

Oral History Presentation

Vivian Ojo: Namibia

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The interview I conducted was of Vivian Ojo. Vivian is a senior at Georgetown University. She is from Windhoek, Namibia which is the capital of the country. Vivian came to the U.S. to attend college making her immigration story unique in that she is an example of someone who can possibly transition into the complete immigrant experience. I see Vivian's story as one of the new, modern immigrant that we see evolving in the United States. Themes that ran throughout our interview were development, transnationalism, religion, and education. Vivian's opportunities and why she has ended up in the United States is based largely on her parent's education which has influenced her desire to pursue higher education. Education has also provided Vivian with much of the mobility and agency needed to achieve a lot of the things she has in terms of migration. Development is reflective of Vivian's desire to help her home country. Similarly, where I met Vivian plays a role in explaining her passion for development. I met Vivian this semester as a fellow intern of the ONE Campaign, a non-profit founded by Bono in 2004 that advocates to alleviate poverty and hunger in Africa. This mission of ONE is reflective of Vivian and what she hopes to accomplish through her career one day. Vivian's ability to travel and experience new cultures are representative of transnationalism another theme in the interview. Vivian is a global citizen and has made choices in her education and life in general to assure she maintains as much of a global view as possible. Religion is another aspect of Vivian's life that she embraces in the United States as well as her home country. Throughout the interview she credits God for providing her with the opportunities she's had. Therefore, religion plays a role in her everyday life in shaping her values as well as a practice she's maintained through her immigrant experience.

Interviewer: Today is March 26th, 2014 and my name is Stephanie Saldana. I am here with Vivian Ojo and I would like to ask her permission to record this interview?¹

Vivian: Yes

00:17 **Interviewer: Okay, so let's start off with (um) could you tell me maybe a little bit about your first memory of your childhood or anything like that, that you remember. Like where you were or anything like that**

00:32 Vivian: Oh, I so...um one of my earliest memories is, so I was born in Nigeria. So um, My dad's Nigerian and that's where we lived and I remember my brother who's two years older than me and my sister who's four years older than me they had this car that they were playing with and I really, really, wanted to play with it and they wouldn't let me play with it, it was like one of those toy cars and so I screamed and I cried and eventually got my way and I got to play with it and they said...because I didn't want to share and they said well since you don't want to share you can play with it. So I sat in this car on my own and they all went and they left me and they were playing so I started crying (laughter) and I still vividly remember that day just because it was a memory um...that kind of stuck with me as to how sometimes you kind of want things um...but if you're not willing to share them or you know to sacrifice or spend time with people and see what anyone else wants you end up playing with your toy alone, which is miserable. (laughter) So, that was a life lesson that I learned at a very young age might have been 3 or 4 years old (faintly)² I can't remember.

1:55 **Interviewer: Okay, yeah. So you lived in Nigeria then, right? And how long did you live there?**

2:00 Vivian: I lived in Nigeria until I was uh, six years old. So my mom is Namibian and my dad is Nigerian, they met in Ireland um...got married and then moved to Nigeria to start a family in an Africa country. They wanted us to be African. Um...and stayed there I think 10 years, my mom was homesick and she was ready to go. My dad was not so ready to leave his country but I think with time it became evident that Namibia would be the country that could give us more opportunities than where we were in Nigeria. We lived in Northern Nigeria. My dad had a pretty good job but, if you know anything about the history of Nigeria. If you know anything about Northern Nigeria in particular, um the religious tension that existed at the time didn't mean that it was you know, unbearable, it didn't mean that you would get shot on the street for being Christian but it did mean things like your church you know, could have been burnt down and you would have to be raising funds for that or it did mean that you just had to be extra careful to...to be, be silent and stick to your own Christianity in a way that wasn't necessarily offensive.³

¹ The interview begins with this introduction to affirm the knowledge of the interviewee that this interview is being recorded and that it took place on the date stated above.

² Vivian's speech was inaudible at this point. We were using a phone to record the interview which may have interfered with not being able to pick up minimal sounds.

³ The conflict Vivian is describing here is based on the separation of religion by geographic region. In Northern Nigeria the majority are Islamic, the Southern half identifies with Christianity.

3:33 **Interviewer: Okay, yeah I mean that definitely makes sense. Um, so do you have like any memories of that specifically like did you ever, I know you were there until you were six, but do you have any memories of coming into contact with any of that conflict or was it more of what you saw just with your parents talking or anything like that?**

3:50 Vivian: Um...No I think, I think my parents did a really good job of making sure that we were extremely sheltered from that and I think obviously they were, you know, I don't come from a wealthy family but we were in a financial position, a secure enough financial position where um...you know my parents could make sure we were driven you know into the gated compound where we lived then back to school.⁴ So we didn't really make as much contact with it. I do remember sort of just, you know by virtue as a child you pick up things. You listen to what people are saying and you get stories from that and so I do remember having a strong sense of fear of...I couldn't name it, I wouldn't say it was a book of Haram⁵ or I wouldn't know who or what but having an extreme sense of, of fear anytime we had the prayer calls. Because, I'd begun to associate um, the prayer calls uh "Allah guapa"⁶ which would be you know at the different times of prayer just calling people to pray. I'd begun to associate that with what I'd been hearing around as this unknown terror that was a group of people who wanted to harm you for a reason I didn't understand. Um, at the time. So that I think certainly played into one memory that I remember, I was by the window and I remember the prayer calls and I was just really curious because I'd heard the noise, peering through the window and I remember my mom saying "No, no, no. Come." Like "don't look at that" or get involved with that. You know, come into the room lets watch TV, let's do anything else. So, yeah.

5:51 **Interviewer: So that somewhat, would you say effected your parents' decision to move to Namibia? Just to kind of get away from that?**

Vivian: Um...

Interviewer: or was that not as big of an issue?

6:00 Vivian: I, I don't think it was as big of an issue because they could have simply moved to the South, you know. Northern Nigeria is different than the Southern part which I think at that time was perfectly normal. I think the trouble would probably be that my mom was very homesick. Her mom was very ill at the time. She wanted to spend time with her. Um...and she had lived in her husband's country for 10 years and she was ready, you know to go back home and I think my dad, realized that his family was the priority and he made a sacrifice I think to leave his country,

⁴ Invisibility of privilege and class is a theme throughout the interview. Vivian never specifies that her family is wealthy but she recognizes and states their different opportunities were available to them because they had more mobility. Her class is an important piece of her story that justifies her availability to education which she acknowledges but never states clearly.

⁵ Haram is an Arabic term meaning sinful. When conducting my research for this book of Haram, as Vivian refers to it. There is no evidence of a book of Haram therefore I believe Vivian may have been referring to the Quran, the Islamic religious text. Merriam-Webster. "Haram." Merriam-Webster. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/haram> (accessed May 15, 2014).

⁶ Here Vivian is referring to Islamic prayer. I could not find any resource to verify the calls she reenacted. Although the word Allah does mean "God" in Arabic.

to leave his job, to leave the stability that he had and to go to another country where he would be treated as an immigrant. Um...

6:54 **Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. Okay so, now that, let's just say your timeline, you're in Namibia now and so that was when you were six. So what are, could you tell me a little bit more about the schooling there or how your experiences were in grade school or attending school, anything like that?**

7:10 Vivian: Um so, I think Namibia so, getting in 6th grade you can feel and, and I love my country um...and I love it so much that I'm 100% in tune with the criticism and the negativity of, of the place I'm in.

