"Ghana must go": Migration, resilience and mobilisation

CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The political mobilisation and transnational solidarity team, based at the University of Ghana and University of Cape Town, worked in partnership with the Migration Advocacy Centre Ghana (MAC) to build solidarity with migrants and local communities. Organising several community dialogue sessions and events in Accra, brought migrant communities, organisations that support migrants as well as the Ghana Union of Traders Association (GUTA), an organisation which has organised anti-immigrant campaigns. During the meetings, the expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1983, also known as "Ghana Must Go", emerged as a justification for anti-migrant sentiments. However this narrative simplifies the history of migration between the two countries dating back to the expulsion of Nigerians from Ghana in 1954. To counter these anti-migrant narratives, the team interviewed Ghanaians living in Nigeria in 1983. Their research highlighted the experiences of migrants, their positive sentiments towards Nigerians and how the state led anti-migrant narrative led to their expulsion.

The lived experiences of Ghanaian migrants captured through this research highlight the dangers of anti-migrant narratives and the likely outcomes of violence, expulsions, and loss of property and lives which emerged during this period. Thus, sharing these findings with local communities can help shift narratives on migration in Ghana. Marking the 40th anniversary of the "Ghana Must Go" expulsion, MAC, the MIDEQ team and local artists curated an exhibition of the lives of people who lived in Nigeria during the expulsions and the broader historical context. The exhibition included performances, dialogues, radio and television debates as well as moderated conversations on migration in Ghana.

EXHIBITING THE PAST TO BUILD FUTURE SOLIDARITY

EXHIBITION ARTEFACTS

Photo credit: Antique Lemonade Art Space

The exhibition was hosted at Antique Gallery in Accra, featured images, artefacts and narratives from migrants that were expulsed from Nigeria in 1983. The exhibition was launched through an opening ceremony which was covered by the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. It featured musical performances, poetry and a panel discussion on xenophobia in Ghana and the broader West African region. Discussions at the launch focused on how governments scapegoat migrants and the need to building solidarity between local communities and migrants. Participants at the opening ceremony noted the importance of the exhibition:

"This is a very good programme that is going to cast our minds back to our heritage, what we went through and bring our culture and all the things our forefathers went through. It's going to help us improve on our current situation in Ghana now."

The exhibition targeted local community members, students from local schools and universities, young people in economically depressed communities, media and organisations such as GUTA.

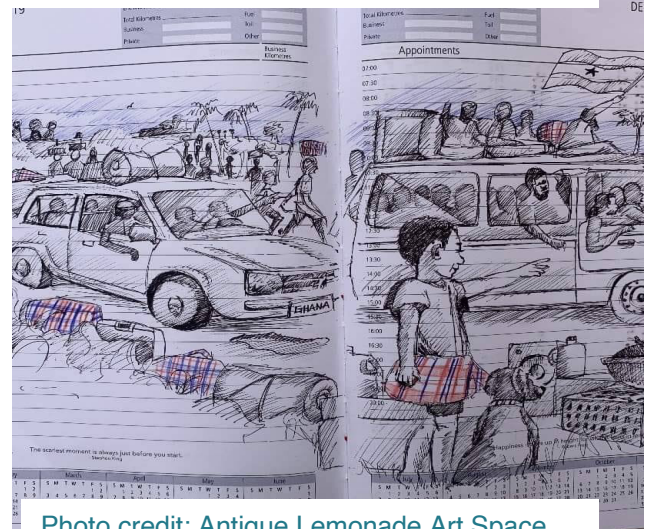# CREATIVE APPROACHES TO MIGRATION NARRATIVES

GHANA MUST GO BAGS

Photo credit: Raymond Ashirifie

A key feature of the exhibition showcased the "Ghana Must Go" bags in different styles and themes. The bags, recognised at a global scale, were used by migrants deported from Nigeria to carry their personal belongings. Ghanaian artists working in MIDEQ, from the University of Glasgow, worked in collaboration with local artists to use fashion and textiles to explore the history and lasting legacies of "Ghana Must Go".

MIDEQ researcher Naa Densua Tordzro organised a workshop with women from a local NGO to transform the "Ghana Must Go" bags into fashion designs. The workshop made connections to the ways in which migrants use fashion to communicate cultural values and traditions. It also explored the "Ghana Must Go" bags themselves as objects of migration, representing the memories and experiences of migrants. Repurposing the bags as textile not only highlights its personal significance but also served to promote conversation about anti-migrant narratives within the community.

USING HISTORY IN SCHOOLS

For many Ghanaian students today, the history of "Ghana Must Go" is far removed, rarely discussed publicly in the media or in schools. Given this, the exhibition also presented an opportunity to teach young people about migration, its history and solidarity with migrant communities. To engage young students, the team launched a painting competition to encourage students to use art to explore the "Ghana Must Go" period. Three local schools were invited to participate, Christ the King School, Faith Montessori School and Martin De Porres School.

STUDENTS AT CHRIST THE KING SCHOOL

Photo credit: Marisa Claire Andoh.

To facilitate the competition, MIDEQ researcher Akosua K. Darkwah visited the schools to explain the context and history of "Ghana Must Go". The conversation stressed not only how migrants felt but also the support that they received from Nigerians both before and after their expulsion. The conversation broadened to migration in the region, highlighting how arbitrary borders divide communities such as the Akan in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. Throughout the conversation, students raised questions about Pan African solidarity and the experiences of the migrants that were displaced. After the school visits, students submitted their entries to the painting competition, which were judged by a team of Ghanaian female artists.

The "Ghana Must Go" exhibition and community engagement activities highlighted the importance of memories as a tool to creatively challenge anti-migrant narratives. Not only does it humanise the migrant experience but also illustrates the dangers of negative migration sentiments. As the team in Ghana continues to build community networks and solidarity with migrants, history and the arts will continue to play an integral role.

Cover Image

Exhibition part of "Ghana Must Go". Photo by Gameli Tordzro

Funding

Licence information

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