

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



AKWAABA:
Welcome to Challenge and Achievement in Ghana

Volume 17, Number 3

Summer 2011

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Eileen Mayers Pasztor, DSW, California State University, Long Beach

Welcome to Volume 17, Issue No. 3, of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*. If you are a new reader, you are joining us for one of our special issues. Twice a year, we focus on a particular theme, in this case, "Akwaaba: Welcome to Challenge and Achievement in Ghana." Akwaaba is an often said expression on signs everywhere there; it means "welcome."

Special thanks to Brenda McGadney, former associate professor and chair of the Social Work Program at Siena Heights University in Adrian, Michigan, for guest-editing this unique issue. Dr. McGadney's interest in and commitment to Ghana is a remarkable story, dating back to 1998. Then, an associate professor at Wayne State University, she had an IRB-approved study to research her interest in "kwashiorkor," a tragic medical condition of malnutrition affecting babies whose mothers give birth to another baby before they are weaned, and thus deprive the first-born of essential nutrients. Several days before Dr. McGadney was to leave for Ghana, her funding fell through. She decided to go ahead with her plans, even taking her family along. She fell in love with the people and found her passion for the challenges and achievements. Since then, Dr. McGadney has continued her research and advocacy endeavors, traveling to Ghana again in 2001-2002, 2005, and in 2010. Most recently, she has expanded her research to focus on war-displaced women.

Dr. McGadney learned about *Reflections* while visiting a colleague, Dr. Edith Lewis, University of Michigan School of Social Work faculty. Dr. Lewis had a copy of *Reflections* on her coffee table and the rest, as narratives go, is history. Dr. McGadney found the narrative process best suited her work. Her commitment to *Reflections* is remarkable. She co-guest-edited our special 2007 issue on Katrina, with poignant stories of resilience.

Continuing this theme, Dr. McGadney has called upon students and faculty colleagues in Ghana to tell their stories. Her "Introduction to the Special Issue" explains the title selection and overviews the extraordinary articles that follow.

Heartfelt thanks to Dr. McGadney and all her authors for sharing their compelling endeavors and truly, their life work. The risks they took, the realities they share, and their passion for compassion makes this special issue a must-read. Special note to faculty: a number of these narratives relate to student-faculty relationships and mutual learning. As peer-reviewed articles, I am including them in my social policy, advocacy, and child welfare course content. I hope you will find them of similar value.

Reflections produces two general issues each year, focusing on a collection of peer-reviewed multiple topics. And then *Reflections* produces two special issues annually, such as our "Heart of Justice: Social Work Innovation in Africa" (Winter 2011) and upcoming Winter 2012, "Heart of Justice: Social Work Innovation in Israel." Please be sure to look at the Call for Papers for a special issue on Mentoring (page 8), Kinship Care (page 38), and Field Education (page 117). Please remember to renew your subscription, and give *Reflections* as a gift to yourself, a colleague, or classmate. Subscription and submission information is on the back page.

It is with pride and enthusiasm that we announce a new director for the CSULB School of Social Work. We are honored that Dr. Christian Molitor has become our leader, effective this summer. Dr. Molitor has a distinguished record of scholarly endeavors and community-based advocacy, both domestically and internationally. His work has focused on teen dating violence, attachment and authority, inherited and acquired roles, loyalties, guilt and anger become more unique and complex. This

presentation will address the issues related to children's safety, well-being, and permanency when reconstituted families (often out of crisis); and offer suggestions to address role changes, boundaries, family support systems, family power structure, unknown futures, and rules regarding contact between children and parents.

When Dr. Molidor interviewed for the director position, several of us remembered him from his being a published *Reflections* author. (Please see Dr. Molidor's article, "A rose by any other name," in our volume 6, number 3, summer 2000 issue of *Reflections*, pages 11 – 20).

Please join the *Reflections* team in welcoming Dr. Molidor and extending warm and best wishes in his new leadership role.

**Letter from New CSULB School of
Social Work Director
Christian Molidor, PhD, California State
University, Long Beach**

Several years ago I began a working relationship with an extraordinary woman who had participated for many years in gang life. Hers was a life filled with family violence, alcoholism, racism, and poverty, which exploded into viciousness and cruelty towards others. Later, her life became one focused on helping others through her experiences. I asked her to speak in my high- risk youth course about this process of change - how she moved from one extreme to her current lifestyle. Listening to her, watching my students, I knew I had to find a larger venue to tell her story. Of all the social work journals I considered, *Reflections*, an excellent peer-reviewed journal, provided exactly the right forum for Rose's story. It also allowed me to speak about a topic for which I felt a passion in a manner that simply didn't fit other journals.

Reflections is a unique journal that allows powerful and intimate narratives to be shared. This journal communicates intense shared experiences that are embedded in the diverse settings and systems that make up the profession of social work. It is a forum for uncovering, evaluating, and forwarding the diverse pains and joys of our work and sharing the knowledge we derive from our experiences.

Reflections utilizes narrative inquiry as its core focus. These narratives explore our communities, our students, our theories, our politics, our biases, our ethics, and our growth. It is a journal that uncovers connections that unite all of us and disconnections that divide us. This journal showcases educators, community and clinical practitioners, students, and clients. I invite all readers to sit back and relish these incredible articles. And when you're finished, I invite and strongly encourage you write up and submit your own stories. Allow yourself to grow through these narratives and then teach others through your own experiences.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Brenda McGadney, PhD, Siena Heights University

AKWAABA (Ah KWAA BA)! Welcome to Ghana! This is the country where professional helpers and advocates, especially westerners like myself, return again and again and again! Why? We feel safe, welcomed and, conveniently, English is the official language. Ghana is a fertile place for volunteerism, social development, and exchanges. Also, the generosity and kindness of Ghanaians is almost unmatched by any other country in Africa. Ghanaians proudly tell the world that they represent a country of good governance, conflict-free, economically stable, with a strong commitment to universal human rights and justice through a democratically elected government. Colonized by the British during the Presidency of Kwame Nkrumah, it was the first independent African nation in the 20th century, represented by a single black star on its flag, based on the principles of freedom and justice.

Ghanaians have a close kinship to Americans. Thousands of Americans travel to Ghana yearly, and many African Americans claim Ghana as their ancestral home, making it ripe for indigenous collaborative development. President Kennedy provided most of the funding for the construction of the Volta River Dam. Launching the Peace Corps 50 years ago at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, he encouraged young people to go to Ghana. Three sitting Presidents and their families have visited the country: Clinton, Bush, and Obama. Ghana's favorite son, Chancellor of the University of Ghana Kofi Annan, served as the Secretary General to the United Nations for ten years.

Given this background, I hope you will agree that the papers in this special issue will increase the cultural awareness of the challenges and accomplishments that

professional helpers and advocates endeavor to reduce disparity and make a difference in the lives of Ghanaians. The narratives are organized to support four themes beginning with *Lessons Learned: Cross-Cultural Sensitivities and Relationship-Building*. Rose Walls' anchor paper, **In Ghana here...** is laced with humor and candid story-telling, and offers a sincere reflection of and insights to her adjustment and development of cultural awareness regarding life in Ghana, from the perspective of an African American female social worker and lawyer. Through her unique and realistic take on life, those who have visited Ghana might find themselves laughing out loud, slapping their knees or nodding their heads as they remember having similar experiences. For other readers, Walls' narrative can be a strategic guide of what to do and not do, providing perhaps sufficient cultural awareness to start off on the right foot as a professional helper and advocate.

Two of my Ghana students, George Domfe, and Kwasi Boakye Akosah, joined me in **Reflections of an American professor and Ghanaian social work students: Implementation of collaborative teaching/learning methods to assess indigenous social problems**. The authors demonstrate the ability of a class of 134 students and the professor to act as cultural guides, teaching and learning from each other while developing ethical problem-solving strategies and interventions for 14 indigenous social problems. The students' account and evaluation of the "prof's" teaching style is unedited. Their description of the collaborative development of course content includes an unabashed and honest assessment of themselves, their peers, and social problems in their homeland.

In Ghana: A great place to be, the narrator, Montrella Cowan, shares her experience visiting the Motherland for the first time as a Study Abroad student. Cowan shares strategies of how, as a single mother, she learned to serve the global community. She is clear that a social worker's success in working cross-culturally and internationally must stem from active engagement. This narrative, a self-esteem builder for non-traditional students, includes vivid descriptions of lessons learned and how experiential field trips and advocacy research experiences increased her cultural awareness of social issues, especially human rights and development projects for the poor.

The next two papers that offer additional awareness on cross-cultural lessons learned were written by social work academicians who have extensive experience facilitating exchange, internships and study/tour programs in Ghana. Both papers address issues related to prejudice, racism, privilege, structural disadvantages, or oppression and resistance. The authors propose a paradigm shift to help stakeholders understand our relationship in the global marketplace and need to expand our conceptualization of cultural competence as we become more involved in international education and practice. Edith Lewis narrates **Cultural differences and neo-colonialism in social work: Negotiating exchanges between Ghana and the United States**, a frank critical challenge to institutions - especially social work schools - and colleagues regarding mutually sustainable professional practicum exchanges. Lewis insists that effective exchanges are possible if there is willingness by representatives from the African Diaspora and non-Africans to work affirmatively to shift their world views. Readers are then informed that this can be done while upholding the values and ethics of social work practice through an understanding of self and willingness to distribute resources. As Director of Educational Study Tours and Internships, Sadye Logan authored **Experiencing Ghana at different points and times**. The narrator expands cross-cultural awareness by sharing personal experiences, perceptions, and interest in Ghana from her perspective as a sixth generation

Gullah or Gheeche-speaking Sea Islander in South Carolina. In addition to her narration about the impact of the tours and internships on the participants, readers should find fascinating similarities between her life on John's Island and that of the daily activities of Ghanaians, such as speech, hair styles, fishing, quilting, and other everyday habits.

Relative to the second theme of *Social and Economic Justice*, Ghanaian doctoral students in the U.S. and Ghana share their reflections on arresting disenfranchisement of women and children in the workplace. Elizabeth Nana Mbrah Koomson authored **Mining communities in Ghana: Reflections on the nature and type of work for female miners and non-miners**. This is an extraordinary paper as the lifestyles and working conditions of female miners have rarely been documented. The author describes these women's experiences in small-scale mining, and discriminatory practices relative to culturally determined positions of women in Ghanaian society, including the nature and type of work and compensation, and overall impact of their livelihood on family stability and vulnerability in the mines. **Child labor: The silent thief of children's rights in Ghana**, narrated by Kwadwo Ofori-Dua, is filled with dynamic first-person narratives of exploited children, mostly in fishing communities, even though the government has policies that prohibit such labor practices. He concludes that this negative practice is endemic, especially in the informal sector, and offers lessons learned and recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to restore healthy child development.

Our third theme, *Health and Stigma*, offers three reflections related to chronic disease, mental illness, and reproduction. Rebekah Urbonya's narrative, **Reflections on sickle cell disease research: Lessons learned from an American student's collaborative research experience and travel in Ghana**, shares an extraordinary journey and fresh observations of her initial visit to the continent. The author gained valuable experiences learning about barriers to health care access, differential resources, and stigma for those suffering from sickle cell

disease in a hospital setting where, however, she received excellent mentorship from a pediatric physician. Second generation Ghanaian-American Lucinda Acquaye writes about **Mental health issues in Ghanaian communities: From personal experience to professional obligation**. Her work provides profound insights into the struggle between traditional beliefs of spirituality and modern medicine related to understanding "madness" as seen in everyday life and portrayed in "Gollywood" movies. Readers interested in providing culturally competent mental health services globally will gain greater understanding of the role culture plays in beliefs about mental illness and treatment of this vulnerable population. Lastly, **Abortion, possible and impossible: stigma and the narratives of Ghanaian doctors who provide abortions**, authored by Lisa Martin, Michelle Precourt Debbink, Jane Hassinger, and Lisa H. Harris is different from all other narratives. It gives voice to Ghanaian workers on the "front lines" of abortion provision through the lens of abortion stigma as investigated by doctoral-prepared physicians and a social worker. In addition to sharing lessons learned in exploring various aspects of abortion practice, the authors present a compelling story of the ways in which abortion stigma manifests in and is reproduced by Ghanaian law, politics, and culture. Thus, they argue that advocates in the arena of reproductive justice and maternal mortality from unsafe abortions can only be effective if they address abortion stigma head-on, as they do in this narrative.

Three narratives are featured in our fourth theme, *Survival and Resilience* (although we could argue that all the narratives in this special issue have those dynamics as underlying themes). These narratives offer stunning examples of positive images of survival and resilience of women and girls against all odds through an exploration of their faith, and empowerment through capacity-building projects by social workers and missionaries. As a polio survivor, Augustina Naami's narrative, **Personal reflections of resilience and survival of Ghanaian women with disabilities: A social worker and**

unemployed study subjects, is gripping when she shares her account of the impact of stigma, and support from family, God, and mentors in determining how she overcame a multitude of challenges that led to her becoming a scholar and leader in disability rights. Her interactions with unemployed disabled Ghanaian women provide a clearer picture of what they share in common, and of resilience. Through their stories, we can see authentic advocacy and survival strategies that can be used by practitioners in the global arena to promote self-esteem, empowerment, and sustainable development.

The remaining two papers are authored by women who launched "mission" projects in Ghana with groups from the States of Michigan and Georgia. **The Krisan/Sanzule refugee who inspired a Ghana ministry** narrated by Rev. LaVerne McCain Gill recounts a nine-year ministry with more than 50 members going to Ghana to support several micro-economic projects, including construction of water wells. (I witnessed the development of this ministry as my family and I were members of the church.) Rev. Gill follows the development of the ministry through the travails of a Liberian refugee who lived in the camp from its inception in 1996 through 2006. The bonding between these two women is remarkable, told in true story fashion, is well worth the read. Lastly, author Marian Landrum Childs' narrative, **Economically empowering Ghanaian communities through patchwork quilting: Intergenerational project between female quilters in the U.S and Ghana**, documents the vision, success, and cross-cultural implications of a CEO developing an income-generating project. What is extraordinary about this endeavor is that Childs, a social worker, engaged elderly female quilters who had never been to the continent of Africa to mentor and facilitate the making of quilts in partnership with young Ghanaian women. This included a visit to Ghana to mutually share strategies of empowerment. The author drew from her faith to complete this paper after the sudden death in May 2011 of her 27-year-old son, a high-school football coach.

In conclusion, it really does take a whole village, thus I want to acknowledge and thank a number of special colleagues and friends. Of course and first, thank you to the authors who have shared their compelling professional and personal experiences so that others may learn from them. Second, thanks to Robert Weiss, MD and his wife, Serena, who gave me sanctuary while I wrote the introduction to this issue. Thanks to colleagues Phyllis Antwi, MD, Rev. Seth Ayettey, MD, Onike Rodrigues, MD, Nana Apt, MSW, PhD, and Edith Lewis, MSW, PhD and nurse Beatrice Addoh, acquisition Librarian Gifty Boarky, and Nii Sarpei Nunoon Cultural Affairs Specialist for Exchanges at the U.S. Embassy in Ghana. A shout out to friend Steven J. Phillips of the Society of African Missions (and please see his blog <http://steveupdate.blogspot.com/> maintained in Ghana since 2005, a heart wrenching and nail-biting set of inspiring narratives of personal challenges and accomplishments aiding in the resettlement of Liberian refugees, a humbling experience that truly exemplifies the intent of this special issue.)

Special thanks to the *Reflections* team for all their diligent behind the scenes work to make the work of all of us authors come alive on each page. Beginning with the cover, thank you to artist *Robin Richesson* for her talent. Not being familiar with Ghana, Robin talked with me to the point that she could create this design. It portrays a few of the nearly 100 ethnic Ghanaian Akan symbols as cutouts of multi-colored, hand-woven, Kente cloth, representing indigenous meanings of spirituality to Ghanaians. This is often one of the longest-lasting memories for visitors, as I hope it will be along with the narratives included in this issue. Special thanks to copy editor Georgette Bradley for reading every single word of this special issue to help make the words come out correctly. Much appreciation to Greg Covey for his assistance in getting our manuscripts into *Reflections* format.

Again, AKWAABA!

Akan Symbols



Initiative, Dynamism
and Versatility



Importance of
Learning from the Past



Unity and Human Relations



Peace and Harmony, Fair Play,
and Cordiality



Supremacy of God



Mercy and Nurturing



Defense and Endurance



Friendship and Interdependence

Call for Papers: Special Issue “Mentoring in the Helping Professions”

Mentoring is a keystone of social work education, professional development, and training. However, there are few forums whereby social workers can seek out reflection and guidance on seeking out, developing, and managing productive mentoring relationships. In this special issue, we seek to begin to fill this gap in literature by placing a call for narratives that explore the diversity of formal and informal mentoring relationships in the social work profession. We encourage submissions from social workers and other helping professionals in a broad array of practice and research settings and across various stages of professional development.

Topics may address, but are not limited to:

- What does mentoring look like in social work education? In social work practice? In social work research?
- How have you identified, initiated, and nurtured mentoring relationships across the lifespan of your social work career?
- Why did you select the mentors or mentees in your career? What set them apart from all the others?
- What are the challenges that you have experienced as a mentor or a mentee? What are some successful strategies that you have employed to address challenges in mentoring relationships?
- How have your mentoring relationships impacted your development as a social work researcher? As a social work practitioner?
- How do you understand your role as a mentor? What has motivated and shaped your understanding of how to engage in mentorship?

Submission Deadline: March 31, 2012

Please follow the writing instruction on the back page of this issue and also visit the Reflections website at: www.csulb.edu/depts/socialwk/reflections

Send an electronic copy in .doc format to both guest editors, as listed below.
We look forward to the receiving your manuscripts. Thank you!

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IN GHANA HERE...

Rose Walls, Esq., MSW, University of Ghana, Legon

In the following narrative, the author draws upon her experiences (good, bad, and embarrassing) and sharp sense of humor to provide insights and shortcuts to understanding Ghanaian customs and culture. The purpose of this narrative is to encourage professional helpers to have fun while being effective.

Introduction

After working and/or volunteering in the countries of Liberia, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Brazil, and Ghana since 1978, I moved to Ghana permanently in 2000. Although I have worked in many capacities with law and graduate degrees in Social Work in Ghana, the longer I live here, the more I hear the phrase "In Ghana here..." I admit I often cringe when I hear it, and at other times I smile. For even if I am speaking in a local language, my accent, name, dress, walk, identification or something else portrays me as an outsider, non-Ghanaian or *Obruni* (foreigner).

