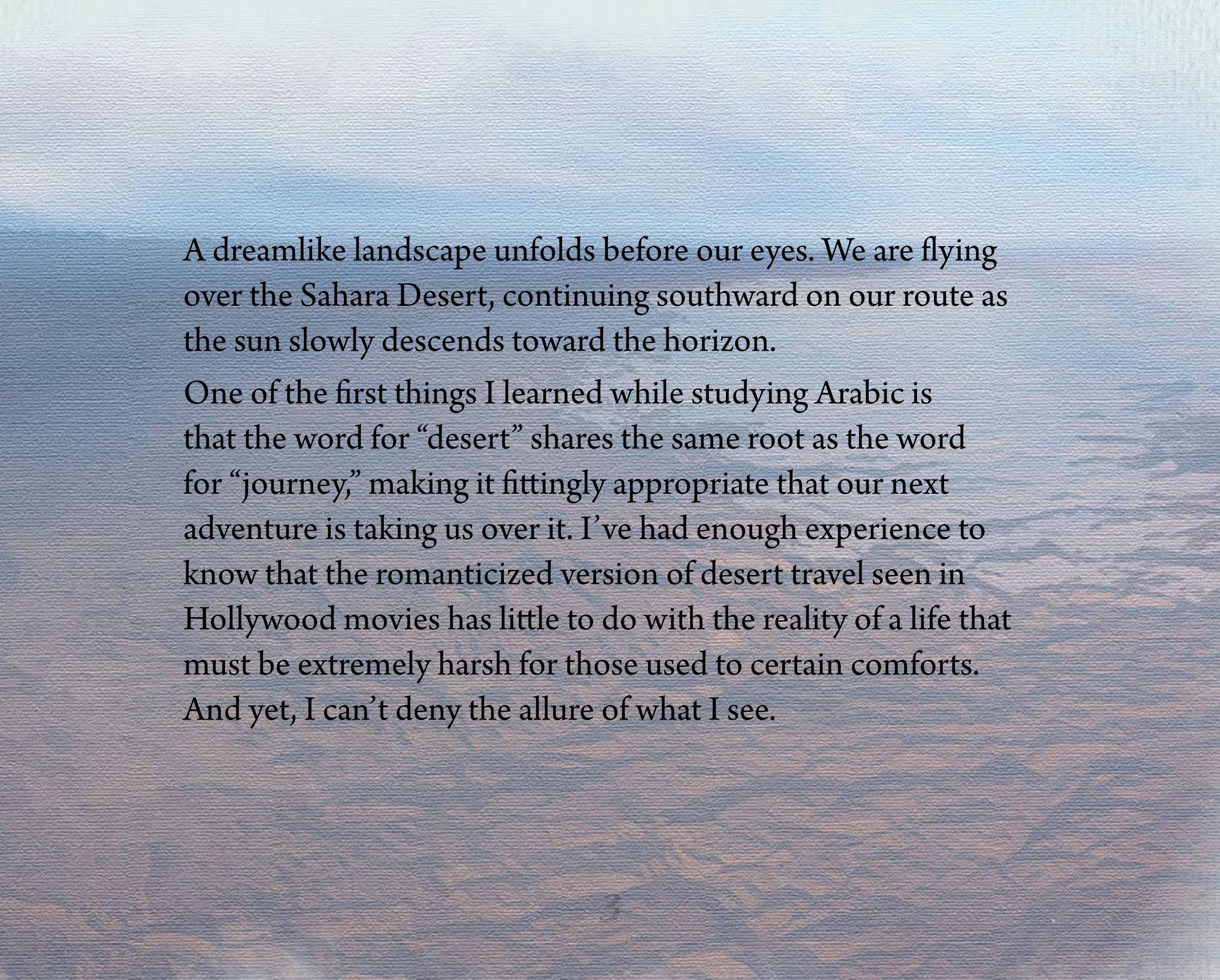


GHANA

PARENTS INTERNATIONAL'S TRAINING IN ACCRA

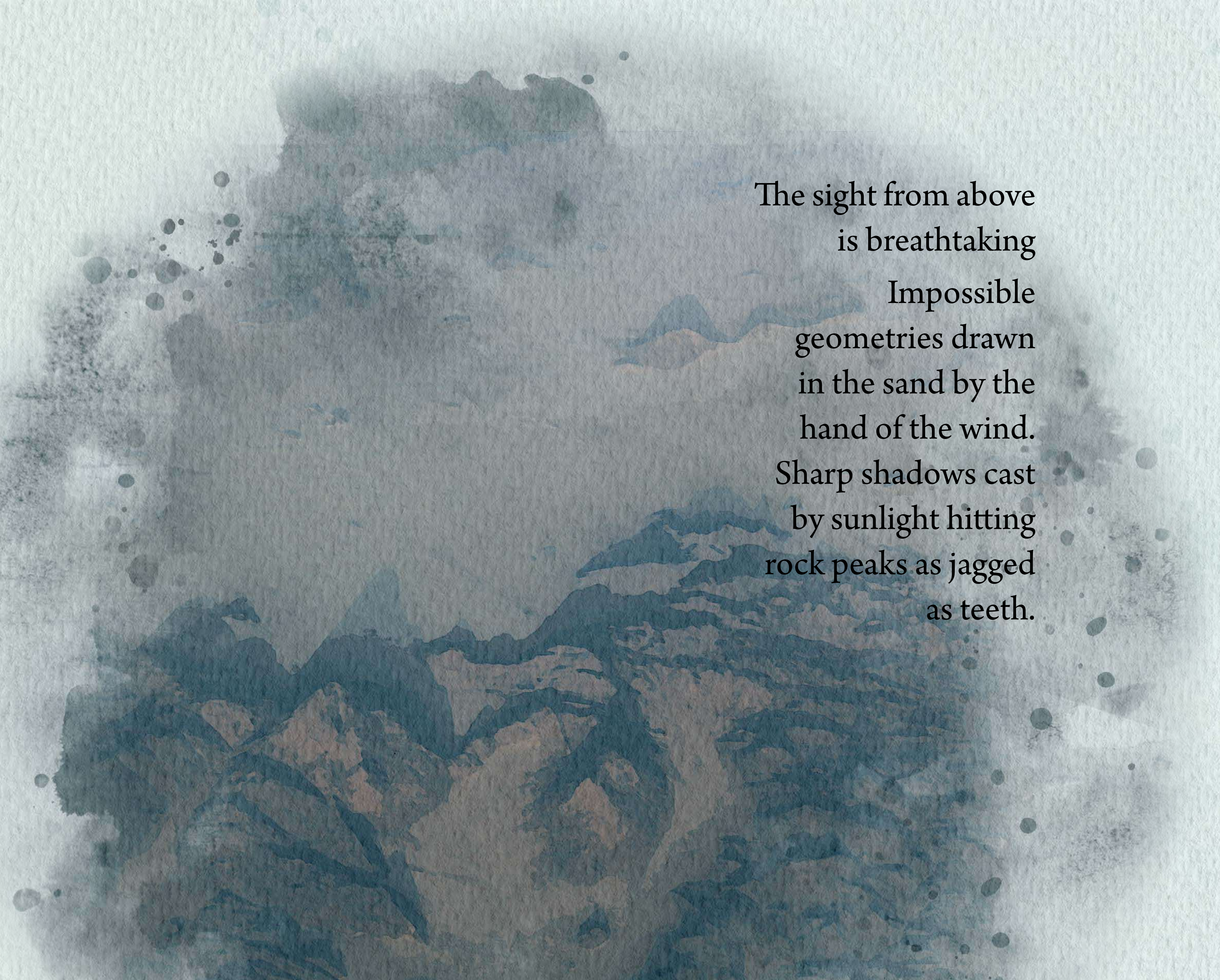


Text and artwork by Emanuele Bertolani - 2025

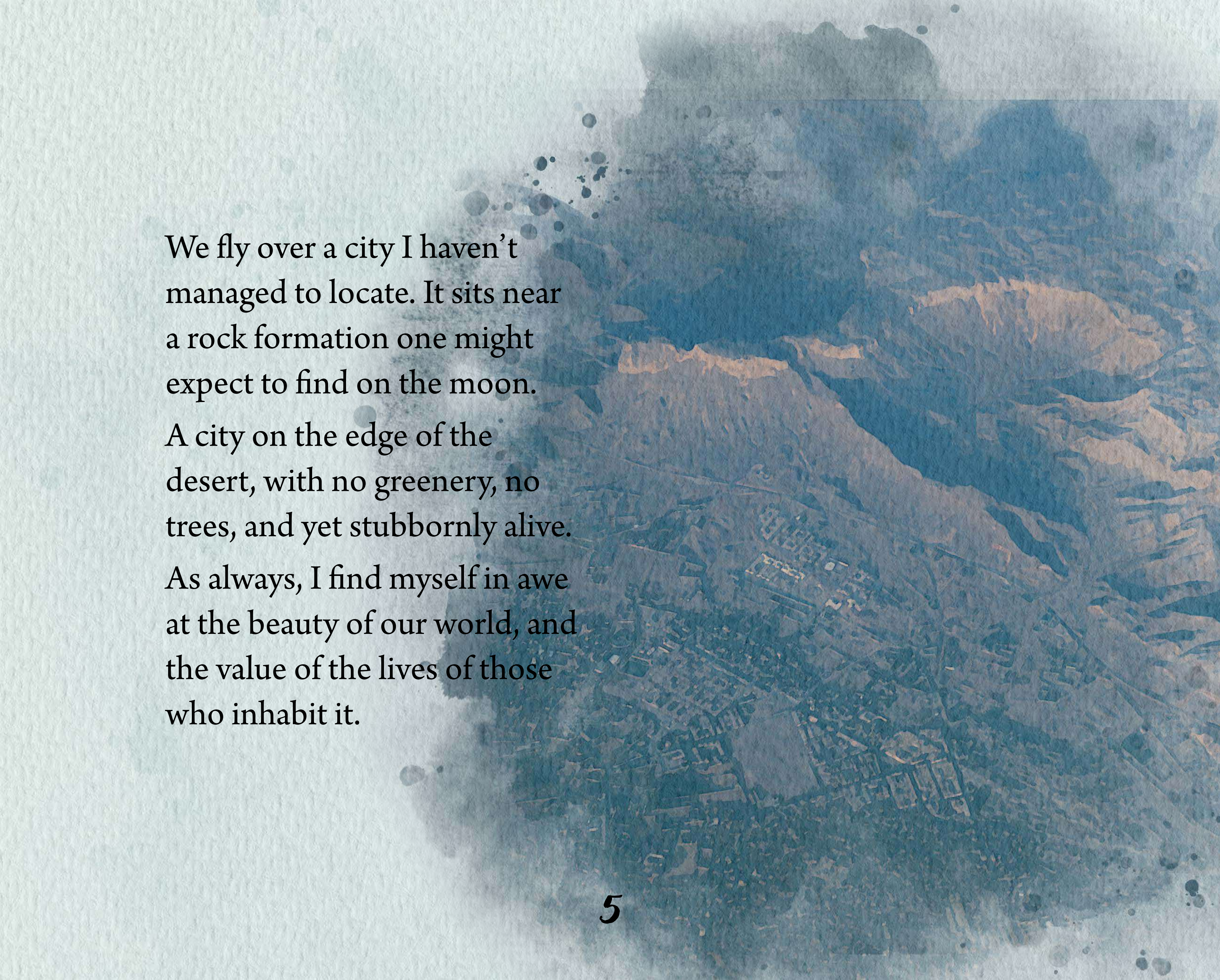


A dreamlike landscape unfolds before our eyes. We are flying over the Sahara Desert, continuing southward on our route as the sun slowly descends toward the horizon.

One of the first things I learned while studying Arabic is that the word for “desert” shares the same root as the word for “journey,” making it fittingly appropriate that our next adventure is taking us over it. I’ve had enough experience to know that the romanticized version of desert travel seen in Hollywood movies has little to do with the reality of a life that must be extremely harsh for those used to certain comforts. And yet, I can’t deny the allure of what I see.

