

To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ Caught Between Two Worlds. Interview With Samuel Oteng



Samuel Oteng is the name. In 1987 I went to Austria. After a few years I got the papers ready and my wife came to join me where I live, a small town called Graz. Our children were born in Austria. Two, a boy and a girl, both go to school. As a family we are settled in Graz and have no intention to move away, moving now would hurt my children's education and their social life

with their friends. My son Godfred, who is twelve, attends what they call the 'Gymnasium' over there and my girl Precious, who is eight, is at the primary school. Precious says she likes where she lives and she has a gang of white girlfriends with whom she feels free and happy. She also loves nature. Our part of the country is beautiful and she does not want to move to a big city. I am the same in that way, I love the natural beauty of where we live. No, we won't move.

Also, after all, I have my work and I'm much involved in the community. Specially our church. Apart from what I said about the children and their education I have been working in that factory all my years and I do not want to lose the benefits and start all over again in London. But otherwise, yes, sometimes we dream of moving to England!

The problem is that most of our Ghanaian friends move away from Austria to the UK. As soon as they have their Austrian passport you see them going, one by one. All the time we lose more friends. It is true that living circumstances for Africans are much better in England as compared to, especially, Austria. In Austria black people are isolated because Austrians stay away from us. It makes life difficult that way. People in England are used to Africans and all kind of other nationalities and they are friendly. Of course the language too plays a role. That's why my people leave.

As I said I am not going to go to England like my friends. They challenge me: 'you are an Austrian citizen and so you can freely move to anywhere in Europe'. But no, we stay in Graz.

What I don't like is being the eternal outsider. The work also is hard. I get up early come back late, hardly see my children, my wife works too, so hardly see her at all. And now we face this exodus of Ghanaian friends leaving for Britain. Others are talking about it, some are packing. We stay where we are but it is sad to stay back here alone.

Do you think I could get a job as a bus-driver in Austria? Or any job where you get in touch with other people? No. Not in Austria and especially not in Graz where we live. I tell you, in the beginning people were afraid of me. When I would board a bus for example all other passengers would look at me. I sit in the front, they all move to the back. If I sit at the back they quietly stay in the front of the bus. All the same that was eighteen years ago and things are changing. When I came I was the only African in town and people would always look at me and sometimes point: 'Schwartz', which means 'black-man' and I would just feel bad. Anyway I was lucky because I got a job. I still have that same job after more than 15 years. I work in a factory and there at my workplace I feel at home and they like and respect me there.

As soon as I came to Austria I wanted to be one with the people and I quickly learned their language. Not just German, but their particular dialect and way of saying things. I use certain sayings the way they do and it surprises them and it amuses them too! I felt that if I learned the language they would accept me which in a way was true. Now there are more Africans working in the factory and I am often asked to be a middle man, to translate and settle disputes. So in the work area I am all right and I know I am appreciated which is important for me.

When I came things were extremely hard as I said. Some people really had never seen a black man and one woman asked if her child could touch my skin and then she gave me money. I did not like getting money for that!! Many times you would walk on the street and people would give you money for they think that all blacks are poor and beggars because the TV always shows Africa in a bad light.

But I learned the language and I learned it well so that I speak it like a man from that village. And with my work I have no problem at all. And I believe I want to stay at that place till I get pensioned and then I have something for the future too.

Blacks now have a bad name which is partly understandable. The Nigerians sell drugs because they have no patience to wait for a work-permit and basically they don't like to work. Waiting for a work-permit can take a long time. During that time they feed you and you get some pocket money so there is no need to become

impatient. However the Nigerians spoil it for us blacks, so now when they see a black they say 'Ah, a drug-dealer'.

When you have your work-permit it is still hard to get a job. As soon as they see your face they say no, this job is not for you, or no, we cannot have a black man for the job. When I later showed my passport to show that I am an Austrian they just laugh me in the face, not even understanding how they insult me. They say no, we need a real one, a real Austrian! Also you cannot get a room to rent, it is impossible. As soon as they see you the room is no more available. That's life for us in that village.