People usually want me to understand or to conform. It is often hard to do, as I know I have a bit of an anarchist/non-conformist streak in my personality. Also, I was raised to critically think, challenge, and struggle against injustice. This personality trait does not cause me to be rude or disrespectful; rather it has encouraged me to listen and learn more and question. How? Why? Does this help us as a people? I often frustrate people with this, and they simply respond, "Look Auntie Rose, this is how it is done in Ghana here!"

I have recorded a few of my favorite *I wish I had known* "In Ghana here..." incidents, which I believe will be enlightening to newcomers to Ghana so as not to impede their effectiveness as they embark on their role as professional helpers. I have had thousands, but time and living limits my recordings for this narrative. I share them out of love and pray my offbeat humor offends no one. My life has always been interesting and unusual to me. I laugh a lot and make the most

of it. I hope you enjoy this small journey into it.

I truly believe culture evolves or dies. Or will it? I keep learning – right here in Ghana, and I must admit, it has been great fun! Thus the purpose of this narrative is to provide the grounding from my sometimes embarrassing real-life experiences, which may help foreigners put aside their arrogance and/or eagerness to help as professional helpers and do so effectively while having fun. It may also help to minimize the egg on their face and promote mutual exchanges. Learning from the locals or indigenous members of the community can be one of the most wondrous experiences a person can have.

Somebody Should Have Told Me

Before I moved to Ghana, I wish somebody would have told me some of the common cultural rules, interactions, and customs that would cause me frustration, annoyance or confusion. Maybe then I would have taken time to prepare myself mentally and even come up with some advance solutions on how I could handle some of these things better and be a more effective social work clinician, lawyer, community organizer, researcher, and educator while offering my services (paid and unpaid) to international K-12 schools, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, Operation Cross Roads Africa, U.S. Peace Corps, tourists, refugees, and the American Embassy.

Well, there was nobody to tell me, so I did what I usually do, forged on in faith. Besides, I had traveled through many African countries, including Ghana, for weeks and months at a

time before I decided to move and live here. However, visiting and living in Africa are truly very different matters. When I moved to Ghana in November 2000, I came with a husband, a 13-year-old son and an 11-year-old daughter. I now had to work, set up a home, integrate into a community, build new friends and a circle of support, deal with schools and activities for the children, continue to learn the culture, and build a balanced life. We had lived in Ghana as a family from September 1996 to September 1997, so we did have friends and quite a bit of experience and knowledge. But life is different when you are transitory versus settling. I wish I had known so many simple things.

First, I wish I had known about the traditional welcome. You have to always start from your right when you enter a room. Go around and shake everyone's hand. Remember to clasp hands, so when you pull out of the handshake you snap fingers. I have scratched, pinched, and stumbled through this traditional handshake many times. After you sit, you will be served water. Drink it slowly because sometimes the drink is *akpeteshie* (the traditional gin or alcohol often made in a homemade still). Once, I gulped mine down when I was thirsty and couldn't finish the next step, which is responding to the following question: "What is your mission?"

You must tell why you are there. Even if you were invited, phoned ahead, or wrote a letter requesting the visit, tradition demands that the question be asked of you. Most often, the question will be posed to the senior member or male in the visiting unit. It is not acceptable to say, "I am here because you invited me for dinner and I am hungry as hell, I didn't eat all day waiting on this!" You will come off better by being formal, even with friends. For example, I have often said, "Our family has always wanted to live and experience Africa. We know we have a history that extended thousands of years before our last 500 years in the USA. We have come to Ghana to learn and experience some of this unique culture and history. It is our privilege to share part of this journey and experience it with you."

That's right; I just channeled myself back to Easter speeches, church programs, and

various African American community functions. I used formal, emotional, and warm sentiments and informally became our family's spokesperson. Although after chugging *akpeteshie* I was not capable of saying anything, so I smiled and looked around until someone else spoke and my throat stopped burning.

Second, I wish somebody would have told me that in Ghana it is a taboo to use the left hand in public for almost anything. In Ghanaian culture the left hand is used for only "unclean" things, so even though you wash it, it is never used to greet, wave, eat, or pass money. If one must use their left hand, it is important to cross it with your right hand and apologize for utilizing your left hand. I have now stopped eating with my left hand and I am still working to stop waving with it. It requires conscious effort. Not long ago, I waved at a small child and he waved back with his left hand. His mother immediately admonished him and pulled his ear; harsh but effective behavioral training. So now when I forget and use my left hand, I pull or tug my left ear. I don't hurt myself, but it is a good reminder.

Third, I wish somebody would have told me that in Ghana the sense of personal space is very different. I know western culture generally requires about ten or more inches between people. In Ghana, people readily touch you. They grab your hand and show you the way when you are lost and ask for help. They may touch you to just ask your name or where you are from. I personally am a hugger and love to feel the warmth of people I care about. I also gladly hug any new person I meet. But I am not used to being crammed in public transit vehicles so tight that I have to crawl over people to get a seat. I am not used to being pushed while standing in line or simply walked over, around or in front of, like I am not there.

Once I was standing in line at a bank. The line was long and slow. The man behind me was so close I could feel him on my back each time he shifted or huffed at the slow speed in which we were being served. I decided to use humor versus the "girl from the hood" approach (which would have entailed yelling "Get out of my space, brotha!"). I turned and

smiled and said, "Any closer and we would be having sex. And I usually require dinner, several dates, and some intense bonding first." His eyes got big. He smiled and stepped back and apologized profusely for crowding me. People in the line laughed and begged him to be patient in line and to respect his auntie. This approach was more fun than my usual: "Could you get up off my butt, please?" request. Well, you have a choice; the narrowed body space can be utilized to your advantage. Take the opportunity to make a new friend, cultivate a date, discuss life, or just complain about slow service, bad traffic, politics, or "what is needed in Ghana."

Fourth, I wish I would have known that being invited to a funeral is just like being invited to a party in the USA. It does not matter that you do not know the deceased or anyone else in the family. Funerals are events that can last for the entire day, weekend, or week.

It is customary to hire a band, traditional dancers, and a deejay and to provide lavish food, beverages, and activities. It is a bit like an Irish wake, a New Orleans funeral march, or the event cleanup and departure of family after a funeral in the USA. After all the mourning, the funeral service, burial and meal, the affair changes. Family and close friends stay and share memories. You laugh, cry, share gossip, and enjoy each other. Then everyone complains that this closeness and celebration should not just happen at funerals. You depart and promise to stay in touch, attend the next upcoming wedding, or help plan the family reunion. And of course nothing happens until the next funeral brings you all together again.

The Ghanaian funeral has some similar sentiments. While living in Ghana, I have rarely seen a dead body, gone to a church service, or to a burial. Instead, I have attended traditional funerals where food and drinks are served, entertainment is provided, and the family is consoled in a beautiful open space. Gifts are presented to the family and guests give monetary donations to help with the expenses. Family members wear special clothes and designated colors that can depend on ethnicity, class/statute, age, and/or gender of the deceased. Guests are invited to learn and perform special dances and songs. You meet

new people, colleagues, old friends, and neighbors. It is the height of social events. Do go to a funeral if you are invited – it is a wonderful glance at Ghanaian culture.

Fifth, I wish someone would have told me how many requests I would get for help with a U.S. visa, a marriage, or for my address or phone number. Many Ghanaians truly believe the story that has been spun. They think if they go to the U.S., they will quickly find a job and work very hard for six months. They will then return to Ghana and use the money to start a business and start building a house. When I try to explain how difficult it is to find a job and the expensive or high cost of living in the U.S., I get mixed reactions. Some people feel I am lying and just do not want to help anyone, or that I am uncertain about their commitment to work. I have no connections at the U.S. Embassy to help people get a visa, and after sponsoring and supporting ten different African students in the U.S., our family and friends there are overly stressed and feel they have helped enough. I will not recall all the episodes of debts, disappearances, and other minor disappointments experienced by me and family. But most importantly, I live in Ghana now, and cannot prove that I can house and feed someone in the U.S. while I am living in Ghana. I often recommend the U.S. lottery as an option. The process is free, and citizens from Ghana and Kenya seem to get more chances to win an American visa than any other Africans.

Since I am already married, I just laugh at marriage proposals now. But they are common for single and married women. Many people will declare their love or ask you to marry them just because they believe it could be economically advantageous for both of you. "Will you marry me?" is a proposal to build a life together. Love may come, but respect and a shared purpose is considered a valuable foundation upon which to build a marriage as well. I now only give my cell phone number or email address out to new people I meet. This allows me the power to cut inappropriate communication when needed.

Sixth, I wish I would have known the true meaning of GMT. To most of the world it means Greenwich Mean Time, which refers

to the mean solar time at The Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London. In Ghana, GMT means Ghana Maybe Time. Now, being an African American, I must admit I am familiar with CPT (Colored People's Time). Generally, many things in our community start late and our people just shake their head and say, "You know us. We gotta do better." Well Ghana Maybe Time takes CPT to a whole different level.

One day I went to a Naming Ceremony for a new baby. I was so excited to learn that the affair started at 5:00 a.m. and would be completed by sunrise. I got to the family house promptly at 5:00 a.m., dressed in the required blue and white, with my baby gift in hand. I rang the door bell and after ten minutes someone finally came to the gate. Their gatekeeper found me a chair and asked me to sit on the porch. After about 30 minutes, members of the family came out to greet me and thank me for coming. They were wearing robes or wraps and still had the fresh smell of toothpaste on their breaths. I joined the gatekeeper and used my truck to go pick up the table, chairs, and other equipment needed for the affair.

Back at the house, we set things up and decorated. People started to arrive between 8:30 and 9:00. I asked my friend if I got the wrong time; the response was, "Oh, you have been here long enough to know about Ghana Maybe Time, Auntie Rose. You tell people 5:00 and they will probably remember at 6:00 and by 7:00 they will be on their way and by 8:00 maybe they get here and by 9:00 surely it will have started or people will still be there to receive you and share a drink with you anyway." I was encouraged not to take time so literally, because there is always more time. I have been to very few events that start on time in Ghana. It took me years to learn to pack a bag with a snack, writing pad, and reading materials so that I would not feel like I was wasting too much time in Ghana. I learned I could not schedule three to four events in a day and to be happy if I could accomplish two. There are exceptions, and some things start pretty close to the given time. But, when it comes to social events, it is rare unless you meet other people who are

preoccupied with the false belief that "time is money," or "time is more important than people." Time is just time in Ghana.

Now I truly enjoy the slower pace and you are always welcome, too, disposition or attitude, whenever you arrive in Ghana, but it takes some adjustment. I have watched many professional helpers, consultants, researchers, students, and visitors lose it when their two-week vacation or semester-long project does not yield the desired results because their host postponed things for a funeral, to accommodate another visitor, or to wait for delayed supplies.

My husband would always say to me softly, "Learn more patience or you will stroke out. You are not going to change this time issue in Ghana." He may be right, but I keep trying in the things I can control. I start lectures five minutes after the scheduled time at the University. This is my way of respecting GMT, but forcing some structure you can count on while ending the torture of many people who also come on time even though they expect nothing to happen. About 60% of the students in my classes are present when I start speaking, and that number is growing.

Seventh, I wish I had been more familiar with the traditional systems and ways of doing things and solving problems when I began my work as a social worker/consultant in Ghana. I had a case where I worked with a child that had been abused. Utilizing the way I had been trained in America, I was able to quickly identify which offices I would need to work with in the Ghana system. There was a Department of Social Welfare that sought to protect children, a method to get free medical care for the child, a special unit of police officers to investigate, a court system to prosecute and pursue justice, and homes and foster families to provide emergency care for children. The systems—though often overburdened—paralleled the Western or Global North approach. But operating in tandem to this system is the traditional system which avoids all of these agencies with the exception of medical care. It is proper to go to the head of the child's family and the victim and let them, a minister, or a chief seek to resolve the problem. They will decide how the

abuser will make restitution and be punished, and they will devise how to provide care and support to the child and their family. Once this is done, there is no need to involve government in any form. This system flourishes in rural areas when many services are not easily accessible, and in the urban areas when people want to avoid jail time and embarrassment. It is hard to work between the two systems and assure that your work is ethical and that the human rights of your client are protected; but you cannot ignore traditions that have been utilized for thousands of years. Many social workers use the existence of government systems as leverage. "Treat my client right, or we will go to the police and courts for a better outcome." Social workers in the community, schools, churches, and non governmental agencies are indeed approached by families to improve their bargaining positions in the traditional approaches to problem solving.

Lastly, I wish I would have known that the common saying "You're invited" does not always really mean that. Ghanaians always tell you, "You're invited" as they sit down and start a meal in their home, restaurant, or wherever. They invite you to whatever they have with this phrase. Just greet them, make eye contact or smile, and if they are consuming something, they will usually say, "You're invited." It is a courtesy. You are supposed to graciously say no. It is rude to eat or consume things in front of others and not share. Hence the saying, "You're invited." Well, I forgot to tell a visitor from Ohio this, and smiled as he joined a woman on her front porch eating *fufu* and goat meat. He readily accepted her invitation, entered the gated porch, and dug in. He did not even wait as she sent for water. He did not know you must wash your hands first. He consumed over half of the dish (another no-no). He thanked her and left with a big smile. I was embarrassed, but everything had happened so fast, I did not have time to educate him or explain. I did apologize to the woman, however. She waved her finger at me and was pretty much speechless.

Oh, well—you get the gist. Cultural adjustment is a lot of work. Many of my learned behaviors, cues, and responses do not work in Ghana. The country has its own set of values,

behaviors, and responses; but knowing this puts one ahead of the game. Be prepared to be out of touch and a bit off until you learn the "correct way in Ghana."

When you work and travel abroad you do miss familiar foods, language, customs, favorite pastimes, the company of family and friends, fast Internet, good roads, medical care you are accustomed to, etc. But you have a chance to gain so much more. You learn a new language, experience new foods, make new friends, adapt to a new environment, enjoy new pastimes, and truly become multicultural in your way of living and thinking. There is a big world to explore and, no matter what somebody tells you—it can be great fun!

You can learn more about my adjustments by visiting www.accrafoundation.us. A short book titled *In Ghana Here* details simple but profound learning via humor.

Other things I wish somebody would have told me include:

- Being called Mom, Auntie (you get the title due to gender, not age)
- That using a hiss to get someone's attention is acceptable
- *Dashes* (a tip or small sum of money or gift to show appreciation for a favor or purchase) are requested for pictures, purchases, requests for copies of photographs, carrying luggage, etc. "I beg you, I beg you, please dash me something!"
- Some people are prohibited from taking photos (belief that it captures part of the soul due to religion/culture)
- That I would get more invitations to attend church than anything else
- To avoid the use of the words "crazy" or "stupid" unless I felt like fighting
- Male preference/gender bias
- The concept of bargaining
- Chop/street food (watch for sanitary practices), avoid if not piping hot, and when people use their hands to serve you
- That belly-out and short skirts are for beach and dancing events, but not formal events (yet tight clothing is common)
- That people take the promises of gifts seriously; do not promise unless you know you can deliver

- That plumbing is fragile and often through septic tanks, so a box or basket near the toilet is usually for the paper you use
- It is not acceptable to talk about sex publicly
- The bias against homosexuality
- Same-sex dances, touching, and holding hands is okay in public but male and females should not show affection toward each other publicly
- People take criticisms about their country personally

Concluding Reflections

So how would this information have helped me be an effective professional helper in Ghana if somebody would have told me about it in advance? Well, I think it is very important to take the time to get to learn as much as you can, especially professional helpers, about a new country and culture well in advance of visiting (as a tourist, volunteer, fellow, teaching, practitioner, researcher, student, etc). When I arrived in Ghana, I could have told you the major ethnic groups, say a few key phrases in several languages, discuss the major religions, geography, politics and economic issues historically and currently. I had maps, an overview of art, literature and education in the country. All of this is helpful, but it does not prepare you for the small cultural nuances that you only truly learn when living among the people.

If I had known the importance of greetings, stating your mission (purpose of your visit) and always inviting people to join in on things I was partaking, I think I would have been more readily accepted in Ghana and had greater success as an educator and professional helper. I would have taken the extra time to invite people to join me and really used the opportunity to network with people of interest. Instead, I mocked the gesture and never understood it as the height of courtesy that it was and still remains. I know that being aware of the issues with close body space would have made me more tolerant and less hyper-vigilant. When you grow up in a large urban city as I did, the constant crowding usually means brace yourself for pick-pocketing, a worse crime, or a really rude and disrespectful pickup of a sexual

nature. Knowing this can prepare one to dress a bit more conservatively in cool cotton clothing and to try to carry less stuff when traveling via public transit and corridors.

I wish I knew about avoiding the use of the left hand. No one wants to unknowingly offend others when they are visiting with them. This is a task I still struggle with. I cannot imagine what the struggle would be for a left-handed person. This is a concept that is unfamiliar to me, but the belief that the left is for unclean things only is prevalent in Ghana. Knowing this detail can save you from being hissed at, passed over by taxis, and offending those you interact with. Knowing about the importance of funerals and what they are like in reality would have been helpful. A visitor can learn more proverbs, dances, songs and meet people ready to mingle, party, and socialize at a funeral. Our western concept of funerals limits our participation in one of Ghana's best socializing and cultural showcases.

Learning about traditional methods of problem solving and conflict helped me to be a social worker that was simply more culturally competent in Ghana. Students were shocked when this American teacher started to discuss it in class and require that our practice in Ghana be based in realism. This reality must be explored and studied. I know our classes became more practical and useful when we all admitted how we had to use, interact, and figure out how to respect this system while using government systems.

Time! I am still learning to be more patient and how to make the best of what is happening in my present despite my goals. No one was there to tell me. I am telling you, so that you may do better than I have.

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REFLECTIONS OF AN AMERICAN PROFESSOR AND GHANAIAN SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS: IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLABORATIVE TEACHING/LEARNING METHODS TO ASSESS INDIGENOUS SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN GHANA

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This narrative chronicles the reflections of an American Professor and Ghanaian social work students at the University of Ghana with the development of a collaborative teaching/learning model of instruction on how to provide social services to the vulnerable, particularly users of Ghanaian welfare services. The purpose of the model was to teach students from their self-identification of indigenous social problems, proposed methods of assessment, and incorporation of philosophical perspectives to address ethical dilemmas in the resolution of these problems. Finally, the authors will address lessons learned and the extent to which the model achieved its goal.