Interviewer: Okay

7:36 Vivian: I love my country so much that I can criticize it. If that makes sense? So, I'm going to say this with um...with love. You can feel the racism in the air in Namibia in a way that you cannot or that I have not experienced in any other country that I've traveled to and I've been...in any other country except for South Africa, that I've traveled to. And you know I've been to over 20, 30 countries.⁷ I mean it's literally in the air. Um, and I think our colonial history and our apartheid history. Our colonial history with the Germans and the apartheid history um with the South Africans.⁸ (pause) and then the presence of you know, the grand children, great, great grandchildren of the colonizer who have nothing necessarily to do with that history, you know from that line and their interaction with the local people have their inferiority complexes um, their insecurities, food insecurities, land insecurities, psychological insecurities that were implemented by the system um, of apartheid as it was made to do. I think that that creates a dynamic um that's really, really tough um and it's racially charged. And so that was the first encounter that I think I had even at the age of six or seven years old walking into St. George's primary school.⁹ Which was a school that you know, opened its doors to both white and black students um...you may not know but apartheid in Namibia ended in 1990, basically or I mean we got our independence in 1990. So, up until that point you had extremely racist systems that made sure that they privilege white people on every social, social status and the counter of that was obviously oppressing black people socially, economically, psychologically, and otherwise you had the segregated benches and buses that take you back to the 60's in this country and you had you know education systems that were broken.¹⁰ So you didn't have very many educated black

⁷ This remark from Vivian is reflective of the transnationalism identity that she carries on throughout our interview. This also plays a role in Vivian's class structure and her ability to travel and mobilize.

⁸ The Germans colonized Namibia in 1884. In World War I the German defense forces gave control of the colony to South African forces. In 1919 South West Africa was mandated by the League of Nations to South Africa. South West Africa remained under South African control until 1990 under the name Namibia. The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "German South West Africa (historical state, Namibia)." Encyclopædia Britannica Online. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/230970/German-South-West-Africa> (accessed May 15, 2014).

⁹ St. George's primary school is located in Namibia. I could not find any evidence of when the school began to allow black students to attend or if the school was actually segregated at any point in time. The only direct link I found to the school was a Facebook page and information packet. Therefore, it is unclear whether the school was mandated to be segregated or if Vivian's surroundings were more coincidental.

¹⁰ Here Vivian is referring to the Civil Rights Movement that occurred in the United States which took flight in the 1960's. Vivian's claims about these laws are apparent in a New York Post article written in 1989 that discusses the

people who didn't have to really struggle to get that education and that recognition. So, I think I noticed that when I was a child.

Interviewer: Mhmm

Vivian: I think I came in and I, I in Nigeria there aren't very many white people and I noticed immediately there was an "other" so to speak and this "other" gets a different response. I had experiences with racist teachers. I think I had more trouble with the teachers than I did the students.

11:07 **Interviewer: Well, how was that like, you know like having it be the teachers as compared to your peers that you were kind of experiencing this with. Or do you have any memories of that maybe specifically where you dealt with that in school?**

11:19 Vivian: Um...I mean I had, I mean I had some experiences with students but those, those you know how do you associate that with racist. Somebody says, "Your hair is weird, I don't want to hang out with you" Is that racist? Or is that children having their preferences? Or "Your skin is too dark" you know, "you look like a piece of burnt toast" what does that mean? Does that mean that person is racist? Um, you know of course there are many answers to those things but you know leave a little room for the fact that little kids in their primary school ages are extremely cruel and have the potential to be extremely cruel depending obviously on where they're brought up. But as part of a survival technique they'll make fun of, you know there's always someone being made fun of, the nerd, the whatever. Whether or not that person always happens to be black you can't necessarily uh decipher whether or not it's a racial discrimination going on or if it's just kids being kids but when it happens with your professors, when it happens with people that are charges to protect you, to teach you, to nurture you I think that's when it gets too um, a certain level of confirmation um, that, that I think this was traumatic for me.¹¹ So I think, uh one of the memories. Let's see what I remember, I had a professor I could say her name now because I remember it but I won't. (laughter) it's unnecessary but um you know she just always gave me a hard time. I was always talking even when I wasn't talking you know shed turn around and it would always just be expected, she begged for me to repeat the 2nd grade you know, repeat the 2nd grade or 3rd grade even though I was, I mean and I say this with the most humility you know, further along than most of my peers academically. I didn't take the Afrikaans class she had desired and um I took German instead.¹² And yeah, I wasn't very interested or engaged in Afrikaans um there was this sort of like expectation that you had to submit to that language you

removal of laws that inhibit free and fair elections but states some racially discriminatory laws would be imposed on Namibia still. Particularly, Namibia maintained segregated schools and independent governments for whites, blacks, and mixed races. Wren, Christopher. "End of Segregation Laws in Namibia Delayed." The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/31/world/end-of-segregation-laws-in-namibia-delayed.html> (accessed May 15, 2014).

¹¹ At this point I could see Vivian's disappointment when discussing the discrimination she felt from authority figures during her childhood. She was very passionate about explaining the difference between children and teachers when it came to racism.

¹² Afrikaans is a West Germanic language descended from Dutch and spoken mainly in South Africa and Namibia. From 1815 Afrikaans began to replace Malay as the language of instruction in Muslim schools in South Africa. In 1925 Afrikaans was recognized by the government as a real language, instead of a slang version of Dutch. Omniglot. "Afrikaans.". <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/afrikaans.htm> (accessed May 15, 2014).

know, um which is a beautiful you know, African language of Dutch derivative. But definitely has a lot of connotations if you're thinking about Sharpeville, um which was uh you know an incident in South Africa where a bunch of students got shot because they didn't want to speak Afrikaans and they didn't want to be taught in Afrikaans.¹³

Interviewer: and this occurred like in a University setting was that, like students?

Vivian: like in high school

Interviewer: In high school?

Vivian: young, high school students were shot for protesting you know, protesting against having to use that language for their medium of instruction um they wanted a language that was more international that would expose them to the outside world and the system didn't want them to have that language because as soon as they were exposed (laugh) then they would say "well hold on, how come in Ireland black people, you know can sit on the same benches as white people? That sounds funny to me" or "Oh, wait hold on, how come it doesn't work?" because the more exposure you have you start to unravel the system and so, that was part of it. But, obviously as a young child I'm not going to pretend to have understood that. I didn't like the sound of Afrikaans, I wasn't interested in it. Um, and so um I was deliberate about not being enthralled in that and um, and I think that frustrated her very much. Um, I think there were a number of things but eventually one day she had humiliated me so gravely um in a class and that I was just brought to tears and um at the end of class. I got into my mom's car and she looked at me and was like "This is not the daughter I dropped off here, what's going on?" and so she went back to the teacher and she brought her to tears (laughter). I mean, my mom (laughs) I think that was probably the last time I would have tried to tell my mom about things that go on in school. I mean she was a no-nonsense lady; she had grown up in apartheid in Namibia. Very aware of the, you know unfairness and absurdity, absurdness of uh of the apartheid regime and after she went to Ireland to study and she would come home and she would see "wait, this does not match up".¹⁴ She could read, she could write, she could understand what was going on in the rest of the world so she would frequently get arrested for petty things like sitting in the wrong restaurant. She would get you know, held up by police officers and she wouldn't care. She was a rebel in that sense. So I think for her you know, when it comes to her kids, my mom. I can remember countless times of her having to come to my school and talk to the teachers, talk to whoever it

17:26

¹³ The Sharpeville Massacre occurred on March 21st, 1960 at a police station of Sharpeville in Transvaal. Protestors gathered to oppose pass laws which would limit the movements of the black African populace, manage urbanization, and allocate migrants labor. It included qualifications for African to reside legally in white metropolitan areas. There is no clear evidence of the act enforcing the use of Afrikaans in schools but it is possible that limiting the freedoms of the black population extended to the use of Afrikaans. This would explain Vivian's perspective on the incident. Her placing it into this context could be an exaggeration or she may see this Massacre as a representation of complete control over the black population extending into schools. South African History Online. "Sharpeville Massacre, 21 March 1960 | South African History Online." Sharpeville Massacre, 21 March 1960 South African History Online. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/sharpeville-massacre-21-march-1960> (accessed May 15, 2014).