I am a religious man. My religion has helped me, my church, my wife, my family. I worked hard to build a church in Graz. It is a Pentecostal church and I worked together with an Austrian Pentecostal pastor. Then gradually the pastor became worried because by and by there were more Africans worshipping there than white people. He did not like that. I had put much of my energy in building up the church and I lived in a room on the second floor.

When the Austrians did not want the blacks anymore they told me to move out. I negotiated meetings and we reconciled. What we decided was that the whites would have a certain time to worship and the blacks another time. It never worked. I understand we have certain habits that they despise. We decided not to be loud for we are always loud, for example. Still eventually I lost my room in that church and had to look for a house. I moved out of there but I still worship in my church and often translate for the pastor from German into English. In the church I was always the middle man between the blacks and the whites, they needed me that way. I understand the mentality of Africa but came to understand the people of that part of Austria too. Often they would call me to solve conflicts. You see so in a way I really belong there although I belong to Ghana.

Because I had a work-permit and a passport I was entitled to subsidized housing. But I tell you it was very, very hard to get a house. When you get a room then all that live in that neighborhood want to leave or they harass you till you move out again. Anyway now I have a house, I have my own apartment.

I often come to Ghana, every year if I can. I always send money and for my parents I have built a large house here in town. During my last visit they asked me for a big truck to use as a commercial vehicle. I consented but did not have such money in Austria and decided to borrow money towards purchasing the truck. I made a loan. Up to now I was not capable to repay the loan. My father

said to me all the income from the car is for you to repay your loan. Then afterwards we will generate money for our family here in Ghana. I had to borrow 10,000 euro and still I am in debt.

When last year I came to Ghana and I saw that my father was driving the car or has someone driving it, I asked how much money did you make? He avoided an answer but finally I understood there was not a penny saved, nothing! All kind of talk, excuses about car repairs, what not. I became very infuriated and disappointed, particularly with my father. I went back to Austria and discussed all with my wife. Now that I am here again I came unannounced just to see things for myself. So that is why I came and that is why I want to sleep away from my own family's house which is almost like an insult to my mother but what can I do. If I would sleep there then I tell you, day and night, all the time, every minute of the day they will be in my room and all over me. Asking, demanding, complaining. It is such a big problem to me that I cannot face it. That's why I lodge away from them. At least when I leave their house and I leave their town and I enter my room I have peace. So recently I had this big family-meeting. I had come with a purpose and with the help of God I was to carry it out. They were all sitting there, my mother, my father, my relatives, other children, many people.

I start by asking how much money my father now has assembled as income from the truck. He says none. What I feel is that I sink. More fury when my father says that I have to pay for repairs for the car.

I already had found out that he has a new wife somewhere in the south and with her he has new children too. All that money that he makes goes to his new wife and nobody sees it. My own mother knows it too but she just lets it happen because she does not know how to speak strongly. My wife says she is too weak. That's why I have come to talk with all of them and I had to make a surprise visit otherwise I would not see them.

This meeting was one of the hardest days in my life. It was like a funeral. Everybody was weeping, my mother was weeping, my father was weeping, in the end everybody was wailing as at a real funeral.

I could not take it but I took it and then I came home and told all to my friend Osei who is my in-law and I wept. Then I went to bed but could not sleep and it is hard to concentrate and think clearly. What I had to tell them was this: That I take the car away from them and sell it. I may have told them I do not want to come to Ghana again, ever. But yesterday I went back to the family amazingly enough it

was kind of a healing experience to be together again after all that anger and crying.

All the same later again I hear more bad news and the healing is over! Past! My father has not only generated no income from the car but has made debts up to the tune of 1700 dollar to one person. (Seemingly he is not the only one). I hear the police came yesterday night to lift him from his bed in Kumasi and arrested him. My father was taken to jail.

Early this morning Samuel left to Kumasi to bail his father out of jail. That is where Samuel is today, with his father at the police station in Kumasi.

It's likely he will spend all the money that he brought to Ghana to repair and sell the car, pay the debts of his father and bail him out of jail.

