

In the Service of Europe

IN AUGUST, students arrive on campus, some in their parents' luxury cars, others from the plain bus. In their single-sex hostels, students meet their new roommates for the year. As students begin to unpack, some anxiously wait for the WiFi password to post their new rooms on social media, while others search for the computer lab to send an arrival email back to their group homes. These experiences are common at Sankofa International College, where half the students are upper class Africans and the other half are orphans. The students have to attend a bonding program to merge the gap between the two groups of students, an experience that lasts two weeks. They sit in circles and share stories about their different backgrounds. The wealthy students frequently self-identify as middle class, as to mitigate their economic, social, and academic advantages. The orphans downplay their struggles to alleviate the tensions emanating from their wealthier classmates' guilt. It is here that they learn that their wealth or lack thereof does not separate them; instead their only differences are their nationalities. School uniforms are mandated as to create an egalitarian environment that eschews any implications of social class. It becomes a cultural norm to shun those who look down on the orphans and the "golden rule"—treat others as you want to be treated—becomes the only rule.

Decades after Ghana gained its independence from the British, remnants of its colonial past and influence are still apparent in the seaport that houses Sankofa International College. Sankofa International College was built in a city that harbored slave forts that were crucial to the Transatlantic Trade. Ironically, the school's mission to focus on Pan-Africanism is given up in favor of preparing students for a global education centered around European ideals. This trade off reflects the ways in which European culture continues to seep into and affect African culture, as it did in the age of slavery and colonialism.

The school is located in a sprawling suburban neighborhood that houses the richest Ghanaians, international diplomats, and foreign investors. The city's neighborhoods are well

defined and clearly bounded by their socioeconomic conditions. One part of the city houses the four largest manufacturing companies in Ghana. The socioeconomic differences of the city are remarkably stark. As the city suffers from severe and random power outages, each building and home in the school's neighborhood is beautifully lit as the generators hum in unison. This contrast results in and is further demonstrated by the local nickname for the city, "Ghana's richest slum." While half of the city lacks clean water and reliable electricity, the school's sprinklers methodically shower the pristine soccer field that lies on the outskirts of the compound. Their tennis courts overlook the swimming pool, where teams practice their 100-meter freestyles and work on their butterflies and backstrokes techniques.

There is a constant mixing of differences—in culture, class and nationality, and family background. In the dining hall, flags from different African countries hang on the ceiling. The flags represent the diverse student body and the school's efforts to attract students from other African nations. Yet, more than simply bringing together the various African cultures in the dining hall, the school also incorporates European culture. On Mondays for lunch, they serve a common Ghanaian dish called "red-red": white rice, fried ripe plantains, mixed with beans fried in palm nut oil. Traditionally, as a sign of respect to the food and the person who prepared the meal, it is supposed to be eaten with one's right hand. Instead, the students separate the rice, beans, and plantains on their plates with their forks in their left hand and the knives in their right, as Europeans do. This meal and its required etiquette are intended to create a sense of respect for one's culture. Eating an authentically African meal together in the dining hall, with other African students, creates a home for those who are not Ghanaian and it reinforces Pan-African notions of solidarity that guide the school's philosophy. But this meal also brings in an identity conflict as it combines the European style of eating with a traditional African meal. Furthermore, merely five hours later, the school serves its Italian "Meatless Monday" dinner: penne pasta with marinara sauce. Over the loudspeaker, they play music from Ghanaian legend Kojo Antwi, as students bond over yesterday's English Premier League game. It is in this combination of cultures that there exists a struggle to negotiate one's African identity, while embracing the constant influx of European culture.

The most popular club, the Pan-African Club, attracts students from all demographics. The Pan-African Club plans celebrations of different African cultures. The goal of the club, which reflects the mission of the school, is to establish strong enough bonds within the group that those

members forget the differences among them and focus instead on ways to serve the continent of Africa. These extracurricular opportunities allow for orphan and non-orphan students to integrate into an egalitarian community. Students take advantage of the academic and cultural experiences the school offers to be prepared for a world of possibilities.

Sankofa International College's curriculum and extracurricular activities mimic those of Western boarding schools. The school provides its students with activities that are unavailable to other Ghanaian students. This advantage makes the students attractive candidates for spots at universities in Europe and the United States. The school provides International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) from ninth to tenth grade, and International Baccalaureate (IB) curricula from eleventh to twelfth grade. The IGCSE is an internationally recognized curriculum and examination system administered by Cambridge International Examinations. According to Sankofa International College's administration, the school uses the IGCSE curriculum to make its students competitive in a global context because the United Kingdom, the next destination of many students, only recognizes the IGCSE and IB programs. But by only providing the IGCSE and IB programs, the school is ignoring the preparatory curriculum for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), an exam required by African colleges. This produces a cycle of advantage for students while forcing them to leave Ghana.

The school's official curriculum is mainly based on Eurocentric idealism. Language and history are mechanisms that preserve culture. Based on the school's 2015 Humanities Syllabus, the African part of the history course only focuses on South African history from 1940 to 1994. So, while eighty percent of the curriculum teaches European and US history since the early 20th century, it barely touches upon Ghanaian and other African histories. The only African language available from the IGCSE curriculum is Afrikaans. Unconsciously, these students adopt European culture and keep its dominance alive, while simultaneously rejecting their own. The school's focus on Pan-Africanism and the uplifting of African peoples directly contradicts a curriculum that avoids the history of African nations and groups. Sankofa International College endorses a curriculum that prepares students to assimilate into Western culture more than appreciating and identifying with their own. The school emphasizes the IGCSE and IB curricula and rejects the WAEC because highly prestigious universities such as Oxford and Edinburgh recognize IGCSE and IB as necessary preparation to meet the academic and otherwise demands presented to students at these institutions. The school, therefore, secures its eliteness.

There is the idea that because students are learning Western subjects, they are well-equipped to become leaders that can change the fate and destiny of their continent. The school's motto focuses on advancing Africa(ns) through encouraging pride in and appreciation of African cultures, but instead reinforces ideas of European superiority by hiding behind the Pan-African façade.