Introduction

"I remember vividly one hot afternoon during the second semester of the 2001/2002 academic year in a class of level 200 (Sophomores in the U.S.), students of Social Work waiting anxiously for a new lecturer to take us through the course, 'Philosophy of Social Work,' when suddenly an African American entered in the company of the head of the department. The excitement that followed her introduction as the new lecturer was expected since many students complained of the teaching style of the lecturer who had handled the course in the previous semester."

The narrative above is the recollection of my former student, George Domfe, about my initial introduction to the class and the reaction of his peers to me at the University of Ghana. Like George and his peers, I also was excited that first day of class but for different reasons. I was excited to meet them, of course, but also a bit nervous because before me was the development of a course mostly from scratch. Although I did have an old and dated syllabus,

I did not have any instructional resources, such as a text book, a bibliography, or multimedia materials to develop course content. Another drawback to getting off to a good start was the fact that I was not familiar with the students, either. Thus, given the lack of knowledge about the students and indigenous resources, the purpose of this narrative is to present cross-cultural strategies that I used in collaboration with students to create a social work course to teach them about indigenous social problems and the state of social welfare in their homeland. By all accounts, as a non-Ghanaian, it seemed that I lacked the knowledge to effectively teach Ghanaian students about social work assessment and interventions to arrest social problems specific to traditional culture in Ghana, including an understanding of ethics and philosophical, problem-solving strategies.

Now I was not a total novice about life in Ghana, or in West Africa for that matter. In 1999, I had made my first trip to Ghana with my then 10-year-old son, Jelani¹, as the principal investigator of a study to assess a social problem indigenous to the country. Prior to arrival, I engaged Dr. Phyllis Antwi, MD, PhD (Professor), who coordinated the study and secured a community nurse, Beatrice Addoh, to recruit all cases interviewed in 1999

and 2001-2002. Upon arrival, I met with Rev. Dr. Seth Ayettey, MD, PhD (Dean), and his committee; approved study, informed consent, and signed IRB documentation. They were both at the University of Ghana's School of Public Health and Medical School. In 1979, with a Fulbright-Hays² award I commenced my first trip to the continent of Africa traveling to Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Haute Volta (now Burkina Faso). In 1981, I followed this experience in West Africa by spending time in Dakar, Senegal taking part in a gerontology research study.

Thus, given these experiences with diverse African communities and cultures colonized by the French and British, I believed that the only way to be effective in teaching this diverse group of Ghanaian students was to implement what was, for them, an unconventional collaborative instructional/learning model. I could not be so arrogant as to assume that I had the knowledge and skills grounded in my western values to do this! So from day one, to the surprise of my students, I engaged them in this ongoing dynamic process throughout the course, teaching them the required content using much of the indigenous knowledge, values, ethics, and information that they provided. Throughout this narrative, my personal reflections, as well as those from former students George Domfe and Kwasi Boakyee Akosah, will be integrated to support the implementation, assessment, and effectiveness of this collaborative model.

Teaching Experiences in Ghana

As a Visiting Scholar and Study Abroad Professor at the University of Ghana, I taught in the Departments of Social Work (2001-2002) and African Studies (2005) as a primary investigator of field studies on social problems indigenous to Ghana. During my second trip to Ghana, I taught "Philosophy of Social Work," with a focus on an assessment of indigenous social problems to 134 undergraduate students. Professor Nana Araba Apt, the Director of the Centre for Social Policy Studies at the University of Ghana at the time, encouraged me to apply for a teaching position. My primary responsibilities consisted of teaching, advising, curriculum development for a conflict

resolution course, and conducting research studies.

During my third trip to Ghana, I taught "Social Issues in Ghana," with a focus on the rights of women and girls to a group of seven American and Japanese undergraduate and graduate students. The model for teaching this course was derived from my teaching experiences in 2002, and thus indigenous knowledge about Ghana was enhanced by service-learning projects, research experiences, guest lecturers, and field trips. Experts gave lectures on indigenous topics, such as the Ghanaian Fulbright Scholar who spoke about the history of slavery. Field trips included visits to a refugee camp for Liberians, a primary school in the shanty town of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Osu Children's Home orphanage, and faith-and-humanitarian-based NGO's, such as a respite site for the disabled called Bethany Projects' Hope for Life, CARE International, and Centre for Community Study, Action and Development (CENCOSAD). The learning experiences of these students were enriched by Ghanaian and American colleagues and former students as cultural guides.

Campus Life: Students and Faculty

In 1948 the College of the University of London established the University College of the Gold Coast. In 1961, its name was changed to the University of Ghana. The campus in Legon is located on a sprawling campus that overlooks Accra. In addition to many colleges, schools, and departments, there are also programs that address Ghana's culture and social problems such as indigenous language classes, and programs in ethnic dance, art, theatre, music, and drumming. There are also specialized departments and institutes that reflect the needs of West Africa, such as public health, nutrition, wetland preservation, malaria research and mosquito control, and economic development.

The campus had changed vastly between my first visit in 1999 and my last visit in 2010. There are additional colleges (especially graduate programs) and many more classroom buildings, dormitories, and an impressive state-of-the-art recreational facility with an Olympic-sized outdoor pool and diving board. All

facilities are air-conditioned and modernized—including the historic buildings—with students having access to on-line courses. All dorms house Internet cafés for a fee (few free sites on campus), and one can access materials on-line from the Balme Library. Currently, the campus has an enrollment of more than 32,000 students (26,000+ are undergraduates). Due to increased enrollment, many more courses are now offered through distance learning at sites throughout the country. Cohorts come to campus for short stays to take exams; local experts have written textbooks that reflect indigenous life, needs, and solutions. How things have changed!

The Legon campus was originally built to house only a few thousand elite students. During my tenure (2001–2002), the approximately 15,000 students overwhelmed the infrastructure and academic resources. Consequently there were frequent power outages, as well as inadequate waste disposal, running water, transportation, and housing (five or more students sleeping in two-bed dorm room), etc. General nutrition on campus was poor because few students could pay for adequate food; some ate only one meal a day. Teaching resources were overextended with inadequate computing or teaching technologies. The library lacked current periodicals, textbooks, or other collections that were adequate. Large class sizes were normal and faculty rarely had the help of teaching assistants. For example, one of my colleagues taught 800 psychology students in one class, a single section, with no assigned T.A.

It is under these conditions that my students studied and prepared for class, often huddling together reading a single copy of a textbook. In many ways, they were more motivated and personally equipped to face the global world than many of my American students. Most Ghanaian students are aware that their success could be determined by their ability to work in a different country—especially western—to support their families and communities. Their cultural sensitivity, language skills (indigenous, English, and foreign), adaptability, and international awareness were always impressive.

I can hardly complain. I lived on campus in free and adequate housing, as did all faculty, along with my family which included a 7th grader who attended (Abraham) Lincoln International School (K – 12th grade). However, I must confess that I was challenged during my teaching experience even though most of the time things went very well for us. Like the students, we had to deal with frequent power outages, water stoppage, and slow (if any) Internet. In very hot weather (11 a.m. – 1 p.m.) I walked about a quarter of a mile, across a campus that was not designed to be pedestrian-friendly, to teach a two-hour, 15-week course. I taught my class standing behind a lectern on a platform in an open lecture facility with no doors or windows, with an old black board that could not be written on. Ineffective ceiling fans moved the hot air around when the power was on, and most of the time the microphone was useless. My students sat in antique wooden desks placed in regimented rows; often other students, taking notes or just listening, would crowd the space, standing on either side of the formal lecture room. None of this stopped me from being excited every time I walked into the presence of my students!

First Day in Class: Playing to Win!

Even before the first day of class I felt that teaching “Philosophy of Social Work - 202” would be a mutually challenging experience for the students and me. No matter what, I wanted to “play to win” and have the best class ever! I was a bit nervous thinking about teaching students with such diverse backgrounds in my ancestral home. And I especially thought that my accent and interactive style of teaching, where I encouraged and expected input from the students, may be a problem. My style of teaching, engagement, and collaboration, was radically different from any of their previous classroom experiences. I knew that the students had most likely never experienced a learning/teaching partnership, especially since their educational system mirrored traditional English domination (since Ghana was colonized by the British). Thus, many of their practices still reflected these influences. They learn by

taking meticulous notes; often never looking up during a lecture. For the most part, this practice was at odds with my methods, as I encourage active participation, daily attendance, and critical thinking with significantly less note taking and memorization. Furthermore, I had no idea what the students thought of me, their fears, concerns, and what they wanted to achieve. It was clear that I was right about my accent being a problem, as one can ascertain from this vivid reflection by George:

"Surprisingly, however, the students started murmuring soon after she had started teaching! One student sitting closer whispered, rather dejectedly, 'Hmmm! this Professor will definitely make things even more difficult than they were last semester.' Then a lady, whose name just came to mind (Anita Adjei), an Ashanti like myself, shouted and complained in Twi to me 'asem ni! enti wote!' Literally, she meant, 'What a problem! Do you get a bit of what she is saying?' I must confess, that was how I got to appreciate the ensuing 'pandemonium' and an expression of hopelessness among the majority of students. Even though I could hear the professor loud and clear, I wished she had slowed down a bit! Then after about five minutes into this seeming confusion, a student shouted in Twi, 'yenti hwee' (literally means, 'we do not hear anything'). Then spontaneously, the whole class burst into laughter. I could see expression of confusion written on the face of the professor.

"As a teacher myself, I thought I could help! I raised my hand and when the Professor granted the platform, I pleaded with her to talk slowly as most of the students were not comfortable with her 'American slangs [accent].' Soon after, we started experiencing the best of her

when she started speaking like the British! Admirably, by the close of the day, she was almost speaking 'Ghanaian English'. Her ability to adapt quickly was unique; students were all over her even after the first day of encounter!"

It was good for George to share this reflection. I had no idea how they perceived my first interaction with them. However, my social work skills kicked in, and I did pick up on their seemingly abrasive (nonverbal and verbal) behavior. What I learned from this experience is that one should be humble, a good listener, and willing to accept constructive criticism from students while being flexible and adaptable. Not taking their behavior personally, I got off to a good start! Listening to George, I got down off the platform and, walking through the aisles in this very hot and overcrowded room, I listened and received instructive feedback from the class. This one decision, thinking fast on my feet and changing on a dime, made the rest of the semester a success for all of us! This significant event, or "oh-my-gosh" moment, also established lifelong relationships with many of the students. George was right, and from then on the students competed to carry my books, briefcase, and newspapers to and from class while engaging me in small talk for as long as possible. Out of great respect they not only called me "Prof," but also "Auntie" This was a community, and I was learning from them. I realized that if I wanted this to be a mutual, collaborative exchange, then I would have to *walk the walk and talk the talk*. How could this be a mutual exchange if I did not listen to them? Now in reality I was not totally out of the woods, but I had gained my footing and the confidence of the students. A great achievement for the first day of class. The next hurdle was to develop the course content for the syllabus.

Collaboration:

The Teaching/Learning Model

"During the first day, she neither introduced a topic nor gave out course outline, a known

tradition at the University of Ghana. At the University of Ghana, during the first lecture of the semester, a lecturer will usually give a course outline to students. This is followed by discussions on where and when to get appropriate learning materials. Students never miss such meetings for anything! After this meeting, some students will never enter the class again³ until the last meeting when the lecturer meets to tell students areas where questions should be expected (for the 'long-essay'; the final exam). She rather told us briefly about the course and how social work in general is handled in American institutions."

George's account is fairly accurate and corroborates my memory of this event so many years later. My decision not to distribute the syllabus that first day was intentional. I was challenged by the fact that I knew my teaching style and lack of cultural knowledge as described earlier would most likely conflict with theirs. In fact, I wanted to ensure that the course content and assignments were relevant and authentic for Ghanaian social work students. I needed to find a way to integrate their culture, indigenous personal experiences, knowledge, values, and problem solving strategies for ethical dilemmas with those prescribed for best practice by international humanitarian organizations and western social work accreditation bodies.

Of particular importance was the extent to which the course could reflect the professional ethical codes and standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and Discrimination Against Women, and the Ghanaian Constitution, including laws protecting the rights of women and children. Additionally, I needed to weave traditional practices into the course because these would be the indigenous standards for the students. So, as we all learned in our first clinical course: to conduct an effective

assessment, start where the client is at! I had to get to know the students and their personal perceptions of traditional concerns and social problems in Ghana.

"She then shared with us how Americans cherish our (Ghanaian) extended family system and even advised that we get prepared to share with the class so many things on our different cultures. (The class was made up of students of diverse cultural backgrounds). I drew from her that she wanted to encourage us to respect certain things of our own. All the while, students were not impatient; we have already developed confidence in her!"

During this meeting, I expressed my strengths and limitations teaching the course by telling them that, although I was from the west, I did not have the ability of indigenous problem recognition or the answers to solving them. I told them that they, themselves, had the wherewithal to define, assess, and to solve social welfare problems effectively and to investigate the ethical complications of such problem solving. I assured them that I was a good facilitator and educator, and would invest my experience, values, knowledge, and skills in their learning. Valuing input from everyone, I encouraged the students to bring their knowledge, skills, values, and experiences to the table.

This is how George reflected on their potential role as collaborators, full participation, and freedom of speech:

"In her class, everybody was a 'lecturer' and nobody was ever wrong! Students were free to share their views on how and why certain traditions and cultures were observed by their tribesmen."

Now that I had their confidence in me, I could move on. I took an additional session to gather necessary information from them before I distributed the syllabus and assignments. This is what I did, as described by George:

"In the subsequent meeting, she asked us to write our names, age, tribe, gender and occupation. The class became lively as we started talking about our occupations and their accompanying problems."

Profile of Students in the Social Work Course

Of the 134 multilingual students enrolled in the course, more than half the class was male (55%), which would be highly unusual in an undergraduate social work class in the U.S. The students' ages ranged from 21 to 48, the median age being 26. They were mostly sophomores, many of whom were working on their second degree. The majority were Christian (75%). Twenty-one ethnic groups were represented: Ada, Akan, Akim, Ashanti, Bono, Dagbani, Dagao, Ewe, Hausa, Fante, Frafra, Ga, Ga-Dangbe, Guan, Konkomba, Krobo, Kusasi, Mende³, Nzemal, Twi, Tampulma from the major regions in Ghana (Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Central, Eastern, Fanti, Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Western, Volta). Within the class were recent graduates of secondary schools, school teachers, military personnel (training in the U.S.), government ministry administrators, future tribal chiefs and queen mothers, a refugee and internally displaced person, persons with disabilities, villagers, urban residents, children and wives of politicians, professors, medical doctors, and the wife of a former Ghanaian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. There was also representation from the extremely impoverished and wealthy communities.

Sadly, three prominent students in this class have died, all of whom were greatly admired by their classmates and our family. One, a stand-out in class, presented as a student who persevered against all odds to get an education. Blinded at an early age when stricken by measles, other students and young boys guided him to class. Robert was the first person in his village to attend university, and he was a champion of women's rights. He was a small man, short in stature, outspoken, humorous, honest, and spiritual. He had an

infectious smile and fantastic memory; hundreds of phone numbers, addresses, and quotes were stored in his brain.

The following passage is from the journal of Brenda McGadney-Douglass, detailing her last visit with Mr. Abukuri before returning to the States. It is from these conditions that he returned to school every year:

June 12, 2002: *He is staying with Inspector _____ at the Osu Police Station since his dorm is closed 'til classes resume in September. This community looks like an Army barrack ... There is a large horse corral and barn...dilapidated, dirty, smelly, and unpaved streets...staying in a single room ... practice on a new and faster Braille machine...sleeping with six other students on two chairs...I give him a pair of Jelani's pants... He tells me he will be going to his village, Sandema, at the end of the month... Upper East Region... housing in the village is a mud hut; the roof is in great need of repair ...no money to repair it and during the rainy season, sometimes he can't lie down and sleep at night. Often, it rains all night and to have some peace about not having the walls collapse on him and being buried, he sleeps in the middle of the room in a chair...taking care of his retarded brother with an amputated arm ...responsible for feeding and clothing him...due to a lack of rain in the region this year there is a shortage of food and fresh water and the water outside has flies on it. There has been an outbreak of cholera in his village. He wants help to repairing the roof. His parting comments to me: 'I know my situation, if I think about it I can't learn' '...meeting you is God's work. Momma⁵, I am still living on the money that you gave me weeks ago.' He asked fondly of my family, wishing us good travels!*

Development of Indigenous Course Content, Assignments, and Cases

George narrates how I engaged him and his classmates in collaboration:

"She then followed with a question, 'How will you deal with some of these problems as a practicing social worker?' Divergent opinions expressed on this question even made the class more lively."

Specifically, I asked the students to respond to the following questions:

- When you graduate, what do you think will be the most pressing social problem facing Ghanaians that you will have to address as a practicing social worker?"
- How do you propose to handle the problem?

Following a content analysis of the student-identified social problems (or presenting problem), 14 social problems emerged:

1. Trokosi System (defined and discussed later in this narrative)
2. Female Genital Mutilation
3. Kayayoo girls (head porters/child labor)—a term used by the Ga people, an ethnic group in the Greater Accra region, to describe women who engage in carrying loads on their head for a fee: "kaya" from Hausa meaning wares or goods; "yoo" from Ga meaning woman
4. Streetism or hawkers (children selling wares on the street/child labor)
5. Widows' rites (mandatory participation in rituals when husband dies, such as shaving of head, beatings, drinking water to wash corpse, etc.; elderly women are frequently abused in this fashion)
6. Crime (frequent false accusations and imprisonment of non-Ghanaian, African foreigners)

7. Self-abuse (drugs, alcohol, and prostitution)
8. HIV/AIDS (especially family-to-family member transmission)
9. Poverty (the mandatory "Cash-n-Carry" system of purchasing medical care prior to treatment)
10. Rape (incest)
11. Municipal sanitation and leprosy (displaced and poor persons living in squalor and relationships to growing health problems and disease)
12. Teenage pregnancy
13. Polygamy (multiple wives and battery/domestic violence)
14. Vernacular illiteracy in local ethnic languages (refugees, mostly Liberians)

Throughout the course, their answers allowed me to engage them in an ongoing interactive and dynamic partnership and the development of content by addressing authentic indigenous ethical dilemmas identified by them.