Samuel's debt in Austria is still unchanged. He will for the time have to stop building his own house in Accra, which is meant for Samuel and his wife after they have retired.

Samuel threatens never to set foot in Ghana again. That's how furious and disappointed he is.

Caught between two worlds and nowhere fully at ease! Right now, while Samuel is still in Ghana, Austria is the less troubled place for him. But back in Austria...?

To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ The Conference Participant. Interview With Osei Takyi



I was invited to a conference and that is how I arrived one early morning at the airport of Frankfurt. Forty three years old, first time overseas, big airport and sleepless night. I tried not to show my anxiety and then I saw my friends Rudi and Susan and they hugged me 'Welcome to Germany'. At once I felt good. But also cold and strange. I saw no leaves on the trees. They

said you are lucky it is spring now, look at the first green leaves. But wherever I looked the trees looked bare and dead to me. I was in a dream. We drove to their house and then the sun came through, I brought it with me they said! After dinner it was still light outside.

Here in Ghana sun-up 6, sun-down 6, but not over there. I was exhausted and wanted to sleep but sleep would not come because of the light and all the strangeness.

Next morning was Sunday and we went to Church. It was a huge building so I thought there will be thousands of people worshipping there but I saw only twenty-five or so grey haired people. Then we saw another church which they had turned it into a restaurant which I did not want to believe. But I saw it.

In the afternoon we drove to a restaurant with all the participants of the conference and we had pizza. My first time pizza and I had to chose between mushroom, fish, spinach, I don't know how many choices and so finally we tasted them all and overate! That I enjoyed and that night I slept.

Next day the program started with a visit to a special school for mentally handicapped children. I was amazed to see all their equipment. The atmosphere was good, not much discipline like here in Ghana, no, a lot of liberty for the kids, I even saw some children smoking, the bigger ones, they would go out and have a smoke. In Ghana, never!

They were friendly and asked me so many questions that I was amazed how very free they were and how much they wanted to know about Ghana. They had made paintings and we were to unveil them. The week was wonderful, every day another program, discussions in small groups about development, a forum on globalization, more visits to schools and mostly meeting each other and the German people and looking around seeing the town. We were catching the European spirit. Their town was so serene and quiet, not at all like Ghana where we make noise playing our speakers and so on. I really liked that quiet, it marveled me. Even the train is quiet, straight and swift and well oiled. Two different worlds which I kept comparing. Hospitality is higher in Ghana but the noise level too. In Germany at times they are friendly and at times they just walk away from you when you ask a question. Sunday we closed the conference with a party and we all sang and danced and had fun. Then we left. I took the train to Austria to visit my in-laws there. The next ten days were like a visit to another Ghana, the Ghanaian society in Graz in Austria. The train ride was a new

experience. It was cold in the train and at each station there was police who asked me for my passport and ticket. They take your passport and after some time, fifteen minutes or so, bring it back. I understand they look for illegal immigrants but I became very tired with it for I wanted to sleep and at least six times they woke me up because of papers. Then we reached Vienna and it was early morning of the next day. I asked for the train to Graz. The police came with dogs to inspect my bags and they took twenty minutes searching everything, even flipped my bible to see if nothing was hidden in it. Then I took a taxi to another station and found the train to Graz. I admired the landscape, high mountains capped with snow, so beautiful that all the way to Graz I made pictures instead of catching up with sleep. Three hours later I was in Graz and called Samuel's wife to pick me up. She had to work so in a rush she showed me the kitchen and was gone and I was alone! I slept at once and in the evening I heard Samuel open the door and heaven broke loose! We made so much happy noises that even the neighbors came out to see if all was well. We are happy, we said. I was so happy to be united with Ghanaians again and on top of it they are my real family! While the parents worked their boy showed me all of Graz. He is twelve. He is the one who had time so after school he showed his town to his uncle! I was there for ten days and visited all the Ghanaians from Nkoranza who I all know well. Lunch, dinner, talking, dancing, music, catching up! It was small Nkoranza! In Graz we went to church with the Ghanaians, Samuel's church, and that was great, that was real worship, a full church like here in Ghana! Like being home. The church is underground so the noise does not disturb other people.