¹⁴ Education is a reoccurring theme during this interview. Vivian's parents access to education affects her access to education and knowledge. Therefore, I believe that this explanation is another example of how her parents fostered her growth into a global citizen.

was giving me a hard time about you know my hair or any of that. In my class there were very few black students.

Interviewer: Mhmm

Vivian: So, yeah I mean I'm grateful to her for that, determination I think but um, yeah you know.

17:39 **Interviewer: Well, I think you've touched a lot on the apartheid and the colonization of Namibia and stuff, do you have any, like obviously I can tell you have some personal feelings towards that. Do you mind just talking about that a little bit? Just how you feel about that or if it's affected or if it's something you see or saw everyday as a child, like at school? Did it effect you in any kind of personal way?**

18:02 Vivian: I, I think.... (Pause)¹⁵

18:05 Vivian: I think it's tricky because, um because I think that my, my country is in a space of extreme healing, you know. We, we've got wounds, right? As I explained, you can feel it in the air but people are trying to heal and people are trying to move forward and you know I have the utmost respect for them. I was reading an article actually just today um about the, the reparations. So in, uh in Namibia when it was Southwest Africa the Germans their first you know colonial expedition, involved a genocide of about 80% of my Mom's tribe was wiped out.¹⁶ They had um, you know the concentration camps, they starved people to death. They did experiments with people, they, I mean it was (inaudible)¹⁷ some type of (pause) some type of mini or some type of practice for the Holocaust, I would say in terms of how they, they treated people. A lot of people don't know, you know that that happened in Namibia. Um, but I just remember reading the article and the article right now is about the Namibian people asking that the German government apologize for what happened and send back the bones and remains of the people who they took for all sorts of experimentations after that they took almost, almost 100 bodies for God knows what reason.¹⁸ What scientific advancement has been made of the uh, um of the remains of these people but um what I think is really interesting is I put this article up and one of my friends who's German you know responded and said you know the problem is that if they

¹⁵ Vivian pauses here and she does so in other parts of the interview. Typically, I felt that Vivian was aware of the conflicts within her country and how backwards some of the belief systems and events that occur there can be because of this I believe Vivian took the time to think before she spoke. She struggled with respecting her country while also providing criticism which she states earlier as being a struggle for her.

¹⁶ Vivian's mother is part of the Herero Tribe that experienced a genocide. When colonized by the Germans the Herero tribe had formed treaties with the Germans. After disputes over grazing land the Herero tribe retaliated resulting in German eliminating 75% of the tribe. "Herero." SIM. <http://www.sim.org/index.php/content/herero> (accessed May 15, 2014).

¹⁷ Vivian had lowered her speech at this point. The tape recorder could not easily pick up what she was saying. I believe the nature of the subject resulted in some personal feelings of emotion and loss that changes her way of speaking to a more monotone voice.

¹⁸ This is the citation of the article that Vivian is referring to. Marima, Tendai. "Bones of Contention: The Politics of Repatriating Namibia's Human Remains." Think Africa Press. <http://thinkafricapress.com/namibia/skeletons-closet-politics-repatriating-human-remains-germany-herero-genocide> (accessed May 15, 2014).

apologize than they, they have to pay they are liable, or there is the possibility that they are liable to pay reparations and Germany, you know doesn't want to have to pay reparations to Namibia for you know wiping out...and I just thought to myself "my goodness", we've come a long way but there are still so many things that just have not moved. I mean, it...if the question is a situation of money there is not enough money in the (inaudible) to, to you know pay for the lives of people. There's just not enough money. The question is not about money it's a, it's a recognition of the humanity and the, the uh pillage of that humanity of the people. And that recognition is something um, that needs to be done with state level. My friend, my German friend he said "Viv, for what it's worth, I'm sorry". I was like, that's okay but you know it's recognition on a state level to say, this was a state made decision and execution um and we need to apologize for it. How can we heal from something that the state pretends did not happen (scuffs) you know, it's bizarre to me, how can we move on.¹⁹ That's the kind of things I think about when I think about my country uh those are the kind of things I think about when I think about my continent. And it's not just colonialism recognize this, recognize that, its Africans recognizing what we have done to ourselves for the past couple of years and taking responsibility for that. How can we begin, you know, our, our outlook on development when we still do not recognize that we have cheated ourselves and our children and our women of so much.

Interviewer: Mhmm

Vivian: Um when it's so much in the Congo, I mean I don't want to name countries. It doesn't matter. There's pain and there's brokenness everywhere. But, I just, for me that's something that's on my mind and I recognize. My mom always says this to me, she says um "until the lion learns to write the tails of hunting will always glorify the hunter" because until people take ownership, until people you know, start telling their own stories it doesn't matter what the truth is if you can't say it. If nobody has written the truth it might as well be a lie. It might as well be a myth even. So, I think for me it's about as an African, trying to pass through who I am, trying to pass through what my responsibility to my continent is, what my responsibility to this world is. And, and, and returning home whether that's physically or in my efforts or in terms of my finances or I mean whatever. Returning home with an understanding of what really happened and a healing from that in order to determine what can happen and the potential that my continent has. That's kind of where I am, I don't think there are any jobs for that. There's nobody hiring for that kind of thing (laughter) but, that that's what I want to do with my life so how that realizes itself, we'll see.

24:31

24:33

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. So I just have some questions or would like maybe to just focus a little bit more just kind of like how you ended up where you are now? Like in the United States going to college here and all the great things you just said um, so I mean

¹⁹ Vivian has a strong passion for development, another theme throughout the interview. Her passion she evokes here as she scuffs in response to the recognition that has not been given to the Namibian people from their past colonizers, I believe shows how much she desires change for her country.

maybe just explain to me a typical day for you when you, back home or when you were in school or anything like that. Just what your life was like there. You know, anything.²⁰

24:59 Vivian: So, okay let's see. So high school um, got to high school I went to high school at St. Paul's college it was a Catholic university. Uh, probably one of the most expensive schools in the country.²¹

25:09 **Interviewer: So, it was like a boarding school**

25:11 Vivian: Um, no.

25:12 **Interviewer: No? okay.**

25:14 Vivian: it was just a day school.

25:16 **Interviewer: Okay**

25:17 Vivian: My mom, you know obviously if that's the quote that you, that she recites most often about the lion you know, she definitely believed in writing. So she invested a lot in our education. I remember there were times we would literally, I mean literally go without food but the school fees were paid and so you can, you will go to school whether there's a meal on the table to take you there and you know God's been gracious to us. I wouldn't dare complain and say that I have, I really don't know what hunger is or what starvation is. I don't know what that is. But um, I definitely know what struggle is and you know having that struggle. Seeing my mom make those sacrifices, seeing my dad make those sacrifices for them it was a hundred percent about us getting the best education possible, getting the best opportunities possible, so I went to St. Paul's never really, I was never very brilliant. I was one of those students who, I was like very creative but in, in the structural sense of things you know, as I said I would get my 70% or whatever and I'd you know swim along nicely. I was never really bothered. One day, there was, we have these prize givings you know, that uh a celebration or you know where everyone gets a reward, or well not everyone but you get a reward for like academic distinctions in this and I remember I went to the prize giving and um, my, my parents had come and they were always super supportive and I noticed my brother got a prize because he's a genius. He's a medical doctor now um, my sister got some prize you know um, and I, I just sat there the entire event and I was like (laughter) nobody's going to call my name. (laughter) I don't know why I thought that they would magically call my name (laughs). It was prize giving, prize giving is for people who have worked hard and deserve a prize but I didn't, (laugh) I guess it didn't register to me. So I was just like oh, "I don't get anything" well I want to get into this prize giving thing. So, I think it was probably around 8th grade, 9th grade, where I just started working hard you know, doing my homework um and I started excelling. Got to 11th grade so I mean I um, and um,

²⁰ I was not pleased with the way my questions turned out once written down in my transcription. When I was speaking to Vivian her responses and my questions flowed naturally and did not come off as broken up as my responses do on paper. I was responding to Vivian's body language when asking my questions which is why in some areas there is added explanation of what I'm trying to ask. When written down I believe those explanations make my questions look long and excessive. Therefore, in certain instances the excessive use of "um" and "you know" has been edited.