Given this background, I assigned students to one of the 14 social problems based on data I obtained from the attendance roster I created. Each group had between 9 and 11 students. Student self-selection would not have consisted of diverse groups due to hierarchy, class, gender, ethnic tribal group, land vs. landless, region of birth, languages spoken, etc. Years later, I was informed that I made the right decision. For example, in 2005 I learned from my research assistant Ms. Nibewun-Tarko (a student in 2002) that due to her ethnicity as a Konkomba, she was very quiet in class. She had been displaced as a teenager, never to return to Northern Ghana. Due to a multi-ethnic war, she "passed" (changed faith from Christian to Moslem, spoke indigenous languages in dialect of majority groups) to avoid further discrimination. This is her written narrative of that experience:

"I remember, during my primary and secondary days, when I sometimes had to hide my identity as a Konkomba, and I made very few friends for fear of intimidation."

There were occasions when we were on a school farm, all the school children of the Nanumbas talked about is abusing and despising Konkombas regarding them as people who are uncivilized...Other Konkombas denied their identity and want to be like the other person who feels superior (some Konkombas cannot speak the language to pass as a non-Konkomba). Nevertheless, the merchants married Konkomba women because such women are reputed to be hardworking and loyal to their spouses."

The broad objective of the assignment was for each group to respond to a hypothetical client's presenting social problem (or case) and to solve a specific ethical dilemma; namely, "What should the social worker do?" Students were given instructions: Their primary assignment was to develop a problem resolution strategy that would do no harm to the client (physical and mental abuse, death, abandonment, displacement) by assessing the client's presenting problem from three alternative or philosophical perspectives available, to practicing Ghanaian social workers: western social work ethical codes; governing laws including the Constitution of Ghana, customary or traditional practices (Chiefs, Queen mothers, village authorities and other community-based stakeholders); and codes representing international human rights. Specifically, groups were required to complete the following:

1. Paper: case, comprehensive assessment, and proposed resolution
2. Provide evidence of interviews and field visit(s) (photos, brochures, audiotapes, letters)
3. Present evidence documenting and validating the severity of the social problem (brochures, and journal, newspaper, and magazine articles, etc.)
4. Group photo
5. Oral presentation

Groups were given a structured rubric, including the number of paragraphs for each section. I also authored 14 indigenous problem-specific cases for each group; authenticated through consultations with faculty, experts, and students (such as the one below about widow's rites) with the aid of George as the expert.

"One day, when I had an opportunity to 'lecture' the class on the tradition of widowhood rites as observed by the Ashantis, many students had to follow me to my dormitory for more information. The teaching style of the Professor had made some of us 'lecturers,' and in the class I had the following as my trusted students: Miss Anita Agyei, Mrs. Kuffour, Mrs. Doris Oti-Dankwah and the late Judith Asibi Tarko (May her soul rest in peace). I never missed any of her lectures; it was so interesting to miss! I always had a new story to tell. On few occasions, the Good Professor invited experts to talk to us on issues she considered technical."

Here is a typical widow's rites case as an example of an ethical dilemma:

A fisherman drowns and his wife and four children make preparations to have his funeral in three months. Relatives and friends have given the wife funds to keep the husband's body in the freezer at the morgue in Korle-Bu Community (near Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, Accra, Ghana). The wife seeks counseling from a social worker because she is depressed about undergoing the traditional 'widow's rites.' She is also concerned about potential conflicts over the distribution of her husband's wealth and property. She is the first wife. A second wife with two children left him two years ago and moved to the United States. However, the second wife is

expected to attend the funeral with her children. Your spouse (you are the social worker) died last year and you were subjected to such rites. What advice and counseling would you give to the first wife and her family?

To help the groups begin their work, I gave a printed copy (too costly at that time for most to do it themselves) of the rubric to each group at our initial meeting when I introduced myself as their "personal consultant." At their invitation, I met with groups as often as possible outside of class, ranging from once to twice weekly for most groups. In this role, I critiqued the team's progress, made referrals to University faculty, librarians, community representatives, governmental Ministries, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), or International NGOs to obtain authentic information, published and media resources. This role required me to do my homework, too, as I needed to find and evaluate such sources for my students while they were beginning their assignments. During the semester, more than half of the groups invited me to accompany them in the field when they interviewed potential victims, government officials, or other sources. Because the teaching environment was severely limited in terms of technical resources that American students would take for granted, I often supported the completion of my student projects by providing access to my own laptop computer, tape recorder, camera, and funds for travel and food.

Because secondary, published sources for research were often very limited, I requested that students authenticate and evaluate their assigned social problem by conducting interviews with individuals and groups in their own communities, and to document their efforts with photographs, popular print media, and to provide references to specific international and Ghanaian laws. In order to assure the acceptance of my students and to certify the legitimacy of their work, I gave all groups letters of introduction on University of Ghana letterhead that explained the objectives of the assignment and how respondents could contact

me directly. Relative to confidentiality, privacy, and adherence to standards set forth for the protection of human subjects in the U.S., the standard differs to some degree. The details of this student/teacher based project were discussed with the Coordinator of the Social Work Department and Director of the Centre for Social Policy Studies, and their blessings were given. Although the University of Ghana does have a human subject-review process, I was not referred. Thus, to address exploitation and ethical concerns, certain safeguards were put into place. I discussed issues of informed consent and stated that everyone (including myself) had to ask permission of persons to be interviewed and have their picture taken (names nor pictures distributed). All consents were given orally. In addition to being told what the purpose of the project was, participants were told how the project would benefit student learning, and that they did not have to answer any questions that they chose not to. I paid all interviewees in Ghanaian currency. It took the students weeks to arrange the field interviews; due to lack of phone service, several trips had to be made by *tro-tro* (a cramped commuter van). Finally, I believe that to avoid the appearance of exploitation in emerging countries, the approval of research and/or instructional projects using human subjects should be approved by a committee representing scholars, stakeholders, and traditionalists so that indigenous persons can be protected.

Lessons Learned and Teachable Moments: Personal Risk and Tolerance Assessment

This project was based in reality, and in the zest and zeal to effectively complete all aspects of the assignment, I had to come face-to-face with assessment of personal risk and tolerance. Several events occurred in and outside the classroom which became teachable moments. All four of these situations took tremendous acts of courage and maturity on the part of everyone involved.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Self Abuse (drugs, alcohol, and prostitution) were two subjects that placed some or all group members attempting to complete the projects

at personal risk of physical harm. Relative to FGM, two male students took a 34-hour trip to Northern Ghana (near the border of Burkina Faso), to collect data on the practice. On the return trip, the students were physically beaten when they discovered their bus driver's criminal behavior in girl trafficking (soliciting for sex trade). When the students on the State Transport Bus witnessed the driver picking up five young girls (14 or 15 years of age), they taped the conversations and informed the driver that he had been recorded and was breaking the law. After being discovered, the driver stopped at a bus station many miles from Greater Accra, then he and a fellow bus driver destroyed the recorder and severely beat the students. Although their interviews with the FGM practitioners were lost, the students were able to save high quality photos of the elderly women, including their traditional homes (mud huts) and surgical site. One was still conducting the surgery on girls mostly from Burkina Faso, while the other had ceased, admonishing her daughters not to have this practice done on her granddaughters. Following documentation of their injuries at a hospital, the students reported the incident to the police. The Minister for Women and Children filed a police report as well and, in a written letter, sought my support to prosecute the drivers. Unfortunately, since the date was set for me to return to the United States, I was unable to remain in the country to testify and the case was dropped. However, we did use this as a teachable moment in class, discussing under what circumstances (ethical and practical) does a student on assignment become involved in identifying criminal behavior and, if one chooses to do so, what preparations are needed for personal protection and security.

In another incident that took us in harm's way (yes, I was there), a group completed their project on Self-Abuse by interviewing alcoholics, drug abusers, and prostitutes in an obscure and very depressed "drug market" adjacent to a squatters' area of Accra called Sodom and Gomorrah, or Old Fadama. I later discovered that most of the students had never been to this area and only knew of its existence from news accounts of poor, displaced squatters living on ground polluted by human

and industrial waste. So for the most part, they were unfamiliar with the dangers that they/we were walking into. This was a place with overwhelming filth, trash, and lots of drug-making activity. A classmate of George's, Mr. A., became a self-appointed expert when he volunteered as a cultural guide for our group, walking us through Sodom and Gomorrah and introducing us to noncriminal residents. As a student working on the sanitation project, Mr. A. became interested in communities like this, and to this day continues in his civic work as a banker to advocate for the plight of displaced persons. Below is an excerpt from his 2002 handwritten, six-page narrative which best describes Sodom and Gomorrah and why travelers to the area should be self-aware:

"It is a place which is very densely populated with about 18,000 people [2009 report exceeds 55,000] occupying the landmass of 2 hectares [5 acres]. The people found there are mostly migrants from rural Northern Ghana who came to Accra to make a living... The condition of the area is so deplorable that in the strictest sense of the phrase, no human being is supposed to live there. The structures found there are mostly wooden and have been erected on every available space. Drainage is nothing to talk about. There are no gutters in the area and one could see stagnant and dirty water all around. There was an instance where we found one pregnant lady who has to jump a pool of water before she gets to her bedroom... people throw their waste at any available space... The most repudiating filth to the eye are women who are cooking and selling by gutters and people rushing to buy these foods. Children are found walking in this dirty environment barefooted and hardly wearing anything. They have to make up bathrooms where the residents have

to pay 500 Cedis before they can take a bath....

So picture this: it is hot and we are in an open area with a narrow exit, with nothing but a plank to walk over a gutter filled with filthy water below us. Just as we completed the interviews with drug sellers/users and one of the young prostitutes, the local drug kingpin—who was clearly armed and wearing a long buttoned-up trench coat—approached the group gesturing to his mouth with his hands, stating that he wanted “chop, chop” meaning he wanted money for food. This is a password for bribe. I introduced myself and looked at him face-to-face, and without flinching I told him that I would not be giving him “chop, chop.” He was not a happy camper. Fear was not an emotion I could give into. Sensing the potential danger we walked away fast, quickly passing tin shacks, open sewers, and rough-board walkways without looking back!

Later that week in class, we talked about the perils of getting assignments completed in the field and the need for advanced preparation, anticipation of threats to personal safety, and the need for complete disclosure to legitimize our roles in communities that might be hostile. Although the students collected remarkable interviews, I informed them that our experiences demonstrated that we were all a little bit naïve and that we probably should have developed methods for completing the assignment without exposing anyone to personal risk. Students’ naïveté may have stemmed from sheltered and isolated backgrounds due to schooling, socio-economic status, and/or living in rural areas. I made a note to myself that I would never again expose students to risk because of my own naïveté or students’ enthusiasm.

As noted by George relative to the indigenous cases:

“On the whole, we learnt a lot, especially the religious and cultural practices that were hereto ‘a non-talk-about-issues’ at our various homes ...we advanced our level of cultural and religious tolerance, we ended up appreciating even why a

mad person behaves the way he does.”

Tolerance relative to the Sharia Law and Trokosi System were also teachable moments for us. Discussions about these practices were very lively, combative, and informative when addressing ethical dilemmas and social work practice. Keep in mind this was a diverse class of students, 99% Ghanaian, who may have been the victims or perpetrators of intolerance and discriminatory practices. In emerging countries like Ghana social work practice is often restricted by the presence of cultural dimensions and traditions that are designed to sustain the community’s ability to maintain autonomy, self-determination and hierarchical roles. This means that a member of a family or village is obligated to adhere to traditional values and mores, or risk facing dire consequences (banishment, isolation, death, etc). This community orientation is in contrast to the individual-orientation and the value of personal autonomy and responsibility of social work as practiced in the United States and most western cultures.

The issue of Sharia Law was a hot topic, especially with the importance of religion among mostly Christian Ghanaians. Although there are religiously mixed marriages, there does not seem to be widespread appreciation of religious diversity. As the professor, I could not walk away from it; thus we all learned a lot from the experience even though most were not converted. One student, Mrs. Kadri—a devout Moslem, mother of five, and wife of former Ghanaian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia—stood up as another expert on Sharia Law following a rousing and heated discussion on gender rights, especially in the Islamic community of Northern Ghana. Also keep in mind this discussion took place approximately six months after September 11th. After this lecture, Mrs. Kadri asked my permission to share her understanding of the practice in the form of a presentation. Below is my own recollection of Mrs. Kadri’s presentation to her classmates:

“When Hajia Meri Abukari Kadri, a stately, tall, and strikingly

beautiful Islamic student, presented the Moslem practice of Sharia to the class, which was comprised of 75% Christian students, there was an uproar (British-style court room yelling and jostling). Calmly, she discussed the relationship of Sharia Islamic laws to the case of a Nigerian woman, a mother, who was convicted of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning. (The case was overturned in 2004 by Islamic clerics due to a technicality.) Although not necessarily convinced that the practice did not violate humanitarian laws, I (we) walked away with a greater understanding of the practice. We understood that not all Moslems practice it and that there is a long history and aspects of the law that are unique. She explained that there is a lack of involvement of women in decision-making and implementation of Sharia Law and that empowerment efforts that include women are being attempted to help them. At the end of the presentation, the dominantly Christian class looked up to Hajia as a leader in her group project and community."

Mrs. Kadri's unselfish leadership, intelligence, caring style, generosity, fairness, and ethics were well appreciated as she led her group through a greater understanding of the plight of non-Ghanaians being falsely accused, arrested, and convicted for crimes generally said to have occurred in upscale communities in Ghana. I admired her because of her stance on the rights of women and children, and that she did not fit the typical stereotype of a Moslem woman. She attended college with her daughter, wore stunning outfits with various styles of head wrap, and she drove a car! She was a mature adult earning honor degrees in Religion and Bachelors Degree in Social Work and Sociology. She was very outgoing and, at her invitation, my family along with several students attended the wedding of one of her family members at her

compound in May of 2002. It was a wonderful opportunity to witness an Islamic celebration of marriage. Sadly, a few days after my arrival in 2005, I was invited to her residence—along with former President of Ghana, Jerry Rawlings, numerous dignitaries and women representing groups founded by Mrs. Kadri—to speak at her Du'a, a customary Islamic celebration of life, which occurred 40 days after her untimely death in a car accident. She was 42 years old.

For me as an African American, the most challenging visit in my ancestral home of Africa was the group's interview with animist priests who adhered to the rites of the Trokosi System: a form of slavery. In this religious practice, young girls are held in bondage to atone for offenses or crimes (real or unreal) committed by a family member against the animist deity. Although this form of slavery has been outlawed by the Ghanaian constitution since 1992, it is still practiced in several districts. We traveled nearly two hours outside of Greater Accra to interview 18 – 25 animist priests at an outside community center. We all had to set aside our disdain for this practice. Showing great restraint and respect for the priests, I modeled an out of body disconnect, demonstrating what social workers have to do when facing a client whose values are in contrast to your own. We were not allowed to see or interview a Trokosi. The priests, ranging in age from what appeared to be a young teenager to an elder, did not believe that the practice was wrong and repeatedly said that it was a calling. If they did not adhere to the gods and willingly become animist priests, then they would die or become ill. Although the practice continues, several international NGOs have been instrumental in liberating and retraining some girls and women who were Trokosi.

Assignment Completed: Paper and Presentation

On the last day of class, 14 student papers describing decision making strategies for solving ethical dilemmas for indigenous social problems were presented by each student group. Groups submitted an authentic but fictionalized presenting problem (or case

example) of an ethical dilemma, such as the following from the group that assessed the Trokosi System:

Mercy S., now 31, was sent to a Trokosi shrine at the age of seven. This shrine is located at Takpo near Adedome in the North Tongo District of the Volta Region in the Republic of Ghana. She was sent there by her parents to be a Trokosi as a reparation/atonement for a crime committed by her grandfather. The grandfather was accused of stealing a fowl. The owner of the fowl went to a shrine and cursed the family as a result of which mysterious deaths began to occur in the family. A local priest, who was consulted, revealed the crime.

To stop the deaths, the family was asked to bring a young virgin girl to the shrine to appease the gods. Trokosi in the local Ewe language is translated "slave wife of the gods." As a Trokosi, Mercy was expected to offer free lifetime labour for the economic benefit and sexual gratification of the shrine or fetish priest.

Mercy reported that she was defiled (raped) at the age of 11, and subsequently had four children with the priest. She reported that as typical of shrine chores, she worked on the farm of the priest together with other Trokosis, but had no share in the harvest.

Even though her parents were supposed to provide her needs, she was totally abandoned. No assistance came to her. She had to work on her own to fend for her children. The priest had no hand in their upkeep. She also could not read and write as she was denied access to education. On one occasion, when life became unbearable, she ran away to her parents but they refused to accept

her back for fear of incurring the wrath of the gods. With no alternatives at her disposal she returned to the shrine to continue in her servitude. Having heard of an NGO working on the liberation of Trokosi girls, she ran away from the shrine to seek help. What should the social worker do?

I showed the Power Point presentation which included field photos documenting each of their indigenous social problems. Teaching this class was a very rewarding experience. The students and I learned a lot about Ghanaian culture and lifestyle. During "up close and personal" field visits and interviews, we learned about the impact of social problems, many of which were unfamiliar. Their learning reflected exposures that extended far beyond the classroom; visits to such places as the leprosarium provided startling new knowledge, raw emotions, fervent despair, and resilient hope. What we did discover is that, despite the deplorable circumstances that some of the folks we encountered were living in, some had a different take on life.

In 2001, Kwasi first introduced me and his peers to a man who called himself "Mr. Love." Here is Kwasi's description of Mr. Love's life in Sodom and Gomorrah:

"...we came across Mr. Love and his family who offered to talk to us. Mr. Love is a 45-year-old man with a wife and nine children. He migrated to Sodom and Gomorrah in 1992...amongst the first residents...the electronic technician of the area and does most of the wiring and also repairs...Through this work he has been able to acquire four trucks, which are manned by people, and he also had a taxicab which was sold about three months ago...a semi-literate as he can express himself in the English language and was once working for a security agency...claims his living conditions are now economically

better than before and that he has been able to send all the children to school...he calls himself 'family of love...'"

In 2005, when I introduced him to my study abroad students, Mr. Love was still thriving and his family was intact.

On a different level, I learned that western academics can tap into the lives, experiences, and highly motivated desires of students in an emerging nation to learn along with students; especially when the students have never been enlisted as co-learners with a professor. My students and I learned about mutual respect and the realization that in order to fully understand social problems, it is necessary to see the world through the eyes of those who live them.