Saturday they all came to say goodbye and I left and took the plane to Amsterdam.

That flight was the best experience I had in the air because I saw Holland like a jigsaw puzzle with small green squares which were fields, I saw the houses and much water... so beautiful.

My Dutch friends Danielle and Oscar drove me to their home and right away we saw the flower fields. The next day we visited Schiphol, the airport. Planes from right, planes from left, planes every second or so, amazing. We saw Haarlem and a fishing village and a typical Dutch café, we saw my friend's parents and their friends and we all talked and laughed all the time. Amsterdam, the big city, they showed me the red-light district and I did not believe what I saw, that was a shocker. The women were half to three quarter naked and in glass-houses and this went on and on from one street to another and then a street with male

prostitutes which we do not have in Ghana. Danielle and I walked for the whole day without tiring, twenty miles or more. When we wanted to we sat down and took a drink and then we walked again. I loved it.

The next day was "Ghana" again! A friend from Nkoranza took me through his city, Almere, and we ate fufu in the house. He works nights and the wife works days. They have one hour to meet! That's what I saw in Europe, people have no time to meet. In Austria the same. They are all tired and run around so much. This one goes here that one goes there and there is no time to relax.

I then went to Belgium with again another friend from Ghana. We talked, slept, ate, they could not let me go. We saw Antwerp, the big shops, I saw the traditional Jews, I saw everything. Then we returned to Holland. There's no border but police patrols there. My friend who I was driving said: 'look, they see two blacks, they will chase us'. Indeed, they stopped us at the highway from Antwerp to Holland. This is how they catch illegals, if you have no papers then you go back to Ghana straight! The next day my time was up and I took the train to Germany, a train as beautiful as a plane. I wore all my clothes on top of one another because of the cold. I had time to explore Dortmund and say goodbye to my good friends who organized the conference and together we went through immigration and we hugged and that was it. Back to Frankfurt this time was peanuts to me, I helped others to find their way! Before I knew it I was in the air again. Once back in Ghana I knew that I had really traveled! I suddenly got tired and it hit me that I was back. The heat! I felt it like a stranger! What country is this! So hot and humid!

We went home and had stories to tell! I wrote a journal and every night I read and I remember because I don't want to forget all that I saw.

I saw Europe but I saw the Ghanaians in Europe as well. I knew almost all of them personally. I sympathize with them. They work very hard, it is mostly only working they do, making money. I said to myself now that I came back I have to talk about this to their relatives here at home. In Ghana they think those in Europe live in paradise but if anything they rather live in hell. They come home at night, you sit on the sofa with them, and they have fallen asleep while you talk! Some have two jobs, some have three. Too little time for their own children. They look after their families in Europe and also their families in Ghana. If only the people in Ghana knew! It is a slap in the face of a Ghanaian abroad who sends money home to see that it is squandered! Like Samuel! He works in a steel-

factory, his wife has another job. Look at the father in Ghana, squanders the money, asks for more!!

I have to be an advocate for them in Ghana. Here we have the wrong impression. Of course someone comes from outside with a car and the wrong impression is already created. How much has that car cost! It may even be a loan, often people overseas make loans to help their family. No idea, here, and no gratitude but asking for more.

If you have no residence permit you have it tough! You wake at 1 am and make a little money distributing newspapers! Cold, in the night, always illegal and in hiding. People back home may think he is making a lot of money. He sacrifices for the family and they sneer at him for not sending enough money home. Many regret having gone but can't say it out of pride. In Austria blacks and all foreigners come second when there is work opportunity. Europe is good for Europeans but not for me to live. No, I will visit again and then I go back, I prefer to stay in Ghana. What I also saw is that most Ghanaians go to Britain. There they can talk their own English language and Britain seems to be friendlier towards the black man. Even in friendly Holland Ghanaians are leaving for England. It leaves those that stay behind lonely and dissatisfied, they lose their best friends. The children born outside are hooked to their new country but at least if you raise your children in England it is easier to come and go to Ghana because of the language. Britain is where the real Ghana community is.