A watercolor illustration of a desert landscape. The foreground and middle ground are filled with jagged, layered rock formations in shades of brown, tan, and dark blue. The background is a hazy, light blue and white sky. The overall style is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a textured, slightly grainy appearance.

The sight from above
is breathtaking
Impossible
geometries drawn
in the sand by the
hand of the wind.
Sharp shadows cast
by sunlight hitting
rock peaks as jagged
as teeth.

An aerial photograph of a desert city, likely Las Vegas, with its distinctive grid-like street pattern and large, rectangular building footprints. The city is situated in a valley, with rugged, rocky mountains rising in the background. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall tone of the image is somewhat desaturated, with a mix of earthy browns, greys, and blues.

We fly over a city I haven't
managed to locate. It sits near
a rock formation one might
expect to find on the moon.
A city on the edge of the
desert, with no greenery, no
trees, and yet stubbornly alive.
As always, I find myself in awe
at the beauty of our world, and
the value of the lives of those
who inhabit it.

Accra International Airport welcomes us with an embrace of hot, humid air. Before leaving the terminal building, we make sure to apply mosquito repellent, which reminds me that here, despite my feelings of connection, I am the outsider, and different rules apply.

We'll only have a few hours to rest before our day begins. Two days of intensive training await us, with over seventy participants, not to mention the inevitable unknowns we must be prepared for.

As Eszter, our director, says, "We adapt and we'll make it work, just as we always do."

“There’s no point looking, Manu. There are no boda-bodas here,” says Judit.