Mission Accomplished? George's Evaluation of the Collaborative Experience

At the end of this experience, students had to be evaluated beyond the project. Thus, as required by the university, I had to develop examination questions for the "long" (final) examination which had to be submitted several weeks before the exam. All this was foreign to me and I resisted a bit; I just did not want to release the questions for fear they'd be stolen. Then I realized it was a no-brainer: all questions would be correlated to each section of the assignment. Students would have to respond to the indigenous social problem their group had assessed. If they had missed class frequently, not asked me for consultations on a regular basis to clarify and discuss major issues, and failed to go in the field with group members, then they would most likely be challenged to respond effectively to the exam questions. As I recall, the only thing that I reviewed with the students was content they learned from their projects; critical thinking would be assessed in the long exam, not their memories. They were very anxious, especially since throughout the semester I frequently walked down the aisle to engage them and would not let them take notes. I had confidence in them because I knew which groups and individuals had made a commitment to this

collaborative teaching/learning model. Finally, some students had not expected me to come on exam day. Of course I did, only to be surprised that they were separated into three different rooms. Oh boy, did I run around to answer any questions other than provide them with answers to the exam questions!

In the final analysis, did I succeed in developing an effective collaborative experience? I will let George have the last word:

"Nevertheless, after the enjoyment, the class became confused again! We were completely at a loss how and where the Professor will set her questions [final exam]. As tradition demands, we needed to know which areas or theories to 'chew' [memorize] so we can 'pour' [write], pass (the course) and possibly forget [everything teacher taught us about]. But alas! The Prof. never gave areas or theories to chew. I remember a few days before the examination day, friends had asked 'Which areas are coming in the examination?' I simply could not tell since I had no clue!

"However, there was a spontaneous jubilation at the examination hall as soon as the invigilator had said 'stop work, pens down.' Professor Brenda McGadney-Douglass had surprised us again with her intelligence and scholarship. The examination was meant for those who observed regular attendance of lectures!

"I never missed any of her lectures; it was so interesting to miss! I always had a new story to tell.

"The few 'chew' and 'pour' experts were however disappointed. Quite unusually, about 80 percent⁶ of the class had an 'A'. Not only did I have an 'A', most of the discussions we had are

still fresh in memory. I wish I one day become a good lecturer as Professor Brenda McGadney-Douglass. May the Good Lord grant her comfort and prosperity in all her endeavors."

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Footnotes

1 Senior, Political Science-International Affairs Honors Student, 2011–2012 Student body President at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI; Trilingual – Japanese, French, and Spanish.

2 Fulbright-Hays. (1979). Faculty Research Award: Cross-cultural oral history project. Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO). U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare: Washington, DC.

3 Three students were terminated from the course and from taking the exam, having not been on my roster when they showed up the 7th week and final lecture respectively. All did the usual Ghanaian-style begging: “Madam, Madam, I beg you, I beg you!” As they say this they clap their hands together – hitting the back of their right hand into the palm of their left hand... repeating this process and phrase over and over until you give in!

4 Unknown causes, age 44; known to be able to recite speeches by President Abraham Lincoln. Graduated 2004 degree in Social Work, taught at Osu Social Work School, and continued to seek admission to Law School (wanted to be second blind Lawyer in Ghana).

5 Always called me “Momma”; called me and family almost monthly from the time of our 2001 departure through January 2009.

6 University of Ghana has a standard expectation of percentage of class who will pass or fail the course.

Endnotes

1 Chancellor His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, 7th Secretary-General of the United Nations (1/1997 – 12/2006).

2 Internally displaced person from ethnic conflict in Northern Ghana.

3 Refugee from Sierra Leone; graduated in 2004 resettled to Australia.

4 Replaced by the Ghana Health Insurance Plan.

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CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND NEO-COLONIALISM IN SOCIAL WORK: NEGOTIATING EXCHANGES BETWEEN GHANA AND THE UNITED STATES

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In the following reflection on a 15-year experience with a professional practicum exchange program between Universities in Ghana and the United States, the author presents stories of personal and professional triumphs and challenges. Lessons learned from childhood about prejudice, racism, and neocolonialism in the United States proved helpful in Ghana. The shift in worldviews is necessary, even for someone who is a part of the African Diaspora. Following the introduction, this narrative is divided into three steps: the author's cultural reflections as a Fulbright recipient; developing and enacting an exchange program; and assessing likelihood of sustaining an exchange program between faculty and students.

Introduction

It seemed to be a relatively straightforward request: "We have a grant from a large foundation for the purposes of uniting professional schools in the United States (U.S.) with those in African countries. Would it be possible for you to organize an exchange between your school [of social work] and the social work program at the University of Ghana?" Little did I know when I responded to this 1995 request from the University of Michigan Center for African and African American Studies that I was embarking on a 15-year odyssey of progress and setbacks on both sides of the ocean. My journey has offered many reflections about the importance of cultural context, worldview, and the persistence of neocolonial and often not-so-subtle racist attitudes in social work education during the late 20th and early 21st century.

For purposes of clarity, definitions of prejudice, racism, and neocolonialism are addressed first. Much has been written about all three topics, and I have devoted the majority of my 42-year professional career to developing programs, policies, and practices to offset them. It is important to address how these constructs as they affected the joint University of Ghana (UG)/University of Michigan (UMI) social work exchange program. In neocolonial social work education, deification of western economic policies and

practices, language utilization, and cultural beliefs are legitimated and dominate the field (Askeland & Payne, 2006; Midgley, 2007). Theories and practice strategies from countries outside of Europe, Canada, and particularly the United States are seldom integrated into our national social work education. This narrative contains examples of the challenges and triumphs of efforts to engage in social work practice across borders.

First Steps: My Fulbright Experience at the University of Ghana

As an eight-year-old girl in 1957, I read a special issue of *Ebony* magazine that celebrated Ghana as the first independent nation in post-colonial Africa. It made such an impression on me that I decided I would one day visit the country. This was no small dream for a young, working-class African American girl from Chicago's south side, but it would be almost 40 years before I realized my goal.

I have professors Nana Apt and Howard Brabson to thank for helping me make my first trip to Ghana a reality. I first met Professor Nana Apt in 1994 when she was a visiting professor at the University of Michigan (UMI), working with now-Professor Emeritus Brabson. Through them, I learned about the evolution of social work in Ghana and the crucial role that collaborations—like the one she maintained with Dr. Brabson—could play in expanding our knowledge base of effective

strategies for global practice. Upon learning of my interest, and after consulting with Apt, Brabson suggested that I apply for a Fulbright Research and Teaching position in Ghana. I made my first trip to Ghana in 1995, and it was a life-changing experience.

My goal then, as now, was to engage in what has been called a "Reverse Mission" (Abrams, Slosar, & Walls, 2005); to learn about the strengths of practice elsewhere and examine the benefits and potential applications to social work practice. I have referred elsewhere to this strategy as reversing the flow of information from the Global South to the Global North, an approach that flies directly in the face of neocolonial "power-over" values and approaches. Since the late 1960s, my clinical practice with women in families and communities has emphasized using strategies that have evolved over centuries and are evident in communities of color, offsetting personal, familial, community, and societal stressors.

The University of Ghana has had a social work program for almost three decades. Its principal architect was Professor Nana Araba Apt, a globally recognized gerontologist who has trained thousands of undergraduate social work majors for almost 50 years. She has been, for all practical purposes, "The Mother of Social Work" in Ghana. Under Apt's supervision, the UG Social Work program moved from being administered by the Department of Sociology at UG to a separate program in Social Work Administration. By the time she left UG for her current position as Dean of Students at Ashesi University in Ghana, the social work unit had been granted departmental status. And the professional practicum program had grown to include more than 70 agencies throughout the country with an accredited M.S.W. program. All of this was accomplished with less than four full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the program and/or department. While I had been taught from an early age to "make less with more," I'd never seen it done with the skill and perseverance embodied by Apt's efforts.

On my first trip to Ghana, I took the time to acquaint myself with the many Ghanaian women's groups. I also studied the

community-building and extended family-intervention strategies they employed that could enrich U.S. social work practice. Having written about this elsewhere, I want to speak in a more general way about insights I have gained as a result of traveling to Ghana for fifteen years.

The Price of Privilege

One of the first lessons I learned was that Ghanaians know much more about the U.S. than U.S. citizens know about the rest of the world. Accra is home to about six daily newspapers of varying qualities and ideological flavors. Since few Ghanaians can afford to buy all of them, those who can afford to buy a paper do so, and the various news items perspectives were discussed, shared, and debated as people waited for public transportation. I was soon participating in these enthusiastic morning groups. I became aware as never before of how this comprehensive global knowledge, actively pursued, shapes the attitudes of entire nations toward the U.S., irrespective of an individual's economic, ethnic, class, racial, or ability backgrounds.

Not only was I involved in the morning debates, but, during my first month in Ghana, I was repeatedly asked to defend the awarding of Honorary Doctorates to Ghanaian government officials. These awards were being given at a time when the UG faculty was on strike to receive back wages. I was taken by surprise by this news, as neither the U.S. press nor U.S. State Department briefings had mentioned either the strike or the awards. Initially, I was unable to adequately respond to the many Ghanaians in academic and social settings who asked, "How could you?" (referring to my U.S. citizenship).

Thinking back, I concluded that the overall quality of international news in the mainstream U.S. media is extremely poor, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton conceded before a Senate committee on March 2, 2011. It became clear to me that U.S. residents, as citizens of one of the richest nations on earth, enjoy the questionable privilege of being indifferent to the social, economic, and political challenges that plague the rest of the world; some of which are a direct result of actions by the U.S.

government or institutions. In fact, the privilege of indifference is often fueled by the lackluster quality of the U.S. global news.

Who's Crazy and Why: Water Bottles, Mental Illness, and Mrs. M.

Shortly after my arrival in Ghana, the UG instructor who had taught the Social Diagnosis class became ill and needed to return to the U.S. for medical treatment. He had prepared the final examination for his students before he left, but someone else had to administer and grade over 300 handwritten "blue book" answers. I was enlisted to serve as the first of what would ultimately be several graders from UG and the international African Examinations Board to review the examinations.

There is an Arabic proverb: "Repetition teaches even the donkey." The students' examinations helped me understand how differing cultural perspectives influenced the very definition of mental illness and the nature of subsequent interventions.

One of the first questions on the test asked students to give at least one example of a sign of mental illness. Having a licensed clinical social work practice background as well as having taught courses in interpersonal practice, I was struck by how many of the students listed "people drinking from water bottles outside" in their examination books as indicative of having a mental illness. Clearly, it is necessary to place this answer in context. Water is a precious commodity in Ghana, so much so that there is even a ritual associated with its procurement when one enters a home or public setting. Using a private water bottle in an environment where everyone was hot and thirsty could be viewed as an insult. To do so during classroom instruction could be considered even more outrageous. What students from other countries took for granted as a sign of reasonable behavior was repugnant to those accustomed to offering water to others as a sign of respect and acknowledgement. I've been unable to use a water bottle in Ghana since that time.

In another part of the examination, students were given a case study about Mrs. M., a newly divorced professionally trained mother of a young son. Her work as an

accountant was suffering; she was unable to sleep or eat regularly, and her extended family seemed to offer little support. In fact, Mrs. M. and her father were estranged. The students were asked how they might handle the case.

Upon reading the first paper through my U.S.-trained-social-worker lens, I was stunned to note that the primary intervention strategy was to help Mrs. M. *return* to her husband. I put the paper aside, knowing that I would have to write a lengthy comment about the ability of Mrs. Mensah to deal with what I considered classic symptoms of depression without her husband, and moved on to the second paper. That one also listed reuniting with Mr. M. as the solution to Mrs. M.'s problems. On to papers three, four, ten, and twenty. Each exam listed reunification with Mr. M. as a necessary variable for intervention. I should note that the majority of students in the class were men, who might not have been exposed to what some scholars have termed African Feminism (Dolphyne & Ofei-Agoagye, 2001), in which women's lives are viewed in conjunction with, rather than separate from, their extended families.

As a way of testing my hypothesis, I went in search of examinations from three young women students in the class. In each case, the answer was consistent with the hundreds of others I was to read: in order for Mrs. M. to be able to effectively and happily manage her life, she needed to be reunited with her husband. One student prefaced their answer by suggesting that while having Mrs. M. diagnosed for depression might seem to be a worthwhile goal, diagnosis and treatment for depression alone would not settle her estrangement from her patrilineal extended family. Treatment for depression would not allow her to be supported by a community or society in which her church, neighbors, and public institutions expected a respectable woman with a child to be married. This was, indeed, an African feminist perspective, but one placing the societal norms on a level equivalent with those of individuals, families, and communities.

I've been using the case of Mrs. M. in global social work practice courses I've taught

for more than a decade as an illustration of how what seems straightforward in practice in an individually oriented society does not immediately transfer to settings where the extended family's support may be crucial in determining the individual's mental health. I also model for my students the ways in which my own lens and bias (i.e., as a global feminist and African American womynist) have the potential to lead to negative consequences in global practice. Contesting the theories and methods in social work is critical for those interested in practice locally and globally (Askeland and Payne, 2006). Clearly social, historical, and political contexts need to be incorporated into any intervention. While such knowledge is found in the U.S. literature on populations of color, it is not normally integrated into U.S. social work practice classes—primarily because it requires the interrogation of one's worldview before action.

Middle Steps: Developing and Enacting the Exchange Program;

Values and Goal Setting in Concert

Along with my research and academic responsibilities, I also sought to honor my University's request to develop an exchange program. As Apt and I got clearances through the administrative bodies on our respective campuses, we thought about the types of students who would most benefit from our proposed exchange. We made a commitment to identify students who might not otherwise have an opportunity to do professional work in another country; particularly first generation college students. Our participant selections would be based on academic achievement, clarity about strengths/limitations of their practice backgrounds, a willingness to engage in colleague—and host country—appropriate work, and their agreement to participate in pre-departure academic training. We also knew that one of our most formidable tasks would be to secure funding for a program that was not central to the agendas of either of our institutions at the time. We wanted for the program to represent a true exchange: one in which students and faculty from each institution *shared* academic resources, collaborated on scholarship, and prepared students for global

practice across a range of practices. Additionally, the students and faculty engaged in the exchange would live like ordinary Ghanaians, not ex-pats or governmental officials who lived behind gates, had chauffeurs, and sometimes could not find their way around their own neighborhoods. Most importantly, this was not to be a 1-2 week "vacation in a foreign country" trip for students. They were expected to commit to working in the country for a minimum of 3 months, accumulating credits based on hours worked. The experience was expected to stress immersion.

These lofty program goals were actually drawn from the work of other UG-associated social work programs from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (U.K.). Although I had served as a field instructor for two universities and worked on designing aspects of the UMI domestic field instruction program, I was a novice to global field work development. I greatly benefited from sharing information with colleagues around the world about their hopes and dreams about global social work from a non-deficit perspective. For most of these colleagues, linkages with UG were not considered "gifts" to "uplift the third world country" (Hare 2004; Haug, 2005). They were, by contrast, viewed as opportunities for mutual support and aid in the development of scholarship and service in global social work education.

Strength in Numbers

By 2000, I had joined faculty members from universities in Ghana, the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. to begin drafting a Master of Social Work Program for the UG's approval. This collaborative effort put me in touch with people I would not have met otherwise. Our discussions about the learning objectives and outcomes expected of Ghanaian students were lively, and we were able to see how our different backgrounds influenced the lenses we used in social work education. It was also helpful to review the strategies utilized by others in building collaborations with the UG. By far one of the strongest was with another university in my home state. It entailed a team of faculty members committed to sustained

curriculum development, who were willing to share their resources and expertise in Ghana to promote the MSW program over a period of years. I realized that I had been unable to build such a team with my university colleagues, who were busy and had multiple research interests yet little knowledge of Ghana. During one period, I was referred to as being "THE Ghana Exchange" in my own academic unit. The other teams I worked with in Ghana came from universities and colleges that were also willing to regularly invite, defray the costs of, and engage Ghanaian faculty in collaborative projects in the United States: true exchanges. The commitment and willingness to provide financial and intellectual support was crucial in solidifying the relationships among the two universities (Pettys et. al, 2005). This knowledge was never lost on me as I struggled to help students to find adequate funding for their trips. Most years the costs I incurred came out of my own pocket.

U.S. Students

For me, working with students was one of the highlights of the exchange effort. The roughly 15 students selected by the university admirably met the challenges of fund raising and preparing themselves to enter a new practice context. In preparation for their trips, the majority sought out independent studies and short courses, worked with Professor P.K. Abrefah of UG to design appropriate field placements, and had their learning goals outlined before they left the U.S. They encountered challenges, such as the view from several faculty members that "It is a waste of time and money to send a Master's-level student overseas. Only those pursuing PhDs should have this opportunity." They later reported that the experience had altered their views of practice. As one committed to this professional practicum program, what has been most gratifying to me is the knowledge that all those former students went on to work in global social work settings at some point in their post-M.S.W. careers.

"We Want You to Speak English Like an American"

Four Ghanaian students were able to participate in these exchanges between 1998 and 2011. Three of them completed their M.S.W. degrees at the university. One of those students is now enrolled in a doctoral program. The fourth student, enrolled at the UG, was placed in a U.S. agency for a summer professional practicum. All of the students qualified academically, and none of them failed their English-language proficiency TOEFL tests.

Before arrival, however, university required all students to *once again* prove their proficiency in spoken and written English. The first student enrolled in our program was told by a local English-as-a-second-language center that while she seemed to be able to speak English, "We want you to speak English like an American." The second student to enroll was told she would be required to leave her job and family early in order to come to the UMI to enroll in English classes three months before her M.S.W. program began.

While it is reasonable to expect that students arriving in the U.S. for study be competent in English, Ghana was a British colony until 1957 and *all* of its formal instruction is in English. Indeed, one cannot complete a degree there *without* fluency in English. It took my repeated intervention to explain that students from Ghana were able to write and speak in English. In some cases, they were better prepared to do so than some undergraduates from the U.S., who had performed well on computer-scored tests instead of written exams. In trying to convince others, I found myself explaining ethnocentrism, and the potential problems of targeting or "tracking" a group because of perceived deficiencies. More than once I thought I was conducting a session of the course I teach on social justice, oppression, and contemporary U.S. cultures.

Ghanaian students consistently served as co-teachers and co-learners for their classmates. In one case, during our weekly meetings, a Ghanaian student noted how astonished he was that behaviors he had read about in textbooks while in Ghana were

common enough in the United States to actually merit the diagnostic labels they had been given. For example, he worked with a family whose house was deemed uninhabitable because the residents exhibited classic OCD hoarding behavior. The student said that he really did not believe that people engaged in hoarding until he saw it firsthand. He concluded that extended family structures in Ghana would have intervened when family members first became aware of someone's over-accumulation of goods rather than waiting until the target relative's home was a health risk. In his final evaluations, this Ghanaian student left a series of recommendations for prevention and early intervention; many of which were adopted by the U.S. agency in which he had been placed.