²¹ When doing research I could not find a direct website to this college that she mentions she attended.

I heard about United Wells College which is a um, fantastic, fantastic organization.²² It is um, just sort of a conglomerate of about 14, 15 different schools uh one in every, at least one in every continent except for Australia and they um, only have one in Africa which is in Swaziland. The message behind the school, the concept behind the school is basically after WWII you know, um a bunch of people got together and were like look, how can we prevent this from happening again? Um, and somebody came up with the idea that you know, we do this through education. If, if the Palestinian and the Israeli go to school together and they happen to be roommates they, (pause) may not necessarily be, become leaders, the presidents of their respective countries

Interviewer: Mhmm

Vivian: Well, whether or not we call Palestine a country. It's not a country but, whatever we leave that to another conversation but um. (scuffs)²³ whether or not they become you know leaders in their specific areas, in those specific spheres of influence um, if you can just teach them to understand each other's positions better...

Interviewer: Mhmm

Vivian: Um, they can change the way in which at least they, if their specific sphere of influence is going to relate to that other sphere of influence so they can uh, they can change the world because they can change their families, or they can change the people around them, and they can influence the people around them for the better. And so, for me um, UWC set the stance for that, that conversation. It's the space where you can have that conversation. I went to a school in Waterford, it's called Waterford Kamhlaba it was in Swaziland. There were, in our graduating class of about 100 students probably from 30 different countries in the entire school probably up to 50 different nationalities represented. We arrive there as young student who are passionate about service, we were passionate about our academic achievement but we were also passionate about um, you know being global citizens. And so, you arrive in this place, there's the Muslim students who say we shouldn't have alcohol on campus, there's the Dutch students who have been drinking since they were you know, 15. Have a beer with their family, no problem. There's the Swazi students who are of a different level of conservatism um but are, are culturally attached to their African roots but came for academic excellence. Um, there, you know you just have students from everywhere. At the end of the day, you can't have a Swazi culture, you can't have an American culture because there aren't enough Americans there aren't enough you know, people to represent all of these different things so you have to recreate another culture. It has to be uh, an international sort of space and it was an amazing thing for me to realize as much as I thought I was very open minded I had to come to UWC and see people who I fundamentally would disagree with but then come to love and come to have friendships with and I can say now with confidence I, I can go to almost 20, 30 different countries and have somebody I can call and

31:54

²² Here Vivian states her school was United Wells College. The real name for the schools she's referring to are United World Colleges, UWC. She confuses the distinction between the two when referring to her school as United Wells College. "Join Us!" Home page. <http://www.uwc.org.za/> (accessed May 15, 2014).

²³ Vivian's reaction when discussing Palestine and Israel is based on the reoccurring conflicts between the two countries. Her reaction to this issue as it comes up in the conversation is one of disgust or disbelief as it seems to remind her that conflict is everywhere. A thought that I believe she considers deeply as a big issue in our current world as she aims to change it, resulting in her disgust at the international presence of conflict everywhere.

say, we went to this school together and for that reason alone, for those two years I would have a place to stay or have a coffee to go to, you know what I mean?

31:56 **Interviewer: Yeah, definitely**

32:00 Vivian: So it was a brilliant, brilliant experience that really changed my life.

32:01 **Interviewer: So, was that um, the UWC was that kind of, was that like where you went to high school kind of?**

32:06 Vivian: Yeah.

32:08 **Interviewer: So that was kind of the equivalent, I guess you could say?**

32:10 Vivian: So, well what I did was IB.²⁴ Which is um, international baccalaureate is um, it's kind of like AP I would say. It's similar. Um, it's you know a 13th year of high school so to speak so we, you kind of, you do it as your 13th year. You have IB 1 and then IB 2 so I think um, in in the U.S. you have like 12 years and AP would be sort of an extra class that you take within your twelfth year.²⁵

32:36

Interviewer: Yes, exactly

32:38 Vivian: So, IB is, is kind of like that except it's a comprehensive program and it runs 2 years. You have to be there for all two years. You take, you know 3 subjects on higher level, 3 subjects on a lower level um, and you, you have an extended essay which is like this very long, sort of paper on anything that you want it to be um, there's theory of knowledge classes which is um, some type of you, you could like (inaudible) philosophy but uh, perhaps less, less focused on the philosophers than the philosophies. If that makes sense. So, so you know we had that. We had, um man we had a good time. (laughter) we really did, we had an amazing time. Two years of just real struggle. I mean it was tough. But the IB classes, by the time I got to Georgetown I was placed out of microeconomics, macroeconomics, english, um both english classes, history, just because I had done IB I ended up starting Georgetown about a semester ahead almost.

33:54

Interviewer: Was that something that you kind of like consciously chose? How did you come into contact with the UWC? Was it common for people where you were from to kind of look for those types of things or not really?

34:06 Vivian: Oh, no, no, not at all. Um, I, okay so when I was in about 10th grade I started to see what the trajectory was and the trajectory in my school at least was you know, you went to the Counselor's office and she did a test and she told you whether or not you were a dentist or uh, I

²⁴ IB stands for International Baccalaureate. This is a form of education systems that provide an international education for students. In Vivian's case this program is what would have assisted her in being able to attend colleges around the world. "Our Programmes of Education." The International Baccalaureate. <http://www.ibo.org/> (accessed May 15, 2014).

²⁵ AP stands for Advanced Placement courses that are offered in American high schools. Although, you can take AP courses any time throughout your high school career, Vivian refers to AP's as a course you take your final year while this is not entirely true. She is right in that AP courses are offered in the United States as well as IB courses but AP courses are more prominent in American schools. "AP Courses." Advanced Placement. <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/apcourse> (accessed May 14, 2014).

don't know, a uh...a teacher or whatever she told you what career and then people you know played around with those two things and tried to find the one that was simplest, the one that would give them most money to study um and you know maybe attach themselves to uh, a firm and end up going to study accounting or they would attach themselves um, to a law firm and go study law or they would just go, go to school. Hopefully, their parents would be able to afford it and they would often go to school in Cape Town. So, UCT [University of Cape Town], Stellenbosch [University], UWC, or they would go to school in Johannesburg. I was very adamant that I wanted to do something different. Um, I wasn't sure what the different looked like but I was certain that I did not want to go to a school where I could you know, end up living with or hanging out with the same people that I was with in high school. Not because I didn't love them, I loved my high school friends. I love my high school friends but, I didn't want that. I wanted something different. Whatever it could, I mean they could've given me a scholarship to anywhere. I mean I don't even want to say a country, because there's like no country that I think I'm above. I would go anywhere honestly.²⁶ Um, I know some people that had scholarships to China. I uh, I would've gone anywhere. I was ready you know to be out of what the Namibian bubble was, I was done with it. And um, and you know I was obviously young and naive at that time and now I'm trying to get back there but you know, its, its I think at that age I needed that. I think it was good for me to go somewhere, where I was uncomfortable and so Swaziland for me was that. It was like, you know going out, getting out of your comfort zone and um, and then when I got there I started realizing it became that, from that school, from UWC from such an international school doing such an international program it became easier to go almost anywhere in the world you know. I could come to the U.S, I could go to the U.K., I could go anywhere because international baccalaureate is internationally accredited. So, ev-almost, actually no, every single country if you present that as your high school, then you can usually get into their undergrad programs.