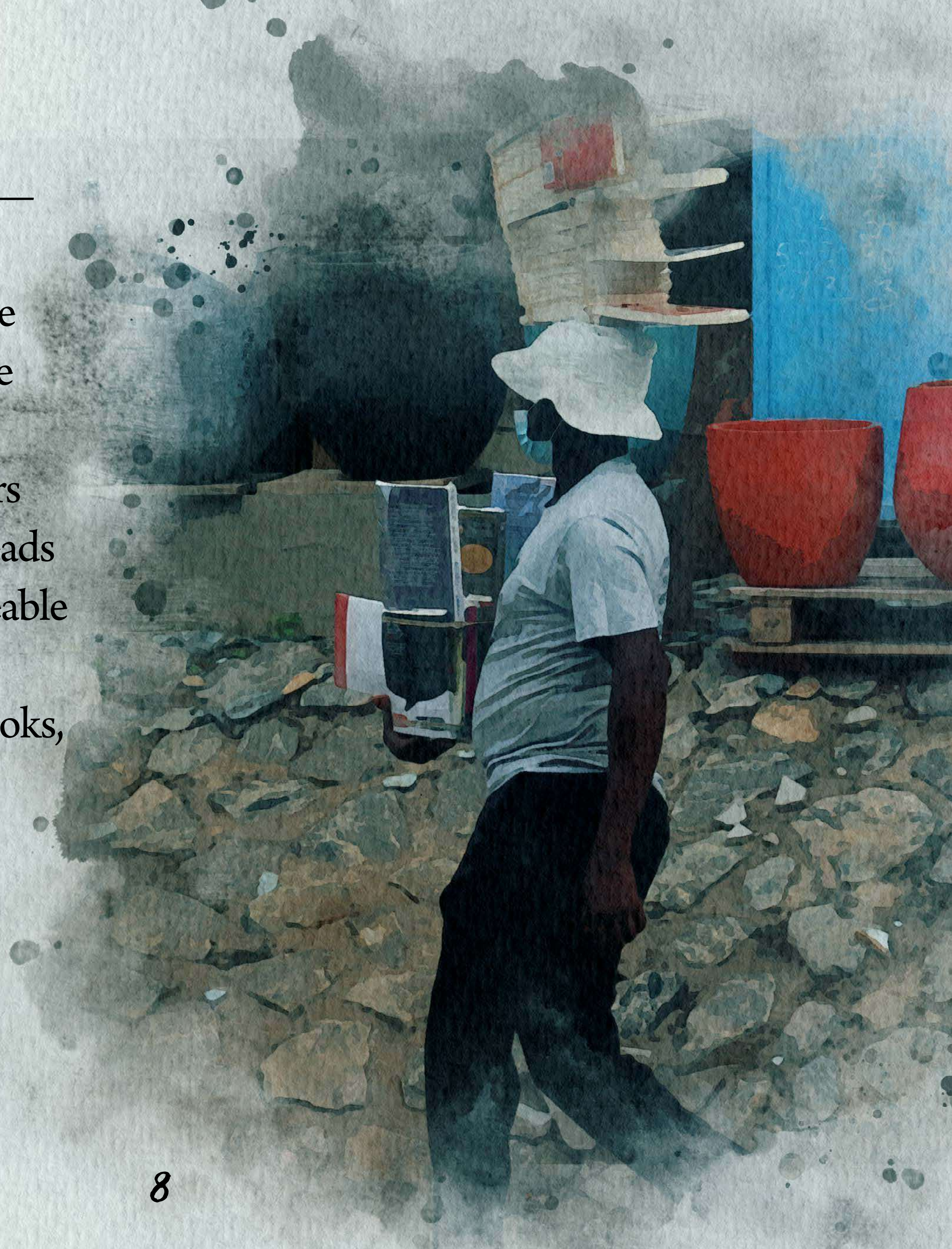
She’s right: the ever-present motorcycles so typical of urban Kampala in Uganda have given way to a variety of four-wheeled vehicles.

Ours, which has seen better days but seems unwilling to give up just yet, takes us along crowded streets and under bridges whose pillars are decorated with well-crafted murals.



As soon as the car stops — either due to traffic or at an intersection—we have the chance to observe the extraordinary skill with which local street vendors balance loads on their heads that would be unmanageable for us.

Some are even selling books, boasting both timeless classics and the last fads of leadership and time management.





When we leave the main road and venture into the maze of unpaved, uneven paths, the real conditions of the local population become more clearly visible. The contrast with what I've seen in other places is striking, but Africa has taught me to be cautious in my judgments. Faced with the challenges they endure, the dignity and strength of these people are often as great as they are unexpected.

We are guests of the Parenting Education Network Ghana, an organization founded by our host, Christian Ayisi. Our location is God's Glory School, where we will deliver targeted training for early childhood education professionals (0–6), followed by a full day dedicated to PENG personnel only.

The alignment between the school's and the organisation's philosophy is evident: the uniforms worn by all PENG staff feature the Ghanaian Gye Nyame symbol, representing God.



GOD'S GLORY SCHOOL

MOTTO:
THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY
FAITH (ROMANS 1:17)

OUR MISSION

TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL OF
JESUS CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM
UNTO THE NATIONS THROUGH
EXCELLENT CHRIST-CENTERED
EDUCATIONS AND TRAINING



OUR VISION

TO RAISE CHRIST LIKE AND
FAITHFUL STEWARDS THROUGH
THE PROVISION OF EXCELLENT
CHRIST-CENTERED EDUCATION
AND TRAINING



OUR CORE VALUES

IT'S SPEED

INTEGRITY - WE DO WHAT WE SAY

WISDOM - WE LIVE BY OUR CULTURE

SPIRITUAL TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT - CHRIST LIKENESS IS OUR FOCUS