Back-Translator as Cheerleader

My primary role in this program was to provide supervision for students participating in these exchanges. One of the difficulties in placing students from the United States into other countries is the lack of a "back-translator," one who helps students to clarify their perspectives on practice against perspectives in their new environments. The back-translator or field liaison does not take the place of regular field instruction by faculty from the host institution. Instead, the person supplements, trouble-shoots, and clarifies differences among the expectations of various stakeholders in the educational process. Additionally, the back-translator assists students with the process of entry into the host country, and re-entry into their country of origin.

This latter role became extremely important as all students from the United States reported having great difficulty returning to the cultural expectations or lifestyles they had become critical of during their time abroad. I borrowed debriefing techniques from colleagues in other parts of the world for use in these cases, and needed to remain cognizant that the debriefing was an important part of the overall practicum exchange. For those entering the country from Ghana, my back-translator role required helping students deal with the informality of U.S. interactions, as

well as the slights they experienced while living in the United States. Few had experienced either overt or covert racism, and were astonished at the refusal of service in establishments, or being considered incompetent by virtue of having been born in Ghana. My own experiences of racism as an African-American woman has enabled me to help students and colleagues negotiate their first experiences with it. I found myself engaged in a very delicate process of helping the UG students understand the nature of prejudice against African-Americans, why they were mistaken for African-Americans in the wider U.S. society, and to unlearn their own misconceptions about African Americans.

Endings

Getting MOUs between true academic institutions in two countries was, of course, challenging. After 1 1/2 years, I knew the requirements for a sustainable exchange of students and faculty would not be possible for me. It is an extraordinary challenge to move through Healy's stages of growth in global education from tolerance, to responsiveness, to institutional commitment (Johnson, 2004). However, I will continue to work on teaching and research projects as well as developing new educational programs with my Ghanaian colleagues. My greatest lesson of living and working in Ghana during this period has been learning how to be "a guest in the house" of citizens of other countries. By virtue of our power, privilege, and isolation from the rest of the world, U.S. citizens learn how to be ethnocentric, prejudiced, and neocolonialist. My new mission is to recognize and change those characteristics in myself and others who wish to be effective social workers in global practice; here and in other countries. This is difficult, but thankfully, not impossible.

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Call for Narratives: Special Issue of *Reflections*

Keeping Families Connected: The Choice and Challenge of Kinship Care

Guest Editors:

Prof. Yolanda R. Green, Ph.D.; School of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach
Prof. Emerita Donna D. Petras, Ph. D.; Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago; and CWLA (Child Welfare League of America)
Valerie Lee, M.S.W. (May 2011); School of Social Work; California State University, Long Beach

When parents cannot take care of their children, relatives historically have stepped in to raise their younger family members. However, over the past 20 years, numerous factors have led to a significant increase in the number of children living with kin, either informally or through the public child welfare system. CWLA defines kinship care as the full-time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives, members of their tribes or clans, godparents, step-parents, or any adult with whom children have a kinship bond. Research documents how vital kinship care is in the lives of children, however, kinship families often experience challenges and barriers to receiving needed social services.

This Special Issue of *Reflections* will address the important role of kinship care in ensuring that children stay connected to their families of origin. Narratives from relative caregivers, child welfare practitioners, and others working with kinship caregivers are welcomed.

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- Experiences of siblings rearing siblings
- Experiences of grandfathers or other males rearing grandchildren
- Adults reared by relative caregivers
- Experiences of other relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins) rearing relative children
- What practitioners learn about the resilience of relative caregivers
- The experiences of social workers who are also relative caregivers
- Challenges social workers experience working with relative caregivers
- The kinship triad (birthparent involvement in kinship families)
- Relative caregivers and their experiences of loss

Submissions must be received no later than January 1, 2012.

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Email your manuscript (in .doc, not .docx) to:

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Reflections Special Issues Editor - Kinship Care
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GHANA: A GREAT PLACE TO BE

Montrella Cowan, MSW, Co-Founder and CEO, Social Change Workers International (SCWI), Washington, DC

The following narrative describes the experiences of an African American woman who studied abroad in Ghana, West Africa, during her sophomore year in 2005. She explains how she overcame challenges as a single mother and as a nontraditional, minority student to realize this dream. She also highlights the importance for social work students, researchers, and professionals to become more active in serving the global community.

In 2005, I stood in the middle of an elementary school in a squatter community of Ghana, overcome with disbelief. My stinging tears reflected the mixed emotions of admiration and sadness I discovered during my first trip to Africa, the Motherland. This school barely had walls, and was built on a foundation of determination and hope rather than concrete. There was no electricity, and no running water. The half-finished roof allowed the sky to provide natural light, but made the teacher and students vulnerable to the rains. There was a long, square-shaped basin hidden by a makeshift partition to serve as the lavatory. The school's teacher had committed his life to serving his community as an educator, and despite dire conditions—including a lack of school supplies and equipment—the children were hungrier for knowledge than for food to feed their malnourished bellies. This field visit was one of the most remarkable experiences I had in those seven weeks. Ghana taught me the priceless value of obtaining indigenous knowledge and skills to make the greatest contribution to humankind.

This cross-cultural experience changed not only my view of the world from a social work perspective, but my *choice* of the role I would play in it. In Ghana, I learned that the horizons of this profession are much broader than many people's limited perspective of social work—including social work students and practitioners themselves. While I was the only non-traditional African American social work major in a group of 13 students from universities across the United States, I realized that I too

could be instrumental in sustainable, human rights-based, social development for the poor and suppressed internationally. I finally got a taste of what it is like to be a member of the majority—in comparison to my status as a minority—in the United States. As a result, I have chosen to advocate for and serve as a living example of social work practitioners fulfilling their responsibilities by protecting the social welfare of the most vulnerable in our global community particularly in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is among the least-selected regions for studying abroad, and among the most expensive in terms of expenses and risks. My experience there taught me that social workers, specifically those from North America, are under-represented in cross-cultural education, research, and professional opportunities.

I had to jump over hurdles and push through obstacles to realize this dream. It was as if I had all the hope of a naïve, new gambler, but a deck of cards—aka circumstances—were stacked against me. First was my challenge of being a single mother of two children and dependent on welfare. I had to find adequate childcare for my daughter, who was 12 years old, and my son, who was only 18 months. I had no support from family members, the majority of whom resided outside of Washington, D.C. With the limited income of a small government grant that barely covered my monthly expenses, I had no extra money to cover costs not included in the study-abroad program to include some meals. Second, the Catholic University of America (CUA), where I was pursuing my

undergraduate degree in social work only offered study abroad programs to Europe. The stringent foreign language prerequisites automatically disqualified my participation. Third, I was a nontraditional student who had returned to school after almost ten years. I knew that I had head-of-household responsibilities and had reached a maturity level far beyond that of the other participants, but the very idea of letting this opportunity slip through my fingers forced me to come out of my "she shell", let go of my survival attitude of being "Miss Independent," and get over my predicted annoyance of being surrounded by 19-to-22-year-olds for an extended period of time.

I pieced together a team of supporters in the United States and abroad. I asked my youngest maternal auntie, the closest member of my family, to care for my children in New York. She agreed. I found out that Federal financial aid can legally be used for studying abroad. I advocated for myself and finally got CUA officials to accept transfer credits from the accredited Universities Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC), by way of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). If I had to, I decided that I would fast for those meals that were not covered in the program, and would test the concept of bartering. Then, I packed some used clothes and other belongings to exchange for Ghanaian goods.

"Akwaaba," the Twi word for "welcome," is the best word to describe my visit to Ghana. I never imagined meeting so many kindred spirits in a foreign territory. Upon arrival at the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, we were comfortingly embraced by the sound of applause from a crowd of Ghanaians waiting on their loved ones. I felt the love as if my family was there, too. Everywhere we went, the Ghanaians were so kind and generous. I was accepted as their "sister." They shared their personal hardships, dearest ambitions, and extraordinary triumphs. Since I was often mistaken for being Ghanaian, I had no problems adapting to the *tro-tros* (the cheap but congested, local transportation), or being the taxi-ride negotiator for my group.

As for extracurricular activities, Ghana is the place to be. Some of my most memorable

party nights took place in the Ghanaian clubs and restaurants. My classmates and I even celebrated a major soccer victory with our new Ghanaian friends. I also met social work professors from the United States and Ghana who were paving the way for international practice and research. I met change agents from other backgrounds, too, including those who were informally educated and working within local, national, and international organizations.

If I had chosen to study somewhere other than Ghana, I would have been deprived of some critical cross-cultural lessons and would never have met the international social workers who became my role models. USAC provided the mentors and resources for us students to have a rewarding and safe summer in Ghana. Through USAC we received a useful and informative orientation, which I highly recommend for any new cross-cultural exchange. We took residence in the International Hostel at the University of Ghana, Legon, in Accra, where we had our classes. We also toured special sites such as the slave castles, the Kumasi Kingdom, Kente cloth factories, and the thriving business district OSU, populated by many retired Americans who have moved to Ghana. Our courses included Twi Language; Society, Government and Politics in Ghana; African Music and Dance; African Literature; and, my personal favorite, Social Issues in Ghana. This class was taught by Dr. Brenda McGadney-Douglass (who would later become my mentor), then a visiting professor from the University of Toledo.

Dr. M-G, as I like to call her, exposed us to the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful of social problems and social welfare in Ghana. Her course included field visits to orphanages, hospitals, slums, schools, non-profit organizations, and even a bakery run by disabled persons. I felt simultaneously sad about the poor quality of life and inspired by the empowerment approaches taken by community leaders. We learned about Ghanaian responses to child labor and neglect, malnutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, and the domination of an informal economy, as well

as detrimental traditional practices, such as child marriages and slavery.

In Ghana, Dr. M-G taught me important lessons that contributed to my future endeavors. For instance, she warned me to ask permission before taking someone's picture, and how to offer a small donation without attracting unwanted attention. She invited me to assist her in research on the effects of the 1994 multi-ethnic conflict in Northern Ghana, known as the "Guinea Fowl War." Interviews were conducted in a group setting of internally displaced women—most of them widows—who'd been resettled in Accra. Hearing the profound testimonies of these women made me realize that women are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and other violent threats during forced migration. This research included interviews with conflict-displaced Liberians in the Budumburam Refugee Camp located in Gomoa, Ghana, provided me with insight about the different challenges, policies, and responses between refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). I also gained an appreciation for gender-specific interventions to meet the specific needs of women and children.

Furthermore, this exposure in Ghana revealed my own privileges and affirmed my true, self-identity. Prior to this trip, I defined myself as a minority with several financial and social disadvantages in terms of access to quality education, employment, etc. But while in Ghana (the first African nation to gain its independence), where even the chefs in Chinese restaurants were black, and where there were no welfare benefits in the form of cash or food stamps to offer those in need, I finally realized my own powerful status. For example, I understood that I was fortunate to be a student and be able to secure financial aid to pursue my bachelor's degree. I also understood that I had a vantage point as an English speaker, fluent in the language of technology, and as a home renter, with an apartment that had unlimited clean running water and bathroom facilities. I then recognized my power as an American citizen with a passport and access to visas to nearly anyplace in the world. With this new awareness of my power, it broke my heart to

decline each of the few marriage proposals I received, because I knew for some Ghanaians a marriage of convenience is believed to be their only chance to enter the U.S.A., considered the "the land of milk and honey." Shamefully still today, cross-cultural exchanges are not mutually beneficial and usually result in a "North-South" (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002) exchange in which those from the North get to explore and sometimes exploit the countries, communities, and cultures of those from the South. I believe that with increased participation of social work students and practitioners in international opportunities, these exchanges can become more reciprocal.

Having the opportunity to study in Ghana for seven weeks changed me personally, academically, and professionally, and continues to produce positive results in my life. I now have a working knowledge of French language skills and living, working, and have also had studied in ten other countries within Africa, Latin America, Europe, and the Caribbean. In 2006, I became the first CUA student to be awarded the Institute for International Public Policy (IIPP) Fellowship, funded by the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Education to increase minority representation in careers dealing with international affairs. It was the opportunity I created to study in Ghana that strengthened my application, which is only accepted during the sophomore year. In my junior year at CUA, I created another study-abroad opportunity through the School for International Training (SIT). Again the minority in a group of 39 students, this time we spent an entire semester in Morocco, where I resided with a host family, stayed in a village for a week, rode a camel, and received scholarship support. I also published an article on this experience as a minority and nontraditional student (see below, Cowan, 2007). I was nominated by CUA for a Fulbright Fellowship. Though my proposal was not funded, I became the first Research and Office Assistant for CUA's new Center for Global Education, where I created the International Scholar of the Month Competition. I brought the knowledge, skills, and values gained from interacting with Ghanaian locals into the classroom by writing my thesis *Indigenous*

Women: A Secret Ingredient to Sub-Saharan Africa's Sustainable Social Development. In 2008, I became the first in my family to earn a college education. After graduation, I completed a ten-month internship in Senegal with "Africare," the first African American-owned development organization, which serves more than 20 African countries.

In December 2010, with a 4.0 GPA, I earned my MSW in macro practice with a concentration in Displaced Populations from Howard University School of Social Work (HUSW). One of the highlights of my three semesters of advanced-standing curriculum at HUSW for me was that I was selected as one of 21 diverse participants to go to South Africa for an alternative spring break (ASB). In South Africa, influenced by my experience in Ghana, I requested a field visit to an agency serving displaced populations in addition to our planned visits to traditional social work settings, such as orphanages and child welfare agencies. Thus, we visited "Bonne Esperance" (Good Hope), a shelter for refugee women and children funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As with my first exposure in Ghana to the plight of displaced persons, the women's sharing of their stories and coping strategies turned out to be a life-transforming and eye-opening experience for many of my peers. During a university-wide presentation on the South Africa ASB, I presented my research on the xenophobic violence faced by displaced persons in South Africa's urban areas. I also discussed some of the peace-building methodologies for integration implemented in South Africa, such as multicultural gardens.

Another impact of studying in Ghana was that I sought to be the first HU student to conduct my field placement at the humanitarian organization Church World Service (CWS). I was the Refugee Protection Advocacy Intern at CWS for two consecutive semesters, and learned a lot about advocacy and policies related to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), U.S. foreign aid, coalition building, and working with inter-disciplinary teams. I applied my social work skills to write the first draft of a refugee resolution which advocates are pushing for the U.S. Congress

to pass in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the UN 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. One of my first tasks at CWS was to co-edit an article published in *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, which I titled "Exploring the role of community partnerships and empowerment approaches in protection" (Eby et al., 2010). I helped advocate for people-centered policies and reconstruction efforts that focused on local capacity building and accountability.

In the mix of globalization, increased natural disasters, and declining economies, people from all disciplines and qualification levels are competing today for the same jobs. Consequently, due to the lack of social work representation in international organizations, people who lack community-based and people-centered perspectives are the ones making decisions which determine the quality of life for the most impoverished and vulnerable. Meanwhile, social workers have the responsibility, tools, and "Code of Ethics" provided by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008) to efficiently and effectively serve these populations.

Johnson (2004) postulated that "despite these global changes, social work curriculum remains narrowly focused on a domestic perspective" (p. 47). In this regard, those social work schools that deliberately incorporate global perspectives and make overseas opportunities available will undoubtedly become more sought after by students wanting to pursue a career in social work. According to Healy's continuum, the internationalization of the social work curriculum could include the student being able to learn a second language, study or intern abroad, and gain hands-on experience with an international organization (Johnson, 2004).

To make my dream of going to Africa a reality, I had to be persistent and totally unreasonable with myself, family, and faculty. In Ghana, after witnessing first-hand the extreme levels of poverty juxtaposed with astronomical levels of hope and self-determination, I took an oath to do everything in my power to help bridge the gap between people from different cultures and internationalize the social work profession and

curriculum. Although I was the minority in my group, I defined what my role would be in the social development of the international community, and am still reaping the benefits of this experience. Social workers are necessary to achieve holistic, people-centered, sustainable solutions. An overseas experience may not seem possible with the demands of the social work curricula at the undergraduate or graduate levels, but I am here to testify it is doable and every bit worth any extra effort or agony it may cause you. I encourage students and professionals to create such rich and rewarding experiences sooner rather than later. And as I hope to have demonstrated, Ghana would be a great place to start!

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EXPERIENCING GHANA AT DIFFERENT POINTS AND TIMES

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The following narrative describes the author's personal and professional experiences as the Director of Educational Study Tours to Ghana, West Africa. This reflection captures the collective experiences of various groups in diverse contexts as they toured the country, and discusses the importance of cultural competence.

Introduction

I am a native of South Carolina. However, most of my adult life was spent in the north where I pursued graduate education, and the midwest where I was employed as a university professor for fifteen years. I returned to South Carolina in 1999 to assume a chaired professorship at the University of South Carolina College of Social Work (USC COSW). I grew up in South Carolina as a Gullah or Geeche speaking Sea Islander. This language, like the island culture, has undergone significant transformation. The geographical isolation of the island, its social and economic independence, and its marginal contact with speakers outside the Sea Island communities contributed to the creation and sustainment of this unique language. Gullah or Geeche is defined as Creole or "pidgin;" a language that has no native speakers but comes into existence as the product of communication among speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. This pidgin language then takes over as the only language of the community (Jones-Jackson, 1989). My home was situated on John's Island, the second-largest island in U.S. waters. The island, with its pastoral and mysterious landscape, looked very much like Ghana's countryside and the Gulf of Guinea where Accra, the capital of Ghana, is situated. Until the 1980s and early 1990s, the island was inhabited predominately by African Americans. In earlier periods of life on the island, men spent their days fishing, shrimping, crabbing, and farming. The Sea Island women spent their days quilting, sewing, weeding, planting, reaping and preserving the harvest. The visible reflections of Africa in our speech, hair styles,

in our arts, and in some of our everyday habits were rapidly disappearing.

It was my connection with John's Island that motivated my greatest interest in West Africa. Although no one could say specifically where our ancestral home was located in the western part of Africa, we were often reminded that this was where our ancestors came from. It is reported that over 40%, approximately 200,000 Africans disembarked on Sullivan's Island, South Carolina, in Charleston County, making it one of the largest slave ports in North America (Northrup, 2002). It is estimated that nearly half of all African Americans had ancestors that passed through Sullivan's Island (Northrup, 2002). We were also reminded that our families lived as enslaved Africans on this island for over two centuries. I am a sixth-generation Sea Islander.