I thought before about all these things and now I saw it all with my own eyes!

Ingeborg Denissen ~ Negotiating Urban Citizenship. The Urban Poor, Brokers and the State in

Mexico City and Khartoum

PhD – Utrecht University. Jan., 2014

Mexico City, 26 June 2008: “We are merchants, not criminals”. These words mark the banners of the protestors on Mexico City’s central square (Zócalo). Hundreds of merchants from the “El Salado” market in Iztapalapa have come in busses to protest against the government operations in their market. A month earlier, the authorities had entered the market with more than 500 police officers to check the licences of the merchants and forcing them to register. The authorities claimed

that around eighty percent of the merchandise was stolen or pirated, including stolen car parts and even weapons. Merchants claimed their right to work.

Although the Department of Public Security’s main reason for the operation was to promote security in the area, that of the local government was “to break with the

corporativism that ruled the market and to have the merchants pay taxes to the government instead of fees to their local leaders”.

Khartoum, 8 May 2008: dozens of army vehicles entered the squatter area of Soba Aradi to relocate the population without prior notice. Riots broke out in the neighbourhood as the residents refused to mount the vehicles. After a police officer posted in the area accidentally shot a child, the police office was set on fire by an angry crowd, killing at least eight police officers. Twenty-four people died because of the riots, and many were held in prison without due process. Public outrage particularly turned against the popular committee in the neighbourhood, with the official body of citizen representation seen as complicit in the government relocation plan.

Read full text (PDF-format): <http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/handle/1874/288516>

sdinet.org - Muungano And CURI Launches The Kiandutu Urban Studio

The Urban Studio is a unique interdisciplinary academic initiative undertaken to address urban issues that challenge the quality of life in cities, more particularly informal settlement. The planning studio endeavors to engage the community in an urban problem solving effort. Through an initiative of the Association of Africa Planning Schools (AAPS) implemented by African Planning Schools and SDI affiliate NGOs more than 100 students in urban planning, architecture, design, anthropology, business, nursing, political science, urban geography and others have participated and partnered with urban poor communities, community based organizations on projects intended to make informal settlements more sustainable.

Read more:
<http://www.sdinet.org/muungano-and-curi-launches-kiandutu-urban-studio/>

newcitiesfoundation - Re-imagining Cities Through Architecture, Design and Urban Planning: Tweet Chat Highlights

Can architects, designers and urban planners transform our cities for the better? What are the biggest challenges they face? Do city leaders and the general public understand the role of architects in shaping our future cities? These were some of the ideas discussed in the second of our monthly [New Cities Summit 2014](#) Tweet chats.

Our *Re-imagining Cities Through Architecture, Design and Urban Planning* Tweet chat was moderated by the New Cities Foundation – [@newcitiesfound](https://twitter.com/newcitiesfound). We were joined by featured guests from the media and the academic, public and private sectors. Over the course of one hour, we analyzed the crucial role of design in re-imagining the cities we live in.

Read more: <http://www.newcitiesfoundation.org/re-imagining-cities>

allafrica.com - Egypt: Living Without The State In Cairo's Slums

Cairo — For the residents of the Middle East and Africa's largest city, Cairo, 2013 ended with the often repeated government promise to finally provide basic services and development in the slums, where half of the city's residents live.

But instead of waiting for Prime Minister Hazem Al-Beblawi's slum renewal project, announced in November, to bear fruit, many are simply coping as best they can without the state.

When basic services are lacking, it is often down to slum dwellers to use their own initiative. They dig land, construct septic tanks and water pipes, install storage barrels, and raise community funds to get private engineers to build sewage pipes and connect them to the main network.

"These communities have an inherent self-reliance in finding ways to get by," said Thomas Culhane, co-founder of Solar CITIES, an NGO that invests in solar and renewable energy in poor communities.

Read more: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201401240529.html>