SERVICE TO HUMANITY - OUR WORK IS OUR MINISTRY

PATRIOTISM - WE PURCHASER

EXCELLENCE - WORKING TO BE THE BEST AT WHAT WE DO

WISDOM - WE MAKE OUR DECISIONS THROUGH EDUCATION

DREAM BUILDERS - WE DREAM BIG - DREAM OF OUR SISTER

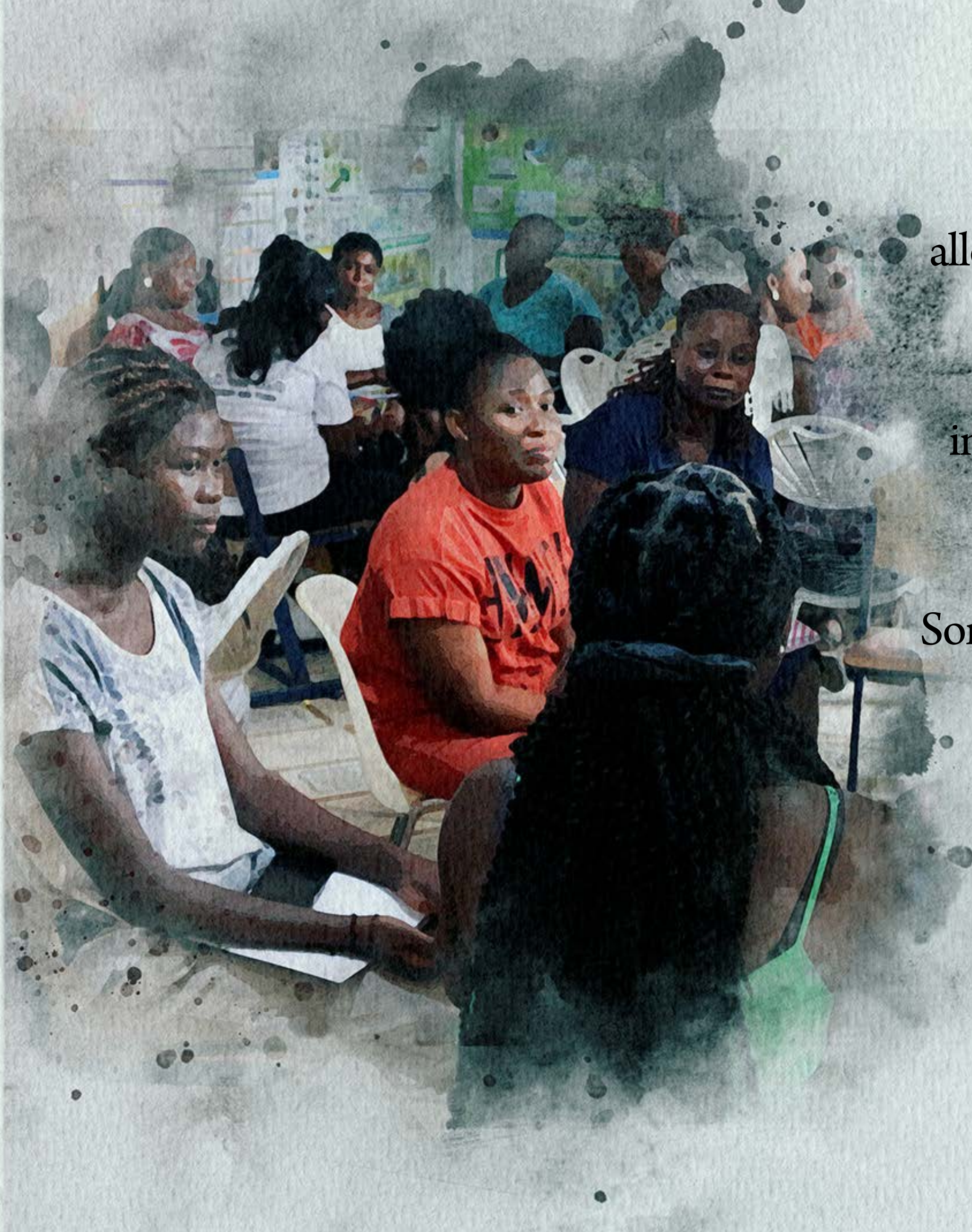


We quickly realize that the logistical conditions will require creativity: we have 30% more attendees than expected, but can't split them into equal groups because the classroom sizes vary. We reorganize swiftly. I'm assigned the first session in a room with at least fifty people, open windows, and several noisy fans. It's a good chance to put our "teacher voice" to use, as Eszter calls it.

What we do in our IPA training is similar to what Socrates called maieutics. We're not here to lecture anyone: we work together with participants to bring to light that which, to a large extent, they already know.

We often open our trainings with exercises designed to raise awareness of our identity as individuals. It's a delicate activity, often needing adjustment based on local culture and needs, precisely because — when dealing with identity — we always need to be mindful of the social norms of our hosts.





Working in small groups allows each participant to take ownership of their learning, and also offers interesting insights into communication and negotiation dynamics within the group. Some take the lead, others stay in the background...

Our role as facilitators is to create the conditions for experiential learning. We cannot replace the commitment and effort of each participant.

The second day begins with Judit's customary energy burst: despite a perceived temperature of 40°C, she tries to engage part of the group in a celebratory moment with Afrobeat music before introducing her module on trauma-informed education, which had been specifically requested by our hosts.