As indicated above, I left South Carolina in the late 1960s to pursue employment and graduate studies. I returned to my home state in 1999 on a permanent basis when I accepted a chaired professorship at USC COSW. The professorship was named to honor the life and legacy of I. DeQuincey Newman, a renowned civil rights activist and first Black state senator since Reconstruction. When I arrived at USC COSW with a charge to develop the chair to which I had recently been appointed, I moved toward planning and implementing the I. DeQuincey Newman Institute for Peace and Social Change. It was intended that the Newman Institute reflect the spirit and vision of its namesake. One of the goals of the Newman Institute was to establish and strengthen connections between African Americans in South Carolina and the African continent so as to broaden the global, cultural,

and educational experience of the South Carolina Black community, the University of South Carolina community, and the COSW. Although the COSW had an ongoing study tour to Europe and a MSW program in Korea, it had not established any contact with the African continent.

After an extraordinary amount of planning and organizing our first educational study tour took place in the spring semester of 2001.

Reminders of our Ancient Connection to the African Continent: A Group Visit to Ghana

Ghana was chosen as the site of our study tour for a variety of reasons. Many think of Ghana as being the true heart of Africa. It has a reputation for a sincere and welcoming hospitality; for many African-Americans, it offers a warm and familiar "*akwaaba*" (or welcome) that made us feel at home. Ghana is a country rich in cultural heritage and natural resources. In 1957, it was the first African nation to win its independence from colonial rule. When our first group traveled to Ghana, the country was in the midst of an amazing transformation as it moved into a new government after more than 20 years under military rule. The lessons were extraordinary as we observed the young democracy working to stabilize the economy, strengthen the educational system, embrace technology, and build a stronger infrastructure.

Although we felt a deep connection to the motherland, it was important to be mindful that we were still visitors. The group was cautioned that, as visitors to another country and strangers to Ghana's many diverse cultures, our aim was to observe, listen, and learn, while remaining open and non-judgmental. The tendency was to compare and judge by our personal—and often limited—frame of reference, which generally resulted in biased outcomes. For some, it became apparent that we were recoiling from the very thing that we came to learn more about: the people and their culture.

It is often a culture shock for most African Americans when they encounter their African relatives on the continent. In my conversations with the tour participants, it appeared that many

had imagined Ghana being primarily filled with lush tropical rainforest, rolling green landscapes, delicious fruits and vegetables; a place without much poverty, a free educational system, adequate housing, and strong infrastructures. In other words, they were expecting much of what they experienced at home in their local communities. Many complained about the poverty, or what was sometimes viewed as an "improvised lifestyle." However, as a part of our daily discussions and reflections we were better able to bring a broader perspective to our daily experiences. Some were able to step back in time and remember the conditions of slavery, or the poverty and human degradation of life in the ghettos where many African-Americans live today in some of our major U.S. cities. It also became clear that if one focused only on the external, one would overlook the caring, nurturing, support and camaraderie in the interaction between Ghanaian children and their families. There was a life rhythm there that is not evident at first glance. What many do not realize is that the perceived differences exist primarily in the external context. Therefore, it is from this perspective that I reflect on the experiences of our first study tour of Ghana.

Despite the initial and sometimes lingering dissonance between the Ghana of our imaginations and the Ghana of our experience, members of the group were realizing a long held dream of returning to the continent. We spent 14 exciting, adventure-packed days learning about ourselves and the rich Ghanaian culture.

Our social work educational tours are student-centered, with a specific focus on social work students. However our study tours were opened to the entire community, to students across disciplines and at all levels of education. Our first group consisted of two junior high school students (one was accompanied by a parent, the other by an adopted grandmother; both were social work professors), two family members, one master of social work student, a Ghanaian social worker who was employed in the U.S., four professors (one from Women's Studies and English; the other three, including the study

tour director, from social work.) In organizing the tour, the intent was to create a diverse, interdisciplinary experience within the group, as well as participate in a one-day international symposium entitled "Families and Children in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Diaspora: Expanding Paradigms for Practice, Policy and Research."

In addition to exploring Ghana's social, cultural, and educational sites, the symposium, organized by the study tour director, was an extraordinary event. A rich exchange took place between members of the study group and the presenters, which included The Honorable Mrs. Mary Amadu, Director of Ghana's Ministry of Social Welfare; Mrs. Comfort Aryee, a retired social worker; Ms. Anna Antwi from Women Vision International and the University of Cape Coast, Gershon Gamor, a Ghanian social worker employed in the U.S.; and Alice Amook-Ansah-Koii, a second year Ghanian MSW student studying in the U.S.; and Professor Rose Wells, an African-American social work professor and lawyer, who lives in Accra with her family. The youngest presenter at the symposium was Adya Beasley, a thirteen year old junior high school student. Her presentation was entitled "A New Light on My Life: Exploring My Ancestral Roots." Adya shared her perspective about why she came on the study tour:

"I came to Africa because of what I believe about being a child and about learning. Children must be challenged to go, inspired to create, nourished to grow, taught to learn, guided to achieve, influenced to dream, loved to care, given chances to live. We are leaders, writers, teachers, and learners—friends, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers and more. What we are helps us to see what we can be. We have no weaknesses, only aspects of ourselves. We are artists, musicians, critics, and dreamers. There are no limits because we should not believe in

boundaries that limit what we can do. We are the past, the present, and the future. We are the foundation upon which our world is built.

"I believe those who have experienced what they speak are the best teachers. I believe that those who can taste, gasp, and relate to what they see and hear have the deepest understanding. I believe a person is always building on their past, learning more about it, making more of it. And that this is the way to proceed into the future. And so, I crossed the ocean. I stand on this soil this soil because I want to be here. This is more important than any other continent because it is where my ancestors came from. This is the missing piece of the African American puzzle. I am here not because I owe Africa anything or because she owes me, but because we should meet. In meeting we discover all that has changed and all we've missed. We learn each other's names and how we've come to live. We grow into more complete people. We are whole again. It is interesting how things in my family history have come full circle.

"I am the great-great granddaughter of Mississippi slaves who owned land in Shuqualak, Mississippi after emancipation. I am the great granddaughter of the son of slaves who left Mississippi and built a life for his family in Chicago. Generations lived in that house, and when it was finally sold by the last remaining heir, my grandfather, part of the proceeds bought a ticket for me to be here."

In many ways Adya's speech captured the sentiments of the entire tour group. It

reflected our longing for connections as a people to the African continent, and as African Americans in the United States of America. We experienced the symposium as the beginning of an ongoing dialogue and partnership, as well as an extraordinary opportunity for learning, exchanging, and sharing, with the hope of ultimately making a difference in our home states and together in partnership on the continent. The symposium reaffirmed that, in the states, we experience many of the same systemic problems and concerns as Ghana. These are especially evident in the different systemic issues impacting women and children. As in the U.S., illiteracy and child trafficking are also major problems in Ghana. According to the United States Department of Education, more than 32 million adults have very low or limited literacy skills (Lasater and Elliott, 2005). Overall, the statistics suggest that low literacy skills affect an unemployed adults' ability to find employment as well as patients' ability to read and understand the instructions or medication side-effects printed on a pill bottle. Two of the biggest contributors to adult literacy in the United States are poverty and high school dropout rates.

Illiteracy rates in West Africa are the highest in the world. Of the ten countries with the world's lowest recorded adult (15 and older) literacy rates, seven are in West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Ghana ranks second highest in adult literacy rates among the ten West African countries. Cape Verde is first and Cote d'Ivoire is third (UNESCO EF Monitoring Report, 2009). Poverty and lack of funding for education are listed among the major causes of the staggering rates of illiteracy.

Another very disturbing problem in Ghana and the United States is child or human trafficking. Some Ghanaians say that this widespread problem is due to overwhelming poverty, which drives parents to sell their children for pittance. Others attribute it to the abuse of traditional practices, where children are sent to live with a more successful family member to break the cycle of poverty. Whatever the reasons, the bottom line is that

everyone—including the government—appears to turn a blind eye on the situation. It is estimated that thousands of men, women, and children are trafficked to the United States for the purpose of sexual and labor exploitations. An unknown number of U.S. citizens and legal residents are trafficked within the country primarily for sexual servitude and to a lesser extent forced labor (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In the final analysis, it is the social, spiritual, and cultural context in which these devastating problems occur that make these systematic issues appear to be different, but they are not.

As a part of our group's learning process, we came together and debriefed without censure after our visit with different groups, agencies, or a particular site. These exchanges were occasionally emotional, but at all times mind and heart expanding. Our process was also informed by holding the following questions in our awareness throughout the study tour:

1. Whose responsibility is it to know what poverty has done to people?
2. Why is the international debt crisis worst in Africa than any other place in the world?
3. Why are the majority of the least developed countries in the world in Africa?
4. What unique issues does Africa present for global development goals?
5. What can be done to bring about more effective development in Africa?

It was not surprising that the poverty, the hustle and bustle of life in the streets, and noisy, jam-packed, but friendly market places created a dissonance for some on the tour. This, too, was a part of the group's learning process. No one expected to return to the United States the same way we left.

The tour bus became our classroom-on-wheels as we traveled from one site to the next. With great excitement and anticipation, we traveled through four of Ghana's ten regions: Greater Accra (Accra), Ashanti Region (Kumasi), Volta Region (Ho), and the

Central Region (Cape Coast). Our tour guide, along with one of our tour group participants (the native Ghanaian from the Volta Region who was living in the United States) provided invaluable information and insights about the history of the different regions, governance structure, local culture, characteristics of the different ethnic groups living in the regions, the language spoken, the major products, and the various economic activities. In addition to asking many questions and sharing perspectives, we were given the opportunity to practice simple social phrases in "Twi," a language spoken by the Ashanti clan of Akan, one of Ghana's largest ethnic groups from the Ashanti Region. Our tour guide and bus driver were very patient and helpful as we went along. In addition to practicing the language, we stopped along the way to visit with local residents and merchants, and learned more directly about local customs, myths, and legends.

The primary focus of our study tour was on the Greater Accra Region, which included an emphasis on health, education, and welfare of Ghana's families and children. In this regard, our visit not only included cultural sites, but also the medicinal plant and herbal medicine center, the botanical gardens, social service and educational systems, women-focused organizations, and orphanages, as well as Dubois Memorial Center, Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, and George Padmore Memorial Museum. Our interest also included the towns and castles of Cape Coast and Elmina. These coastal towns played major roles in the trading of African slaves. The Elmina Castles is a monument representing historical links between Africa and the African Americans who are in search of their ancestral roots in Africa.

We gained refreshing perspectives from our visits to the University of Ghana, Legon, and the University of Cape Coast. The University of Ghana, Legon, is the oldest and largest of Ghana universities, and is considered one of the best. The University of Cape Coast is a much younger university, but has expanded its focus to include not only teaching, but education planners and administrators, and health professionals. We met informally with

groups of five female second- and third-year students on both campuses. We were impressed with the openness, intellect, and commitment to learning these young women displayed. They felt privileged to have the opportunity to study at the University. Their chosen majors were in computer technology, engineering, journalism, and the sciences. All expressed interest in further studies in the U.K., Canada, and the U.S. We also had the opportunity to visit a Catholic Junior Secondary School in a small rural village in Somanya. It did not matter to the students or teachers that classes were held under a tree; the students were happy to be learning. Educational resources for the school were almost nonexistent.

On the whole, traveling across the different regions was informative, enjoyable, and at times both bittersweet and restorative.

Ghana on the Move

Our second educational study tour to Ghana occurred in 2003. During this tour we experienced a growing and changing Ghana—a Ghana that is on the move! Throughout our 14-day stay, the front pages of the *Daily Graphic* (Ghana's "biggest selling newspaper") were replete with stories about Ghana's economic and educational development concerns. In 2002, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) surveyed 35 African countries and placed Ghana in eighth position. However, among the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana took the fourth position. According to Mr. Yaw Boadi-Aye Bonfah, Editor of the *Daily Graphic*, this difference meant that the findings of the United Nations survey signaled a vote of confidence in the government's effort to breathe life into Ghana's precarious economy. Mr. K.B. Asante, an educationist and social commentator, calls for a return to the Seven Year Development plan that was proposed over forty years ago for the economic development of Ghana. The plan proclaimed the well-being of the individual Ghanaian, however humble, as the "supreme law." According to Mr. Asante, economic development must precede all other considerations of policy as Ghana moves

toward social reconstruction. Mr. Asante and other leading economists, health care providers, and concerned Ghanaians at home and abroad continue to speak out on behalf of making Ghana a stronger, more compassionate nation. Some are standing up for changing the Ghanaian educational system. Despite the call for privatization, Mr. Asante and others support government funded public university education. It is important to note that Ghanaians view education as the key to economic, political, and social development. Ghana's health care system parallels the educational system in terms of importance and need. Unfortunately, even to the untrained eye, it seems obvious that the medical care system was very strained and continues to be so. Health care providers spoke of the need for more trained professionals, a stronger infrastructure system, and more modernized equipment.

Not unlike the study tour participants, Ghanaian's leaders also saw the people of Ghana as the primary catalysts for keeping the country moving towards the reclamation of its glory days. Ghanaians believe that they hold the key to making Ghana a truly free and prosperous country.

We agreed with Mr. Asante and others that with confidence, a spirit of self-reliance, and abundant faith, Ghana will recapture and live the dream of the country's founding mothers and fathers of a prosperous country and a United Africa.

An MSW Student Internship

As a result of this study tour and our ongoing relationship with the human services community, we were able to put two MSW students in a block summer placement with the Center for Community Studies, Action, and Development (CENCOSAD), where Professor James A. J. Annorbah-Sarpei is the executive director. CENCOSAD was established in 1977 as a people-centered, action-research NGO to promote strategies for empowering and enabling communities of individuals and people to realize their potential through an integrated approach of participating action, research, evaluation, training, networking, and resource development. It is

our hope that we continue to work in our roles as social justice workers to build a viable social and educational exchange program between our social work community and the Ghanaian social work community. During the summer of 2006, two female Caucasian students sought a block placement at CENSOSAD. I accompanied the students to Ghana, and remained the official liaison practicum instructor from their home base in South Carolina.

Given their youthfulness, limited social work experience, and lack of experience with the African continent, I was hoping that at least one of the students would be of color. Both students described their experiences as life-transforming, but unlike most visitors to the continent of Africa, they evaluated their experience from a western perspective. As a part of their evaluation, they wrote that things are slower in Ghana, and that GMT (Ghana Maybe Time) can result in s frustration around deadlines. They also stated: "It was in the workplace (practicum) where we noticed most of the cultural differences between ourselves and Ghanaians. As social workers, we were thrown for a loop when we discovered that Monday morning meetings begin with a Christian devotion, Bible reading, lesson, discussion, prayers, and singing." They continued: "Finally, be prepared to witness power distribution based on gender and age." There are several lessons to be drawn from these reflections that may be used as teachable moments in cultural responsiveness in general, and in an international context.

First, in indigenous cultures time is not viewed or experienced in western terms. It is important for visitors to be open to alternative ways of viewing and experiencing time. Looking at time through culturally responsive lens would suggest a more expanded interpretation of how native Ghanaians use time. In this sense it is neither bad nor good; it is simply the way it's done in Accra. The same observation holds true about morning devotion in the work place before the work day, as well as the situation concerning age and gender. As an outsider, it is more appropriate and effective to observe, listen, and learn the norm. These experiences and perceptions noted by

the students reflect implications of how schools of social work may prepare students for international encounters that moves them beyond an ethnocentric interpretation of different cultures. It is important for students see people from different cultures in terms other than of what can generally be described as risk factors. These risk factors are: race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender difference, disability, etc. Such a reductionist framework tends to abuse individuals sometimes entrenched in experiences of marginalization and or colonization. Finally, another concern that is often ignored is the students' reluctance or lack of readiness to discuss and deal with uncomfortable discussions about race or other oppressions in the classroom setting. Additionally, as pointed out by Adams and Gibson (2007), a common reaction by students to discussing racism, structural disadvantages, or oppression is resistance to the material and sometimes to the instructor teaching the material, especially if the instructor is of color. This is particularly true when the dialogue turns to issues of privilege, colonization, and white privilege in particular.

Both Caucasian students concluded that, "Ghana was a great experience to be involved in international social work." One student also wrote, "The cultural learning and friendships developed with people in the community and other visitors to Ghana are some of the greatest treasures I took away."

There have been other visits to Ghana, but not in the context of student motivated study tours. As a visitor, I continue to be enriched by my African roots and reminded of my ancient connections to the African continent. I also continue to see a changing, inspiring, hopeful Ghana

Implications for Social Work Practice and Education

The global and multi-contextual nature of our existence in the world has required a shifting of paradigms, especially in social work education and practice. As our personal and professional interest in international education and practice expanded, it became more obvious that we also needed to expand our

conceptualization of cultural competence. The Ghanaian member of our first tour group (who presented at the symposium) spoke on the topic of cultural competence. He emphasized that cultural awareness should be the first step toward cultural competence. His perspective, not unlike the evolving dialogue on the subject, is that cultural competence is a process that in some ways represents a dilemma in social work practice and education. The dilemma is inherent in the historical origins of cultural competence, which reflects practice with individuals and groups of color. The problem with this model is that it tends to equalize oppressions under a "multicultural umbrella" and unintentionally promotes a color-blind mentality that eclipses the impact of colonization and the significance of institutionalized racism (Abrams and Molo, 2009). In other words, scholars adopting a critical lens toward the cultural competence model contend that the cultural competence model's focus on individual attitudes leaves social workers unequipped to deal with or even understand the subversive, destructive nature of colonization and instructional racism on all levels where it permeates: individually, structurally, and globally (Yee, 2005). This mindset becomes an even greater problem for U.S.-trained caring professionals who take this perspective into an international setting. This problem seemed very obvious in the student's reflections about Ghana, the agency where they were interning, and about their practice in Ghana.

Overall, this narrative—especially the section on the MSW interns' experience—may be used as teaching examples that target cultural responsiveness at the level of social workers' personal beliefs, and agency practices with a view toward expanding the cultural competence concept to include a critical race theory framework. Critical race theory is an interdisciplinary theory that draws from feminist studies, postcolonial studies, history, economics, sociology, political science, ethnic, and cultural studies. The aim of this theory is to address systemic and institutionalized oppression, with a view toward greater equity and empowerment for people, communities, and organizations.