Interviewer: Okay

37:09 Vivian: I mean you obviously have to do well in it or pass it.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, I know you mentioned before that your mother kind of, definitely encouraged you and your siblings to go forward in education as far as possible. So, do you definitely feel that that was a big kind of impact in kind of your decision to go to UWC and everything? Like, would you say that your parents experience...

37:28

Vivian: Yeah, I think I wanted, I wanted something different and I think that it was an offer and it would look like a cool thing and I said you know, I'll go for two years. It, it was a bit of a sacrifice because in Namibia school goes till 12th grade so most of my classmates would graduate a year before I graduated um, and so that was a worry and... I went for it and I'm so grateful that I did. It taught me a lot of things about Africa, you know like that sometimes as an African you think that you know everything about the continent simply because you live in one of the

²⁶ Vivian's ability to adapt to change and her desire to seek uncomfortable situations to expand her understanding of other cultures and experiences speaks to Vivian's passion for development. When speaking of these issues Vivian's body language and emotions changed she seemed very forthcoming with her views and insistence on the importance of being a global citizen.

38:34 countries. You don't. You know some things, not everything, but some things about the specific country that you are in um, that you are from. It's kind of like saying you know, I mean maybe it's not a good example but here with the States because it's so big. But it's kind of like saying, you know just because I lived in D.C. all my life... I know what it is to live in Canada. You don't. You know, we and I think sometimes you tend to do that in Africa.

38:35 **Interviewer: Yeah**

38:40 Vivian: but, there were so many differences that I needed to learn so Swaziland was a good place to do that.

38:43 **Interviewer: And your parents and everything were very supportive I'm assuming?**

Vivian: Yeah.

38:45 **Interviewer: You touched on that they were very supportive of your education so...**

38:48 Vivian: I mean, sure. They (laughter) they paid some for it, so they better you know they um yeah they wanted me to, I think you know, I think I came from a position that was I think very different from most of my friends because my dad is Nigerian and my mom's Namibian so, and they met in Ireland.²⁷ So they couldn't care, I mean for them it wasn't, they were not you know uncontrollable patriachs to any kind of, you know what I mean. Yes, they loved their country, their respective countries. They loved their continent but at the same time they were so exposed that for them you know, wherever I went they would be supportive. I know they had a bias towards the U.K.²⁸ but, eventually um I made the decision that I preferred the U.S.

39:40 **Interviewer: Mhmm, okay. Well let's talk a little bit about that because I am kind of curious as to like, why the Washington, D.C. area more specifically because you do like, go to Georgetown. First of all, just what kind of made your decision, like peaked your interest in coming to the U.S.? And then maybe like why this area, why D.C.?**

39:58 Vivian: Um, so yeah like, I think the second question can be answered really quickly. Yeah, lets, so I um...I, once I graduated I um, my gap year I went to the U.K. and I went to this school called Marlborough College which was an incredible experience, it was an incredible learning experience. Um, but it was, it was difficult. It was a...I was you know, one of...two, three black people in the entire school. Except you know, including the janitor (laughter). Do you know what I mean? I was um, uh...I was surrounded by people who, who were very intelligent but not as exposed as you would expect them to be given their intelligence. And so, I did come across a little bit of ignorance, not all. And um, I think for me that experience kind of...I didn't, I wasn't able to see that experience in isolation from what the entire, going to school in the U.K. would mean. But, that image kind of stuck in my head and...and then it was a series of images and I

²⁷ This quotation speaks to the theme of education and mobilization that Vivian had because of her parents. Her parents coming from two different African nations I believe also played a role in their acceptance of her traveling throughout the country itself, something Vivian seems to be touching on here.

²⁸ Vivian shared with me before the interview that she had family in Britain which was primarily why her parents would have liked her to attend school there. Also, the geographic location is important because Europe is more accessible from African than the United States.

had another image of what it would be to be in um in the U.S. and that I got from music videos and The Hills.²⁹

41:44 **Interviewer: Oh, wow. Really? (laughter)**

41:47 Vivian: and then, So I had all these images that were snap shots of very small things and I picked one and for me it was you know, I didn't think I was coming to The Hills but (laughter) I thought I was coming to a place where there was a lot of diversity and excitement. Where there was a lot of energy. And so I applied to programs and Georgetown, Georgetown said yes and I didn't even know how big a deal that was because I hadn't heard of Georgetown before. I got accepted. And so, once I got accepted um...

42:26 **Interviewer: So, how did you hear about it? I'm just a little curious to... were you exposed to it at all?**

Vivian: So, can I tell you...

Interviewer: Yeah

42:31 Vivian: So honestly, when I was in Swaziland my friend uh, one of my friends who is half American, half Iborian³⁰ um, she was in the program as well and she was one of my good friends. We were talking about what different universities we would apply to and I knew like maybe three. I was like, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, you know all of the...but I knew I couldn't apply to those because they you know off the bat they told you what the requirements were and I was like...(laughter) like what is this, like um even the SAT's I hadn't, I hadn't even done them until like the very last minute. I, I heard about the SAT's probably like I want to say 2 or 3 weeks before I did them, like you know I was like huh, a test where you color in.³¹ Like this should be easy. Um, and you know got the shock of my life but um so you know I wasn't um, I wasn't really sure what anything was but my friend said to me she said you know, Georgetown, like I'm applying to Georgetown so I thought, "Oh yeah, me too". (laughter) So um, so I put that down. I didn't know um, you know we had to have some guests from smaller universities. So like, Louis and Clark [College], [University of Massachusetts at] Amherst, um, just like a bunch of different little liberal arts colleges so you, when you're sitting there you make the most arbitrary you know, decision as to which one you're going to pick. I was like well, uh do I want a school that they say they have two gyms at this school and this school has one gym and you know like, I was completely delusional. I was just like, oh well this school is... But, I didn't think about the critical things, like are you going to be in a city? Like that didn't even occur to me, like are you going to be in a city or are you going to be in the middle of nowhere? Like those are important

44:47

²⁹ The Hills was an American reality television show depicting the lives of young, 20-something adults living in Los Angeles, California. The show aired on MTV from 2006-2010. IMDb.com. "The Hills." IMDb. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0489598/> (accessed May 15, 2014).

³⁰ I had a difficult time understanding the ethnicity that Vivian was speaking of when she mentioned it. I researched the term and was unable to find any direct correlation. Although, I believe Vivian may have been referring to the Igbo tribe from Nigeria.

³¹ The SAT is a standardized test for college age students that are required to be considered for entry to American colleges and universities. In order for Vivian to attend college in the U.S. she had to take this exam. "Your SAT Today." SAT. <https://sat.collegeboard.org/home> (accessed May 15, 2014).

things and like, where's the middle of nowhere? Like do you know that? Are you going to be super close to nature? Are you going to have the opportunity to go hiking if you want to? Or are you going to, are you going to be super homesick because you're in this concrete jungle? You know...

44:52 **Interviewer: So, did you kind of have, so you applied to Georgetown kind of blindly? I'm assuming, yeah?**

Vivian: Very, very, blindly.