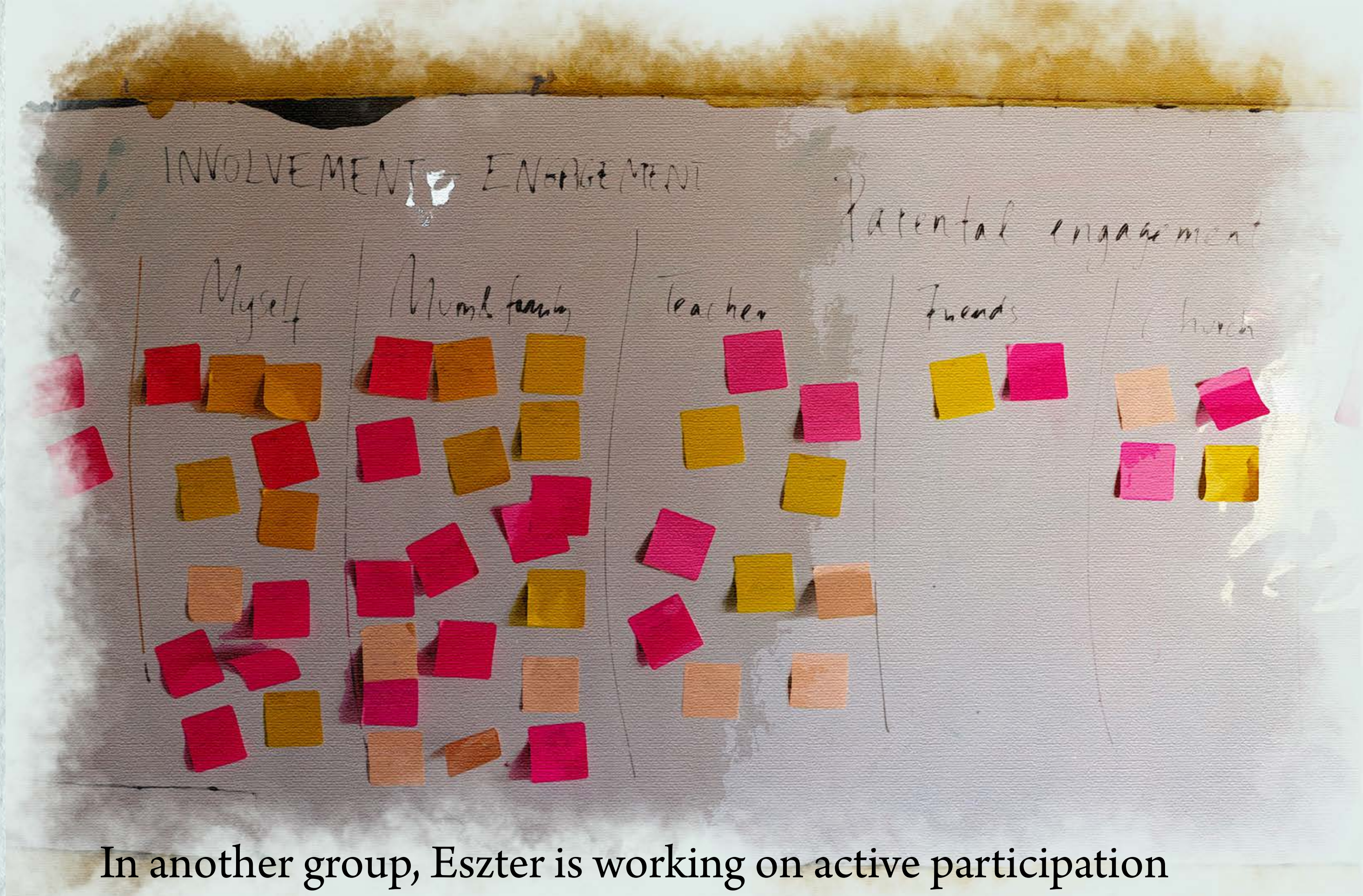
The use of corporal punishment as an educational method is a reality that is not ours to judge, but one we have been asked to help eradicate in favor of non-violent methods. That alone speaks to the commitment of our hosts to pursue a value-driven education— one that doesn't necessarily reject the past, but seeks to improve it in pursuit of the future.



I'm on communication and collaboration, starting from the basics: proxemics, body language, intonation. Cultural differences, that become immediately manifest when the participants call me "uncle", which is an expression of affection and respect, for the first time in my life.

During a break, I'm asked what day I was born on. In Ghana, people born on a Sunday are considered adventurous, self-confident and charismatic, but also spiritually oriented and with a strong sense of destiny. That part, I say to myself, fits me. Since I'm a man born on Sunday, my *kra din*, or "soul name," is Kwesi.

From now on, I'll be known to my group as Kwesi Manu.



In another group, Eszter is working on active participation and engagement — one of the themes that defines the work of Parents International both in and outside Europe.

Finding effective ways to build true collaboration and dialogue is a challenging task, neither parents nor teachers can afford to be passive players in a child's education.

A simple question on whether teachers are allowed to read messages intercepted in their classroom stirs a passionate exchange during the module on child rights.

The ensuing discussion brings to light positions that are rooted in the religious background of many of the participants, who see children in need of “correction”. We know this is not the place for a theological debate, and it is our policy not to try educating people against their own beliefs, but we do have a methodological perspective to offer on how to provide guidance without resorting to corporal punishment.

Luckily, it seems we are heard.

