are *mujeriegos*, or fond of women, and this prevented unwanted pregnancy. Although it might seem as though promiscuity is promoted through steriliza-

tion, instead it is unwanted children that are prevented. As the Women's Center lawyer confirmed, men rarely support the children they father outside of marriage. The majority of the cases she receives are for child support. Sterilizations avoid this situation altogether.

All the interviewees stated that without sterilization they would have had another child. A family with effective birth control is better able to manage income and even to begin to save money to improve their homes and have sufficient food. Smaller families are better able to send their children to school instead of sending them to work on the streets or to pick through garbage. The Women's Center even has a small preschool many of these children attend, from which both parents and children benefit. In addition, with a limited number of family members, women can dedicate time to themselves, raise their self-esteem, and be more productive in the workforce or household.

All of the interviewees I met and conversed with were truly inspirational. They made radical changes in their lives in order to provide their existing families with the love and support they deserve. I hope to be able to return to Nicaragua in the future and follow up on the lives of these individuals and, with support, provide the Women's Center with monetary support for the sterilizations.

Beatriz Sanchez, Anthropology, HC 2012 Empowering Women and Children in Nicaragua. Acahuila Women's Center, Acahuila, Managua, Nicaragua

Compassion & Choice

You walk on the muddy path that purports to be a road, shoes sucking in the earth that's made viscous by monsoon. Your senses are inundated with otherness—the acrid stink of hardship, hunger, poverty—the air itself pungent and foreign. Sickness tears at your insides, a searing pain in your gut, pollution clogging your pores and your lungs and your nose, the grime of dust and diesel like an oily layer of sweat. It stings your eyes, as do the almost-wrong scents, of spices or sickly-sweet decaying litter. You know nothing of what is being put in your body; even when you are ill and need medicine, the names are written in a foreign alphabet, housed in unmarked sachets that bear no resemblance to their chemical counterparts in Western allopathic medicine. The food is strange and tastes like the jungles and marketplaces and roadside stalls: everything mashed or boiled and spiced so that it is unrecognizable. You don't know what it is or where it came from, or whether it is safe. Even water, the most translucent of



liquids, hides microscopic lethal dangers. Safety and peace are not part of daily experience in this region of the world—especially if you are a woman. The stares of men brutally rip off your clothing (already so ensconcing that its folds preclude any suggestion of curvature). You have never seen such hungry stares, and it is not a gentle lust. You have no idea what has been done to your body in their imaginations.

You are out of control of your physical self, but it is the emotive and cognitive faculties that are most assailed. There's a blind man in the alleyway behind the building, but he's not one of those visually impaired people who have a dog and dark glasses...he just has no eyes. He grasps at the air around him, hoping that people will give a few *taka* if his groping fingers can reach their hearts. There's another old man who has no legs or arms. His stumped torso grovels in the streetside garbage. His bony hunched form contorts

into a bucket that holds the coins people throw at him. Sometimes the money spills out onto the ground. You don't know what he is saying, but the sound he makes over and over gets into your consciousness. His raspy voice sounds like a mix between broken glass and gravel. A young woman with a baby resting on her hip stares through the window of the coffee shop where you are taking a brief respite, her gaze warped by hunger, longing, resentment, shame, fear, hopelessness. She can't be older than fifteen. She just gestures at her child, putting her bony hand to her mouth. The baby is screaming, snot and tears making runnels in the dirt on its face. You can't tell if it's a boy or girl, because it only wears rags that slide off its scabbed shoulder in tatters. The woman recoils from you when you proffer food, as if she expects a blow rather than a bite to eat.

Once you foray across that endemic socio-economic divide (to see and acknowledge the untouchable and invisible individuals), you open yourself to the high-pitched and insistent pleas of a horde of street children. They follow you as though you were a Pied Piper, and you glance down as your elbow is prodded with the crusty stump of an amputated arm...you follow the limb up to a face, dark eyes inset in dark circles resting deeply in the hollows of gaunt cheeks. The little girl has no feet. She has acid burns all over her legs, and she totters on crutches, barely supporting her own weight. It's like she is wearing high heels, but they are bone splinters instead. She begs for money, refusing food in the nausea-inducing way that indicates her enslavement to a slumlord, who reaps the profits of the child's disfigurement.

But finally, she and some other children accept mango juice, followed by some chocolate. It's not the healthiest thing, and they need vitamins and nourishment, but every kid deserves a treat once in a while. And that is almost the hardest part, see-

ing this little girl laugh like a normal child. And she is, she's just human and probably only seven or eight years old...

How can you wrestle with this poverty, abjection, violence, dehumanization? There are no rationalizations you have no anesthetized cultural context that normalizes it. So many people just brush it off, eviscerate empathy to retain their sanity. As a westerner, as a student full of vitality and idealism to help the world, you cannot reconcile brutal reality with any redemptive cognitive answers. Being slapped in the face with trauma and vulnerability and the raw pain of existence, you are left with the red afterprint of a hand, transcribing the force of cultural collision—but the hand is that of a small child, firmly and indelibly imprinted on your mind. It feels like your consciousness has been rubbed with sandpaper and every fresh abrasion just cuts a little bit deeper. This place is a learning curve that is so sharp, you feel the drop in the pit of your stomach.

My answer, in the face of such unyielding atrocities, was to retain my capacity for empathy, to avoid constructing that protective shell, that wall barricaded by each heartrending experience into lapidary grief—all stone and silence. Unfeeling disavowal undercuts their ability to be heard, robs them of what little voice and pride they have. In my mind, the only way to give their suffering any vestige of credence was to open myself utterly to every witnessed instance of inequality and hardship. My vulnerability mitigated my feeling of helplessness at having a time limit, metering the minutes I was spending in their world, and the privilege I had to leave it. I had to come to terms with knowing that they had a greater impact on me than I had on them. The least I could do was let empathy wreak havoc with my emotions, let poverty percolate into inspiration for the direction I want my life to take.

*Sarah Inyesh, English and History of Art, BMC 2012
Empowerment: Ethics and Efficacy of Educating Women in
Bangladesh Asian University for Women
Chittagong, Bangladesh*





Domestic Interns 2010