44:54 **Interviewer: and then was it kind of once you got in and got accepted that you did further research and...**

44:58 Vivian: Once I got in and then I told my parents and I told you know, and people were like, "Viv, do you realize that Georgetown is a really good school?" and I knew I wanted to do international relations and they're like it's really good for international relations and, and the school of foreign service. I mean and I was like, Oh that's nice (laughter). You know, God is gracious. I, I really I mean I, I should not be here for sure. I should not be a senior at Georgetown University like, I don't even deserve that.³² When I got here my freshman year people were like, "yeah, um I applied early action" or "I've been planning this my whole life" and I kind of was
45:46 ike (scruffs) ooh, you know like what, what a miracle that I'm here.

Interviewer: It was just a different experience for you.

45:57 Vivian: I, I, um they sent me my stuff by mail um, my acceptance thing and I didn't get it for the longest time. They sent me like five different copies and I never got it. They eventually called me and were like, "Do you want to come to Georgetown?" and I was like, yeah. (laughter) but you know, it's just all a big blur of chance and so that's how I got here and I'm happy, I'm happy for it because this country has taught me so much. Um, about myself.

46:24 **Interviewer: Like in good ways, bad ways?**

46:27 Vivian: Ugh, in every way. You know isn't it like, teaching lessons is like that. So any type of lesson, you know is two pronged. You hope that you learn of the bad things and you hope that you learn of the good things. Some of the bad things so that you can protect yourself against them and some of the good things so that you can have a reason for living and something to aspire to. So, yeah when I say it taught me, I think it's taught me a lot more about myself than I expected. I thought I would learn more about America than I, than I ended up doing eventually. I, I, I, maybe I'm just a self-centered. (laughter), I don't know like, I managed to turn it all around on me you know um, and end up... discovering things about myself but, I think you know when I first got here I remember one of the things I was always frustrated about. I, I was

³² Vivian is very conscious that she was able to do a lot of things that others in her country were not. Throughout the interview she thanks God for her good graces. Religion is a theme during our interview; Vivian still practices Christianity and credits her blessings for reasons why she was able to have all of the opportunities she has had.

walking one day in DuPont Circle and I saw this old man... like, I mean Steph³³, he was walking like this (motions)³⁴ literally, so slow, so slow. You know, sick. You know, probably, you know he was probably ill. I, I just couldn't believe it. But, I remember people were just pacing fast, it was like rush hour. I was going to like one of my internships and you know everyone's walking really fast and I see this man literally I was like, he's crossing the road as we're crossing um, like he's not even going to make this 30 second, red, you know green light thing. He's not going to make it. He's literally just waddling. But everybody's just boom, boom, boom doing their own thing like and you know somebody's hooting so he could just move along and it's just and people just kept going and I, I, honestly it bothered me so much. Because and you know this isn't an American thing, this isn't an inherently American thing but you know where I was right then at that time in D.C. thing. I, I was like this could never happen at home. Where on earth are this man's grandchildren? Where are the people he raised? You know, where was the investments in the next generation...like do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Is that like different in Namibian culture? Is that a big difference?

48:55 Vivian: At home, there is no question that your responsibility is to take care of the person who cleaned your diapers. That is not an option. Um, you know you make it happen. I don't, I don't even think I've seen a retirement, there's probably one retirement home in our whole city. Like, and yes there for sure there is um...there's circumstances that allow, mean that you have to you can't, you can't, if I have a job and I'm working whatever, how many hours a week. I don't have the time to take care of my parent in the same way as somebody who has that luxury, the money, and the time and so, I'll put them in a home where they can actually get the time and care that they need. I understand it logically, emotionally I just didn't get it. I, I didn't get you know why this man was on this own...at that age. I noticed it in so many different settings. If I was in the subway or whether I just notice how people speak about the elderly. It seems like, oh you know, you've had your turn, get out the way, move. If you've had any of the conversations that we talk about like, our generation is paying for um pension for the older generation. You know, that kind of thing, and it's all very logical and it's all very reasonable but my heart couldn't make sense of a lot of the ways in which we, we, we have this ageism in this country. This real, real bias as if we are invincible and will never be old. And I remember clearly one time somebody said to me, I can't remember which old lady, she said one just thing about it, we're all going to be old one day. So, why not make it a joy? And then at home I think it's maybe even the opposite in a negative way too which is what I learned. So some of the things I thought were most negative were that I had most trouble dealing with here. The opposite of it I also had problems dealing with at home where we are such an ageism in the opposite direction where you can't as an, even a 22 year old there are certain things that I just cannot say you know, no matter how ridiculous someone who's older than me is being, they are right. Simply because they have that, you know wisdom of ages and they you know and that's okay. That's the way the system works, that's the

³³ Vivian is referring to the interviewer here. Vivian and I have a personal relationship outside of this interview which would explain why she is speaking to me as she would normally. Because of this I feel it's an example of how comfortable she was during our interview to really get involved in the stories she was telling.

³⁴ Vivian reenacted the motions that the man she's describing was walking in. When doing so, she hunched her back and walked very slowly showing signs of struggle.

way it operates culturally but at the same time there's so many inefficiencies that are brought about by that. Where you see these aging governments, where you see you know, the youth, the definition of the youth, is somebody up to the age of 40, 45. You know, youth league is run by a 45 year old because nobody wants to move up, nobody wants to give the young a position or nobody wants to give the young a space. And so, I think if I could say a lot of things that this country has definitely taught me is about the balance. There is an obsession with extreme, um we like extremes because then we're standing for something. If you stand for something...if you don't stand for anything you fall for everything, right? That whole thing. So people want to just, "I'm this way" and they want to put it down, you know there's no, they want it black and white. But, this country has taught me about balance for sure because you know things like looking at the old man crossing the road and feeling that pain and then going back home and looking at some of the situations where young people don't get the same, the kind of access that they need because older people are holding onto it because they have the moral and political authority then it teaches me that maybe there's this soft spot, this sweet spot, in between the two um and, and that's what I'm going to strive to and that's what I have the ability to, to really navigate through simply because I have experienced both worlds.³⁵

53:42

Interviewer: Yeah, so do you feel like in Namibia with the younger generation, there's not as much push towards growing or more opportunities. Did that at all affect coming to America or not even just America, in general your interest in like you said the UWC, the college you attended that was international, did that have anything to do with it? Just realizing that maybe there would be more opportunities for you to kind of you know grow up and move up in the world or your career?

54:11 Vivian: Yeah, I mean I definitely...I wouldn't say, you know I don't think my immigration story, if we could put it that way, is, is the same as, as well nobody's immigration story is the same but, um I don't think that it's the stereotypical immigration story in the sense of I come from a country where things are tough politically or economically or both I mean, and I um need a space to get away from that or express myself. I wouldn't, I wouldn't go as far as to say that but I would go as far as to say that I uh, recognized that there was something that I needed to make my country better and to make my continent better that I couldn't get in it. (pause)³⁶ I needed an exposure, I needed an experience, I needed skills that weren't readily available at home. Um, and what those things are I'm still unable to fully articulate but I know that I have more of them than four years ago when I came here.

55:30 **Interviewer: Okay yeah, definitely. One question I have is in terms of your life at Georgetown and your experiences there. Are there any ways that you try to keep in contact or be involved in African communities or is there anything like on your University, your campus or any ways that you kind of stay in tuned. Like I know your religion is very**

³⁵ This was a great point in the interview where I felt as the interviewer that I understood Vivian's outlook on development more so because she's experienced two different cultures that operate based on different value systems. Vivian sees the faults in both systems and I believe this outlook is what has shaped her desire to explore more countries and cultures.

³⁶ At this point I could sense Vivian was contemplating the best way to frame her answer without discrediting her country and its opportunities. It's clear that Vivian still identifies with her country.

important to you so any ways you try to keep, you know doing certain practices to keep those things that are true to you and your values that you have, that you just carry with you every day, do you put forth those in Georgetown, in your community there? And in what ways?