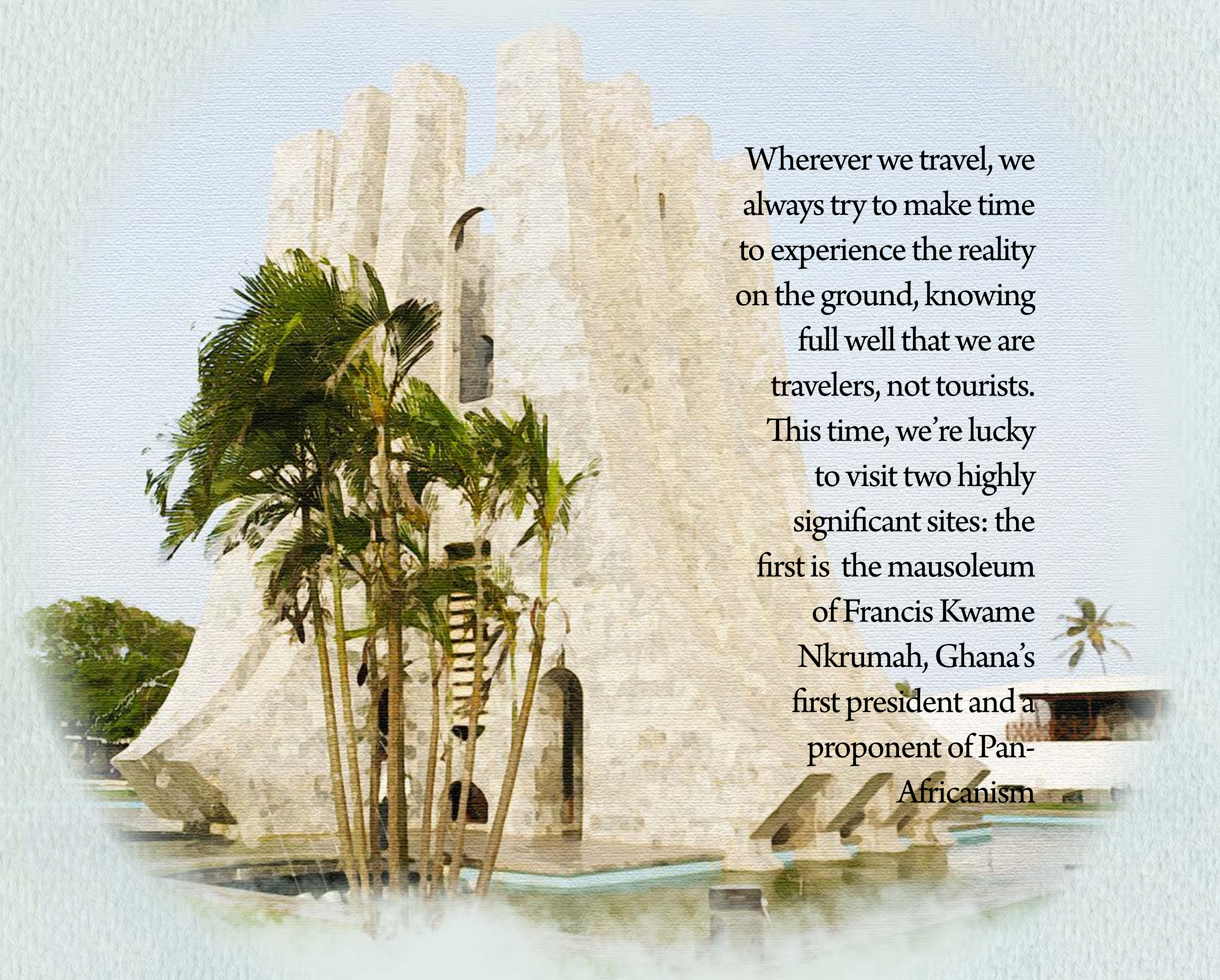
The second day concludes with the distribution of participation certificates, each signed individually by Eszter and handed out one by one by Judit — until I am called upon to take her place. As I watch and photograph the ceremony, I can't help but admire the dedication and diversity of the participants. Some of the teachers are boys younger than my own son, mothers who brought their children just to be able to attend, elderly women who have surely amassed great experience but still want to learn.



On Sunday, we had the chance to take part in one of the training sessions of Parenting Education Network Ghana. The building we enter is just steps from a mosque under construction, and among the participants is a peaceful mix of Christians and Muslims.

Constructive criticism is an essential part of any training journey, and despite the undeniable goodwill of the organizers and the dedication of the trainers, Eszter and Judit are attentive observers with many suggestions for improvement to share during our final session on Monday.





Wherever we travel, we
always try to make time
to experience the reality
on the ground, knowing
full well that we are
travelers, not tourists.
This time, we're lucky
to visit two highly
significant sites: the
first is the mausoleum
of Francis Kwame
Nkrumah, Ghana's
first president and a
proponent of Pan-
Africanism

The second one is the Elmina Castle, a fortress originally built by the Danes and later taken over by the Portuguese, and eventually by the British .

In the past, it was a hub of the slave trade in the so-called Gold Coast. The building is still in good condition — if “good” can describe what we see once we enter the male slave dungeon.

There was also a dungeon for female slaves, the guide explains, located directly beneath the church floor.

Slaves were kept there for long periods, in conditions meant to ensure that only the strongest would survive.



