

Bihotza James-Lexartzegi

Gilman Program Alumni Ambassador
Cameroon, 2022



“Gilman’s expansive network has introduced me to a community of people who hold similar values and goals and who I can reach out to for guidance and inspiration.”

The Gilman Scholarship provided Bihotza an element of security that allowed her to pursue her dreams of living in Africa in a meaningful and enriching way. As a student of international studies and women, gender, and sexuality studies, Bihotza was eager to take her studies outside of an American classroom setting and learn directly from local Cameroonians.

Through her study abroad program, Bihotza studied development and social change, examining and contrasting the experiences of different ethnic groups facing modernization. She undertook an independent research project resulting in the publication of a paper titled “Evolution of Women in Cameroonian Traditional Dance.” As a dancer herself, Bihotza was intrigued by the ways women use dance to express grievances and strengthen female bonds.

Inspired by her experience in Cameroon, Bihotza extended her time in West Africa by studying the history of colonization in Senegal. Upon returning to Washington University in St. Louis, she became the choreographer for her university’s Latin Dance Performance Team, integrating elements of West African dance that she had learned abroad. Bihotza graduated from Washington University in May 2023 as a member of the Rodriguez and Deneb scholarship programs, a volunteer for her university’s sexual assault and relationship hotline, and a mentor for the writing center, where she helped students complete their Gilman Scholarship applications.

After graduating, Bihotza taught English in France in the 2023–2024 academic year. She continues to dance and nourishes her passion for social engagement through her podcast, on which she discusses traveling as a young woman and global politics. She is excited to continue this work as a Gilman Alumni Ambassador by empowering students to take their leap into the world.

- Rodriguez Scholarship
- Co-founder of the Gender Expansive Multicultural Program
- University Writing Center mentor