56:06 Vivian: Um, yeah definitely. So, when I came in freshman year I looked around me and I noticed something. I noticed that a lot of the Latin kids, the Latin American kids hung out together. And, I noticed that from the first day of the international orientation and they all spoke Spanish to each other. Um...and I thought to myself, maybe I didn't have much of a choice, there was only one Namibian, I thought to myself, Listen, I came all this way. There is no point in me having left my, my bedroom in Namibia if all I wanted to do was sit and have conversations with other Namibians, or Africans or you know what I mean? Um, and I'm not saying, I'm not belittling other people's experiences uh you know saying, I'm not trying to belittle.

57:13 **Interviewer: No, of course not**

57:14 Vivian: Um, what other people's decisions were. And I'm not going to say that it was easy not to want to go to straight to you know the first African, Sub-Saharan African I met and just spend the next four years with that person. Um, but I was, I had to be deliberate. I had to push myself out of that because the tendency is to do that and I had to, I had to push myself out of the um the need to be in a comfort zone to get into a place where I was uncomfortable and challenged to um articulate my beliefs and then even understand them for myself. I needed a place where somebody would ask you, why do you think that? Why do you do that? Challenge me. What happens in your country? Is it like that? Is it really like that? I needed those questions even though they frustrated me to the core. I needed to hear those questions because I needed to articulate those answers. Um, so that they became true to me. So that is somebody asked me, like I have been asked before, whether there are airplanes or cars or whatever in my country. Or somebody asked me if Africa truly is a continent or is it a country with 50-some states? Or Whatever. Somebody asked me, you know...what is Namibia? I needed to be able to answer those questions um, so that I could that I could understand where they were coming from and I could also understand what was most important to me about that answer. And so, I, I hung out with um, I hung out with everybody and I had a ball, I had a blast. And um, I think it wasn't until my late sophomore year, junior year that I started getting involved in African Society of Georgetown. I also um, am in a dance company called Black Women Dance Theater. Um, and you know I don't know how to dance but I managed to get into this company, it's unbelievable. I mean, it's a pretty, most of the girls have been dancing since they were three years old. They're amazing dancers, ballet, contemporary I mean I knew nothing of that and I just sort of like strolled in and was like "pick me", "pick me"(laughter) and it happened and um and but I've learned so much from that and I've started doing, started writing poetry which I, I mean I got poetry from this country. I mean, I used to write a little bit at home but I, I didn't, I didn't used to know what slam poetry, spoken word was. Um, I, I, listen I got so much from this country I wouldn't even, I couldn't even, I couldn't even put into words. I got so much from Georgetown you know the academic experience that I've had, the exposure that I've had, the opportunity to

go to Brazil, speak Spanish, speak Portuguese.³⁷ All of these things are things that really I've learned here, you know. But yeah, so poetry was definitely something that um...that I, I got from my time in D.C from my time, yeah connecting to the African societies there, religiously like my faith has always been important to me and building a relationship you know, with God and then allowing that to transcend any other kind of difference that you may have. So that I have people who I can you know pray with, and have a fellowship with, and hope with, who don't necessarily know where I come from or know anything about me, but like I can get along with them and connect with them in such a deep way that you know I couldn't even do with some people who were at home. Who I would know, you know 100%. Um...yeah. It's been wild. (laughter)

1:1:21 **Interviewer: Well, definitely. Yeah, are there any major differences like that you might see between like, just like you were just explaining with your experiences at Georgetown and you know like still practicing your religion and everything here. Are there any differences in kind of, those things compared to Namibia? Like is the practices of Christianity here diff-like celebrated, thought of in a different way that maybe you've either chosen to embrace or not to in some cases?**

1:1:49 Vivian: I think um, you know definitely with religion. It's funny, so Africa's a very spiritual place you know, and if you if you every get the opportunity to go you know, you will find that it's a very spiritual place in general and, and I forgive me for the generalization of 54 countries but really I think there is something in every African country that I've been to or been exposed to that just has a rhythm of spirituality, a connection with the super natural. You know if you go home and you, you know you ask anybody you know over the age of 60, 70 years old, you know oh somebody's sick and you ask them why they'll say, "Oh, they were, they were bewitched", they had some taboo or they had some you know, there's a spiritual component to every physical manifestation. It's somebody described it and I wish I could remember the person so that I could quote them, but I mean so that I could credit them but somebody described it as, In Africa...you know, i-i-in the West, not in the West, one doesn't want to say, use that word but I think certainly here people see the natural world here in one little you know circle, and then they see spirituality here (motions with hands)³⁸ and they believe that you can pull certain things of spirituality into the natural world so you function in the natural world but there are spiritual components that you can draw on, you can pray, you can ask, allow the super natural to participate in the natural on your orders. In Africa, I think we see the world as a natural world completely encapsulated by the spiritual world so, that nothing happens naturally, nothing happens naturally that isn't ordained or influenced or encapsulated by something super natural. Somebody described it that way and I thought, that's really spot on because and it's not to say, it's not to say everybody's religious, Christian, Muslim, none of that but it's to say that there is a

³⁷ When she was attending Georgetown University, Vivian went abroad her second semester of her junior year. She went to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil this is the experience she's referring to where she had the opportunity to learn other languages and cultures.

³⁸ As she described the difference in religion and spirituality in the United States and Africa Vivian became very animated in her explanation. She formed her hands into circles to explain how each element of spirituality and the natural world come together based on the difference in location. In the U.S. she sees the spiritual world as separate world that we draw from to explain the natural world. In Africa she motions a large circle with her hand with a smaller circle inside. She explains this as in Africa, spirituality encompasses the natural world.

submission to another world or to another...yeah, to something other than the science of the natural world. There is this acceptance that that is beyond what we are.

1:4:52 **Interviewer: Do you embrace that at all or do you feel more...?**

1:4:55 Vivian: Absolutely, that's who I am you know. I think, I think honestly if you are a Christian anyway like that's kind of, you, you lean more towards that um description than you would to the two separate um, but I think more so, culturally for atheists in Africa, for atheists around the world, whatever around the world it is clearly more, there is clearly more of a connection to the super natural in Africa than I think here. And so what that means is that...the kind of faith that you can get, that I have seen. There's a song called "Shuffering and Shmiling" by Fela Kuti³⁹ that's one of my, my favorite songs and he talks about you know, he talks about in Nigeria you see all the, you, you, at a time when it was really tough, you see all these people suffering, but smiling in their suffering and he was talking about the absurdity of that but then celebrating um, the faith, the belief, that that entails. And so that, that basically...that's essentially what I'm talking about when I say we as Africans have that, that energy, that faith, that belief, in something greater than ourselves that is so attached to who we are, to our spirits that is so recognized and appreciated. Maybe because of our ancestors, maybe because we're more connected to the people of the old, maybe because we have less scientific explanations so I don't know, whoever you know there's many theories. Some people will say, "Oh, you believe that so you don't know this" um, whatever it is there's that connection to the supernatural that gives us more faith. Not more faith but just gives us a type of faith that um...that I think makes African people exceptional.

1:7:06 **Interviewer: Mhmm, So do you feel, I'm assuming just from what you just said that you kind of identify a little bit more with kind of the African view on religion or just like you were saying, everything that you just said. Do you feel like you kind of resonate more with the representation of religion in Africa and the spiritualization than you do more so than how you just explained, how we do in the United States or...?**

1:7:30 Vivian: Um I think, yes. But I think I found niches in the States that very much adopt that same, that same view. So um, I hate to make it an African and "other" thing but um, you know I think, I think it's a reality in many communities within this country.