Many came from the interior and had never seen the ocean. Their first experience of it came when, after being counted one by one, they passed through the Gate of No Return — leaving behind their names, their language, their lives up to that point — and were loaded onto ships bound for the New World to work on European plantations. For some, the journey would end without ever sighting land.



I can't deny that this visit has affected me very deeply. It's one thing to read about slavery in books, but walking where one of the dark chapters of history actually took place is quite another. I find myself thinking that is a testament to the fact that humans possess the capacity to commit unspeakable evil and, more importantly, also the faculty and the opportunity to choose to do better.

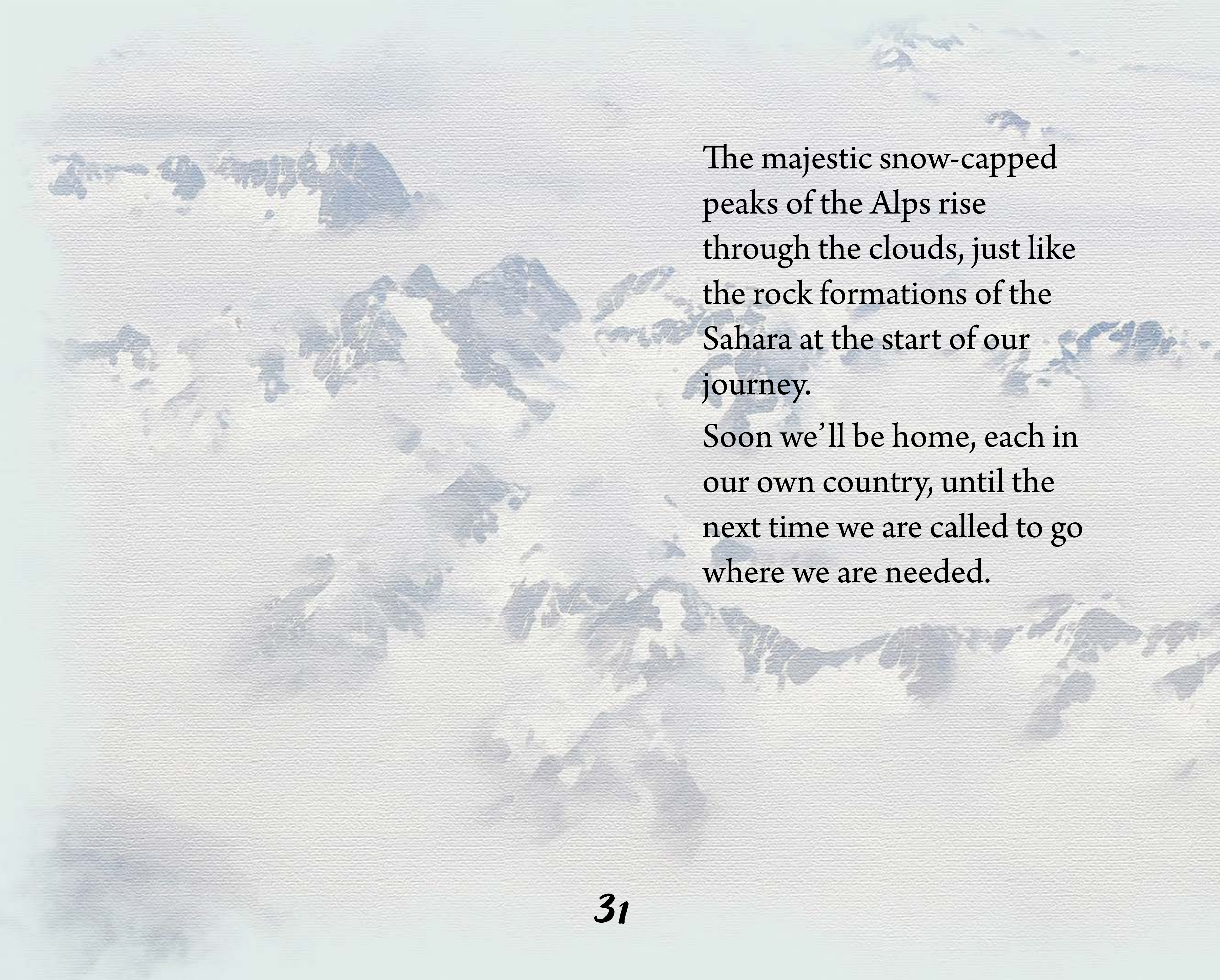
Surrounded by the sound of the waves rolling in the distance, the words of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

*He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.*

After a relatively easier session with the staff and Board Members of Parenting Education Network Ghana, we part ways with an exchange. While we always leave some of our training materials with our partners, we don't expect to be given gifts. This time, however we receive many useful ones, which will remind us of the bond we share with those we worked with here.

I take advantage of the last moments to sneak back into the school and take a picture of one of the classrooms. The blackboard is worn, and so are the desks, the chairs, the posters on the wall. This is a place where adults do their best and children learn. That alone fills me with gratitude.





The majestic snow-capped
peaks of the Alps rise
through the clouds, just like
the rock formations of the
Sahara at the start of our
journey.

Soon we'll be home, each in
our own country, until the
next time we are called to go
where we are needed.

CLICK AND FOLLOW US



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