It seems obvious that this process of drawing on examples from another country may prove to be challenging as a teaching tool for local or international studies; however, it would be invaluable. This teaching example would push students and instructors to examine structural/systemic barriers as well as personal beliefs and practices in local and global contexts.

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MINING COMMUNITIES IN GHANA: REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF WORK FOR FEMALE MINERS AND NON-MINERS

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The following narrative describes the experiences of women in small-scale mining and other economic activities at Kejetia, in the Upper East region of Ghana. The ways in which economic activities of women are influenced by social factors—such as the culturally determined position of women in the Ghanaian society—are discussed. The cultural challenges faced by these hardworking women account for their vulnerability in the mines.

Introduction

This narrative is based on my 2010 participation in the University of Michigan's Study Abroad Summer program, sponsored by the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies at Kejetia, in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The original study (my doctoral research, from which this narrative was drawn) came from data which was focused on evaluating the effect of mercury on small-scale miners in Ghana, both male and female. Funding for my doctoral research came from the University of Michigan's Office of the Vice President for Research, Department of Anthropology. From the original data set, I interviewed females ranging in age from 16–45 in groups and solo: 4 groups (N = 4 – 7 in each) and 20 individual. What drew my attention to this issue was a desire to understand the nature of women's work as miners and non-miners at mining sites, the type of work they do, personal income generated from mining activities, their social and family interactions, and reasons for working in a mining community without basic amenities such as electricity and running water. In addition to sharing the plight of females in mining communities and lessons learned, I will put the narrative in context commencing with the historical overview of the development of gold mining in Ghana, especially small scale mines owned by Ghanaians.

Small-Scale Mining Activities in the Talensi-Nabdam District of Ghana

Ghana, called the Gold Coast prior to March 1957, has produced and exported gold for centuries. Trade in gold with the Phoenicians and Moors were recorded before European incursions in 1471. Most gold mining in Ghana before the mid-nineteenth century was alluvial: miners recovering the gold from streams. Women and children in coastal towns around Elmina and Axim collected and washed beach sand to obtain gold after heavy rains (Aryee, 2003). Modern gold mining that plumbs the rich ore deposits below the earth's surface began about 1860, when European concessionaires (vendors – subsequently owners) imported heavy machinery and began working on large-scale mines such as Ashanti Goldfields Company (currently AngloGold Ashanti; based in South Africa, the 2nd largest mining company in the world) in Obuasi with mining rights granted by 1896. According to Hilson and Pardie (2006), between 10 and 15 million people worldwide are directly involved in small-scale gold mining with another 100 million people estimated to be associated with this work. In Ghana, gold currently accounts for about 40% of the country's exports and employs more than 200,000 people, with over 300 registered small-scale mining groups (Hilson, 2002).

As mining became more regulated by state, there was a high demand for unskilled labor power. The Northern territories of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) became the target for labor recruitment. Thus, men from the Upper East region have travelled south to work in the large gold mines, non-Ghanaian owned, for more than forty years (Plange, 1979).

History of Kejetia

Kejetia is a mining community in the Talensi-Nabdam district of the Upper East region of Ghana. Ghana is divided into ten administrative regions. At the north-eastern corner, in the Guinea Savannah zone in the Upper East region. The regional capital is Bolatanga. Talensi-Nabdam district capital is Tongo, population 94,650 in 2010; one of the eight districts of the Upper East region (<http://tongo.ghana.districts.gov.gh>). Mining concession in the district originally covered an area 72km², although there have been encroachments by miners to other non-demarcated sites by illegal miners.

The major occupation of the people had been farming and raising livestock in their home communities. Relative to the livelihood of local inhabitants of Talensi, economic reciprocity among husbands and wives is used to satisfy their material needs (Fortes, 1949). The land belongs to the head of the family and to those of his lineage. Men do the heavy work on the farm, while women are responsible for the household chores and offer services to the men, such as the harvesting and marketing of produce. But the trend in occupation or agricultural duties differential by gender has changed with the emergence of other industries such as mining; this meant increased participation from women as miners and in mining-related activities.

At Kejetia, small-scale gold mining did not start until 1976. According to one of the early settlers, most of the neighboring concessions or mine workers migrated to the town of Obuasi to work at the gold mine. They returned to their local communities with the skills gained while working in large mines to start or work in small gold mines, often owned by Ghanaians. Thus, gold mining became the

“pull” factor for starting these communities. Now, Kejetia’s economy and development is heavily dependent on both gold mining and gold prices which impact the role of women.

Women’s Work: Mining and Non-Mining Occupations

The population of Kejetia is about 3,000; this number could more than double during active mining periods. Half of the population is estimated to be women primarily the ages of 16 - 45. Before the introduction of small-scale mining in the district, the major livelihood of women included farming, livestock rearing, shea-butter picking and processing, and fuel-wood gathering (Banchirigah and Hilson, 2010).

Studies by Awumbilla and Tsikata (2010) showed that 44.8% of females in mining communities are actually involved in mining. Most women working in the mines were born and raised in the Upper East Region and migrated to southern Ghana (especially Kumasi) to work in mining and non-mining occupations. The rest of the women (31%) are either traders or service providers to miners or food processors (17.2%). Only 3.5 per cent of the women are farmers. They live at Kejetia for a greater part of the year; at the beginning of the rainy season, the delays prohibit them from mining, so they often go back home for a few days to help their parents plant crops. They occasionally make trips to Bolgatanga in northern Ghana to purchase major food stuffs such as vegetables. Currently, women in Kejetia engage in several types of economic activities for their survival, including: small-scale mining, domestic services, bathroom operators, *pito* brewing, food vendors and petty trading, and processing shea nuts into butter.

Women as Miners

All the females interviewed for this narrative have been involved in mining, the most common work being *shanking*. More than half of the women work as *shankers* who strain grounded rock to separate the rough particles from the finely grounded powder, using a sieve or scarf. The fine powder is then mixed with water to form a paste. Water is run over the

paste to wash away the earth. Mercury is then added to the residue to form a gold-mercury amalgam. A few of the women are involved in the amalgamation process known as *burning*. The amalgam is heated using small burners to vaporize the mercury, leaving behind the small grains of gold, which is then either refined or sold in its raw state. Not many women are involved in this process as it is normally performed by the owner, sponsor, or buyer of the gold, all of whom are usually men. Where particles of gold can be visibly seen in rock pieces, the rock is pounded in large metal mortars by men to retrieve as much of the gold as possible. Another task women perform is transporting rocks to milling machines to be ground into powder.

Women are excluded from certain mining activities such as the digging of mining pits. Groups of workers are called *gangs*. Each gang is given accommodations in the same household by the leader, owner of the pit, or business (*ghetto*) owner. One man explained:

"Women are excluded from entering the shaft because it is a taboo for a woman menstruating to enter mine shafts. A menstruating woman drives away good spirits, which are guiding spirits for the mines."

Some women reported that working in the mines was peaceful, as it temporarily took them away from the pressures of their families and local governments. One of the women interviewed explained:

"We are defrauded by relatives in Kumasi who contract us (hire us out) as domestic servants but receive (keep) our wages (on our behalf) and refuse to give the money back to us. Besides, we are constantly harassed by city authorities for non-payment of sales tax even when we do not make enough sales. We cannot afford suitable accommodation, often living on the streets or in slum

locations and thus are prone to sexual harassment and rape."

When asked how much money women earn from mining activities, one interviewee stated that 30 – 50 GH¢ (Ghana Cedis) per month is the average (\$20.05 – \$33.41 U.S. dollars; rate as of 6/1/2011). However, the amount can double when business is booming. She explained that she is able to save part of this income for herself and the remainder for her parents through *susu*, which is a form of informal savings organized by groups of people who contribute small amounts in savings over a period and collect the money back in bulk.

Women as Domestic Workers

There are various types of domestic service jobs in mining communities. *Chop-bars*, which are local restaurants where dishes are prepared and sold, are usually female-owned and usually stay open until midnight. Women also work as *kaya yie* or *kaya yoo*, (head porters or couriers) carrying heavy loads of goods or food stuffs on their heads for buyers street vendors.

Younger women can earn money by fetching water for other people in the mining community for a fee during times when the main stream dries up. The cost of a bowl of water (about 30 liters) ranged between 40 and 60 pesewas (.27 – .40 U.S. cents; rate as of 6/1/2011) depending on the season. During the dry season, women can travel distances of over 5 kilometers (approximately 3 miles) one way to collect water upstream when the water downstream dries up. In any of these positions, women are subjected to low wages and/or tips, irregular sale of goods, and lower profits.

Women as Bathroom Operators

Most homes do not have private indoor or outdoor bathrooms in this region. Women own and operate public bathrooms where workers can shower when returning from mining pits. "No flush" toilets are available in the form of large, outdoor rooms for multiple users with trenches along the inner wall for squatting. There is an open underground storage structure where water collects when it rains. Miners fetch water from these structures for bathing,

and the operators use the water to wash down the trenches. It costs twenty pesewas (.13 U.S. cents; rate as of 6/1/2011) to use the bathroom and more if one purchases toilet paper.

Women as Pito Brewers

One of the major female-owned income-generating businesses in Kejetia brewing *pito*: beer made from millet. Women are involved from the milling process through brewing to selling of the end-product. The owners of the business (mostly women) employ other women to assist in *pito* production. One woman can brew 4-7 barrels (210 liter/barrel) per week. *Pito* serves as wholesale stock for other women to sell.

The main component of *pito* is millet, which is milled, mixed with water, and boiled over a fire in large pots. The drink is either sold immediately (this is referred to as the female drink) or left overnight to ferment (male drink) to increase the alcoholic content. The drink is consumed all-year round but especially in the dry season when temperatures are extremely high.

Water is also an important component for *pito* brewing. The main source of water for *pito* and all other food preparation is from the main stream at the outskirts of the community. A source of worry is that the stream is highly contaminated from mining. The ultimate impact on the health status of those who drink it has not been officially measured, but during the interviews it was realized that there was a high rate of infant mortality in the community, which can be the result of water contamination. However, no research has been conducted to prove or disprove this assertion.

Women as Food Vendors and Petty Traders

At busy times, a lot of people buy locally cooked food. Food is sold under sheds from morning till late evening. Most food vendors are women, who also employ other young women. A large number of women also engage in petty trading. Their wares include herbal medicine (locally dried leaves and plant roots), food, and clothing. A few men also sell goods, but they work out of actual shops instead of

tables on the street like the female vendors. *Insu* (filtered water sold in small plastic bags for drinking) is brought in big trucks from Bolgatanga, which shop owners buy and sell. Items sold by men tend to cost more than women's, so therefore men are likely to make more profit.

Women as Shea-Butter Producers

Shea butter is used on a daily basis in this region for skin care and food preparation. It is extremely time consuming to make, and is rarely sold for money unless there is a downturn in the gold business. Shea butter is used to make stews and sauces and to fry food, so almost all of the butter is consumed by the household with no economic gain. To make the butter, shea seeds are collected from wild trees, which grow in the area, are sun-dried and crush opened to remove the nut. This process is usually done collectively by a group of women, who sit together and chat while crushing and sorting the nuts. Since there is no shea nut milling machine at Kejetia, women carry the nuts to near-by communities for milling and processing. This takes them away from the community for a week or two.

Kejetia's Mining Community: A Challenge for Women & Children

Life in this mining community is very challenging for women and children. During my visit over the summer of 2010, Kejetia had no basic facilities such as medical clinics, toilets (both private and public), potable water, or electricity. Educational infrastructures were compromised because of these factors. The people are discouraged from building permanent compound houses and permanent sanitation facilities—such as pit latrines—because of the migrant nature of the residents. Thus, a form of open defecation referred to as “free range” is commonplace. Houses are constructed with mud, roofed with thatch or plastic sheets and corrugated metal. Some houses have single rooms and others are a compound with two to seven rooms. Most houses do not have separate kitchens. Cooking is usually done out in the open on locally constructed mud-stoves, using firewood as fuel.

According to the residents of Kejetia, a Danish Development Agency (DANIDA) is the only non-governmental or governmental organization which has donated equipment—a generator—to the community to be used for mining activities. Although this generator could also be used to provide a section of the community with electricity, most people cannot afford it. However, houses close to the generator get enough power to light one or two bulbs when it is in use.

Kejetia has one main unpaved road leading into the community, which divides into two main branches. One branch stretches to one end of the community while the other ends in the market area, where there are two wooden constructed sheds under which women sell goods such as local herbs, and men sell locally-made clothes. The streets of Kejetia are littered with plastic refuse from *insu* and other kinds of trash. An interview with one man revealed that they have not been able to organize themselves for clean up campaigns because mining takes up most of their time. However, he also indicated their willingness to organize for community work.

The only three-classroom block school for the children is run by a private proprietor under poor environmental conditions, such as a damaged roof which leaves the school unprotected during rainy and Hamatan (sand and wind) seasons. There are approximately 70 children, with ages ranging from three to eleven-years-old, with differing academic and physical needs. The single teacher and assistant are responsible for providing meals for the children. Even under these conditions, the children are cheerful and eager to get an education (and meal) as they walk to school, often defying bad weather conditions such as torrid rains. A newly-constructed school by the Talensi-Nabdam District Assembly (local government administration) had not begun enrollment. One male stakeholder who was interviewed stated that the *"inability to start the school could be due to the general lack of getting teachers posted into deprived communities."* Many trained teachers do not want to go to such communities without basic amenities for fear of their health and well-being. Housing provided by the government

would be sparse; oftentimes they would have to relocate their families to such communities. Older school-going children usually live with family members in cities such as Bolgatanga or Kumasi where they are likely to attend school if enrolled, visiting their working parents in Kejetia when they are on vacation.

Women's Economic Dependence: Lack of Security

More than half the women in the community are engaged in the mining activities. Payment for their services was unregulated and unformulated. As compensation for their labor, they receive ground rocks from secondary extraction with very little gold left in them. Even this compensation for their labor depends on how much the male mine owners are willing to offer. The women seem powerless to contest payments or wages. According to one of woman interviewed, "men only give what they are ready to offer." She went on to explain that men can choose to refuse a woman any form of compensation for their services. After all, "they enter the pit [in her view, men do the most difficult tasks], which is the most risky part of the process and they own the business." This feeling of powerlessness accounted for their inability to negotiate their wages. Moreover, she explained that women only found themselves in the small-scale gold mining initiated by men.

Without men, it would be impossible for women to get into the mining business. Thus, the vulnerability of women is revealed in their inability to come together to negotiate with men since culturally women do not argue with men who are the main decision-makers.

Gender Disparity and Economic Justice: Perspectives on Rights to Access Resources

In an interview with a group of male miners, I found that men are more likely to know and exercise their civil rights to access resources from government and other agencies than women. For example; when questioned, the men mentioned electricity supply as their most pressing need to improve their quality of life. During the interview, the men had a clear plan of protest to secure electricity. Vocal in

their pronouncement, their planned action was to threaten to refuse to vote for the next general democratic election in Ghana (December 2012) unless the government provided them with electricity. They need electricity not only for their homes but for their businesses; the lack of which negatively affects their economic lives and the mining community. The shafts often fill up with water during major rains, and needs to be pumped out before miners can re-enter the pit. This process requires the use of electricity.

By contrast, in a focus-group discussion with women, they mentioned a poly (medical) clinic as their most urgent need to improve their quality of life. Their rationale for such a clinic was that the clinic would provide services to sick children and accident cases from the mines (mostly involving men who enter the pits); the lack of which negatively affects the social and economic development of families and the community. Like the male miners, they too expected the government to provide the polyclinic. However, they did not have an action plan to ensure support for such a clinic in the community. In fact, these women specifically reported that they had not even considered any action if the government failed to provide them with a polyclinic.

Conclusion

Despite the significant role women play at the mines for the production of gold, they have received minimal attention from researchers, development programs, and the government of Ghana. There are discrepancies in the actual number of women involved in mining and related occupational activities, in the significance and nature of work they do, and in diversity among the group. For example, the differential impact of working long hours by female miners has not been fully investigated. For women who come from the same district where the mines are located, it was found in this preliminary study that they were not as negatively affected by working long hours. Being geographically close to their families also offered them the opportunity to participate in social activities such as funerals; a significant event in Ghanaian culture. Not participating in funerals and paying respect for

the dead in Ghanaian society can result in excision, shunning, etc. One woman, whose family lived far away from where she mined, put the importance of taking part in her family social life after she returned home by saying: "For the last two weeks, I've been attending funerals in my hometown. I couldn't do that when I was in Kumasi."

The impact women have had on these mining communities such as contributing to "community stability, cohesiveness, morale and general well being, and acting as primary agents in facilitating positive change" (Hinton, et al., 2003, p 171) need comprehensive investigation relative to the income and benefits they receive from these profitable mining companies. Often women occupy marginal roles in small-scale mining; activities associated with transporting and processing materials, unlike digging and maintaining pits, do not qualify them as "miners" (Hinton et al., 2003, p 164). Thus they are not sought after to contribute to decisions regarding pay, length of work day, safety, etc., as compared to concession owners, mine operators, dealers and mineral buyers and equipment owners (Yekovleva, 2007). Both their roles and activities need to be investigated—quantitatively and qualitatively—compared to males and within group diversity for those in residing in these communities with small scale mines.

Lessons Learned

I believe that more studies should be carried out on female miners to tell their stories of survival and desire for economic justice. Due to limited time during this preliminary study, many inquiries were not made for a detailed study. However, I have learned several lessons that I hope will be meaningful for future researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and other stakeholders advocating for the rights and improved quality of life through social development programs and initiatives for females in mining communities in Northern Ghana.

Most importantly, I have learned that there is a need to mainstream women's sustainable employment opportunities and activities in mining areas—improving their economic status

and that of their families—in more lucrative businesses. Clearly these women had a preference to work in mining communities as compared to other areas where they felt more exploited (economically, socially, and physically). Thus, stakeholders should pay greater attention to the extraordinary contribution of women in the mining sector while improving facilities such as schools for their children, housing accommodations, sanitary conditions, and drinking water. Finally, what I learned most is that these women seemed to be suffering from low self-esteem, accepting not only what men offered as owners of the mines but believing that, from their social position, they had no voice to ask for fair pay and better working conditions. These women are not only hard workers, but they do have a voice and are the glue holding many of their families and communities together. Much more can be learned from these women; thus, I am encouraging others to seek additional knowledge from them, including the beliefs and traditions of their diverse community, perceptions towards governmental policies on mining, relationships that are emerging from this economic endeavor, and sustainable empowerment interventions that will improve the quality of life for those residing in this “needy” community of miners, especially females.

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