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely.

Vivian: Where you know, people, people view their lives in the context of God as a way, as opposed to the other way around. And so, I um, I mean I hope I haven't gone to...I mean I don't mean to confuse...⁴⁰

³⁹ Fela Kuti was a Nigerian multi-instrumentalist, musician, and composer. He was a pioneer for human rights and political activism. His album *Shuffering and Shmiling* produced in 1977, which Vivian refers to as one song here, speaks to the struggles the citizens of African countries have experienced. Wikimedia Foundation. "Shuffering and Shmiling." Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shuffering_and_Shmiling (accessed May 15, 2014).

⁴⁰ Vivian was very conscious throughout the interview of assuring she didn't confuse what she was trying to say. I believe her consideration to not insult or offend people and things she was referring to shows how her views as a

Interviewer: No, you haven't (laughter)

Vivian: I'm not trying to confuse you but maybe just say um a lot of stuff that just doesn't make sense. I say that, I do that sometimes and I, I like to be you know...but basically what I'm trying to say is that I um, yes I have noticed a difference in the way in which you can appreciate a relationship with God and at the same time that's made me even more passionate about my relationship with God here in the states. I've become closer to God because I've understood... I've been able to see Him in places where I think you're not expected to see God and I've been able to communicate with Him and fellowship with Him in the context of, of science. In the context of academia, I've been able to take theology classes and understand what, what does God mean in the context of slavery.⁴¹

Interviewer: Yeah

Vivian: What does God mean in the context of occupy Wall Street, what does God mean in the context of gun law, what does, where can we fit Him in in the reality of what's going on...

Interviewer: Yeah

Vivian: Now.

1:9:37 **Interviewer: So do you feel that since you've come to the United States that...your connection, your involvement in your spirituality has increased because of that? Just because your knowledge has grown and you've kind of become more curious, I guess as to the role that it has in your life?**

1:9:52 Vivian: Yeah, I think, I think it's increased. I don't know. They say when you need God, (scuffs) He you know He shows up but I guess you, you need Him more in certain areas of your life and by-golly these past four years, academically alone, I've needed God like no other. (laughter) I mean just like the amount of academic pressure that I, that I've endured and um...emotional and just being in that stage of your life where you're in college and growing up. Um you're figuring out who you are, your space in the world that you should occupy.

Interviewer: Yeah

Vivian: So I think in all of that I've become closer to God. I wouldn't necessarily say it's because I'm in the States or just because I've been far away from my family um, but for whatever reason I am grateful for it.

1:10:50 **Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. So just one of my last questions...because I know we're approaching graduation in May and things are getting a little more real or more intense**

global citizen have made her more aware of these things. She stops her stories at points where she feels she may be overgeneralizing.

⁴¹ I felt that Vivian's views of God and her relationships with Him changed as she came to the U.S. because of the different ways God is celebrated and represented here compared to African countries. Thus, when she mentions seeing God in areas of science and academia, areas not explored in African religion in terms of God's presence it seems to me that the U.S. has increased the strength of her relationship with God because she is open to see Him in those places where in Africa, she couldn't see Him in those areas before because it is not widely practiced.

with our lives. (screams/laughter) So, I guess just what are your feelings or your thoughts, because I know you've definitely spoken about, what you're going to do or your next step. Like what your thoughts are about possibly staying in the United States or continuing to...

1:11:17 Vivian: I could stay in this country forever. I am completely satisfied. I could also stay in a couple of countries forever. You know, I'm not a-I mean I went to Rio last, last year and I thought "Look, I can stay here". I could live here, you know? I'm a bit of- I have a bit of a Nomadic spirit in that sense. Um...I do know that what I do has to go back home and... eventually, and that's not to say that I'm not going to sign up for anything that doesn't go back home but eventually I want to, I want to change my country.

Interviewer: Mhmm, I understand. Do you feel though that...?⁴²

Vivian: I want, I want to change my continent and I want to change the world. I am determined. I, I, I want to go back home and I want to heal people. Not, not in medicine like my two brothers who are actual medical doctors who heal people but, I want to heal people and heal nations. Um, or encourage and facilitate the healing of nations. Um, in an artistic manner but in a manner that has to do with all of the things I've studied academically. And so, for me any place that I can do that from will be home for me, any place that I can learn the skills that I need in order to do that will be home for me and so, plans post-graduation is literally, I mean I have, I have I think 3 months before I have to be deported from this country, um after graduation um it might be 3 months.⁴³ Yeah, its 3 months. So I have 3 months to figure it out, if I get a job where I feel I am learning the kind of skills that I would need to change my country, change my continent, and change the world, I will stay. If not, I think I could go home. I think I could look for more places to be and um, I don't necessarily like to move around too much. I can go to different places and stay there, I like to stay because I think you ground yourself. You know, 4 years, I barely know D.C., I barely know this city. Um, so I need, I need to ground myself somewhere. Where? It depends on sort of where my career...

1:14:00 **Interviewer: So, it's more just about your purpose. Like you know where, what your purpose is, it's just a matter of finding which place fits in the best for what you want to do.**

1:14:09 Vivian: That's it. That's so brilliantly said (laughter).

1:14:15 **Interviewer: No, I mean that's all really good.**

Vivian: You just summarized all of that hullabaloo. That's exactly it, it's about the purpose.

1:14:20 **Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. So...I guess that wasn't my last question. Just one more question (laughter), Was just do you feel...that you know your decision to go to college here has really of just like you were saying...you kind of feel that what you want to do, you can**

⁴² Vivian's passion for her country and for development comes through when I ask her certain questions. At other points in the interview as well as here, Vivian interjects as I try to ask her a second, follow-up question she continues to explain her thoughts and desires.

⁴³ Vivian is currently in the United States on a student visa which adds to why her immigrant experience is different. She is given 3 months following her graduation in May to find a full-time job or she will have to go back to Namibia.

almost do it anywhere but you just know what your purpose is and you know what your mission is. Do you feel that going to college in the United States and kind of having this, even though it's not the complete-you know you haven't completely immigrated to this country or anything but do you feel that the things that you have done, just going to college here, have kind of given you the view or the opportunity to want to do those things. Like if you had maybe went to college in Namibia or in Johannesburg or somewhere in South Africa, you may not have your goals set as high or have these experiences to kind of allow you to see how possible these things are?

1:15:15 Vivian: Um, yeah absolutely.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Vivian: I think this space has given me, that, that opportunity to, to get out of my head, get out of myself and what I think is usual and challenge that and be wrong and then correct that repeatedly. So I think, yeah absolutely. Listen...I mean, I, I love this country, I really do.

Interviewer: But you love your country too.

Vivian: I do. I think, I think there's space to love more than one country. But uh, yeah, but I love Nigeria. That's my birth place, I love Namibia and I love Rio. I don't know about all of Brazil because I didn't do enough traveling but um, No you know, look...I am, very much aware of, I think we are in a world that is mobilizing very fast you know um, that is moving towards a space where different cultures are going to have to confront one another everywhere and its happening all over the world. Cultures are confronting and knowing who you are is probably one of the most um fulfilling things you can do and the most, best investment you can make for the type of world we are going into. But then, putting that knowledge to the test in front of or in the context of who other people are in other countries through other experiences that is what really fortifies you know, self-knowledge um, I think that this is, that's what these 4 years have been. To know self and to know how far I can be pushed, academically, socially, emotionally. Away from home. All of those things have shown me who Vivian is and have gotten me excited for who I can be an um and that's nothing, I will forever be grateful to.

1:17:39

1:17:47 **Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. Well, that's great. Thank you so much for letting me talk to you and everything.**

Vivian: No problem, thanks Steph.