

**The Volunteering Self:
Ethnographic Reflections on “The Field”**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis explores the author's experience of fieldwork in Western Ghana while volunteering to promote gender equality at an elementary school. Analyzing the stages of preparation for fieldwork, situating the self in the field, conducting fieldwork, and returning from the field, illustrate some of the strengths and weaknesses of NGO and volunteer involvement for the combined purposes of conducting ethnographic fieldwork. Reflecting on these processes and the presence of the researcher allows for a critical understanding of issues in the field; such as children's responsibility and ethnic discrimination. The complex of the researcher's multiple identities in the field, including volunteer, researcher, and white woman, affect the experience and results of the fieldwork; the significance of which is reflected upon through autoethnography.

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List of Abbreviations

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada	-	BGCC
International Student Volunteers	-	ISV (pseudonym)
Local Mining Company	-	LMC (pseudonym)
Millennium Development Goal	-	MDG
Non-Governmental Organization	-	NGO

Special Note: Pseudonyms have been provided to protect the identity of the organizations, the mine, schools, teachers, volunteers, students, villages and villagers.

Introduction

Using an international volunteer placement as an opportunity to conduct fieldwork on a development issue has its benefits and its disadvantages. Right from the beginning it creates a situation which offers the lone female anthropologist a feeling of security, but limits her choice of destination or project; she is provided with information which she relies on to be true, but which is subject to the laws of the broken telephone as it filters its way through the lines of communication from the field site in Ghana to her email box in Canada. It also provides a field environment in which the neophyte anthropologist is incorporated without having to go through the trouble of making arrangements with partner organizations, as the volunteer agency organizes the administrative details, but in which she must still establish herself as researcher. In theory, she knows that she may have to reframe her research focus if situations in the field do not match expectations, but in reality, it is not something she is always entirely prepared for.

The chapters of this thesis take the reader through my anthropological journey. From the planning stages and the frustrations associated when things inevitably did not go according to plan, to the process of reconceptualizing the research focus; through analyzing interviews and lessons learned through interpersonal interactions, to the realization that fieldwork does not end after returning from the field. Drawing on autobiographical and autoethnographic writing, this work illustrates the utility of reflection and self-awareness in the ethnographic enterprise. It also contributes to the growing literature on volunteering.

Chapter 1: Plans for a Research Project

Research Through Volunteering

An International Student Volunteers (ISV) program began in 2005 as a means of facilitating opportunities for post-secondary students to gain learning experiences while volunteering overseas in developing countries. The Canadian non-government organization (NGO) that runs ISV has initiatives on university campuses across Canada as well as a variety of projects and partner organizations internationally. ISV offers university students with an interest in international development issues the opportunity to travel to a “third world” country to gain hands-on experience in the field. Students apply for various volunteer positions based on their interests and after a series of applications and interviews the Canadian coordinators select who will participate and the volunteer placements. Volunteers are placed in a number of developing countries and offer various fields of study, based on the needs of the local partner organization.

My volunteering experience over three years with university based local committees during my undergraduate and graduate study terms, along with my anthropological interest in social issues in developing countries, prompted me to pursue ISV. I was interested in the opportunity to further my knowledge through field research and to apply the knowledge I had already gained in the university classroom. I was accepted to fill the position of Assistant in Extra-curricular Activities at Nwoma Primary School in Kuro, Ghana from May to August 2009. This meant I would be working under the Unique School Club component of the Nwoma School Project; a project that also sought volunteers to assist with teaching English lessons and other classroom-based teaching.

The need to address gender issues in Ghana became a concern from the 1980s-1990s with the introduction of structural adjustment policies. This concern has grown over the past decade as studies have shown an increase in poverty rates in certain areas of the country and have identified a correlation between poverty and gender inequality (Awumbila 2006). The Ghanaian government has taken measures to address these issues through formal recognition of the importance for all children to receive basic education. Ghana has ratified the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as “the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the African Charter on Human Rights and People’s Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child” (Tuwor and Sossou 2008:376). As a way of working toward gender equity and women’s rights, the Local Mining Company (LMC), the District Education Directorate, the District Assembly and ISV have collaborated to create the Nwoma School Project, in the community of Kuro.

The job description I was sent specified that the volunteer candidate should have experience working with school clubs. As the job title indicates extra-curricular activities, I understood this to mean that the candidate should have experience working with afterschool programs such as those run by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada. The mission statement of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is “to provide a safe, supportive place where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life” (bgccan.com). Similar to this mandate, the goal of the Nwoma School Project is to use club activities and mentors trained in gender sensitivity to raise awareness of gender issues and to create a gender-balanced environment for youth in the school.

Going into this project I expected that while some people would feel this is a worthwhile initiative, the introduction of social mandates for change might make other people feel uncomfortable or threatened. To gain an understanding of how people in the affected community felt about this effort to promote women's empowerment and increase gender equality, I proposed to pursue the following research question: *How does the local community of Kuro respond to the implementation of activities designed to raise awareness of gender issues?*

As I approached this situation I thought it would be important to keep in mind a few key questions. Where did the motivation for starting this initiative come from? It could be a result of demands from the local population or imposed by international pressures, such as the World Bank's Millennium Development Goals; which include universal basic education, and gender equality and women's empowerment. It would also be important to ask how the success of the initiative is measured and by whose standards. Is success determined by desired outcomes set out by the LMC which is the primary funding agent, by ISV which is the primary implementation agent, or is it at least partially subject to the opinions of those running the Unique School Club?

As it turned out I was incorrect about a number of things I had anticipated concerning what to expect from and in the field. I will explain in the next chapter what these misconceptions were and how this affected my fieldwork endeavour. First, however, I will contextualize this project by turning to the literature on gender and education regarding development issues in Ghana.

Gender in Education as a Development Issue

Gender equality is often raised in correlation with poverty and specifically the feminization of poverty. Moreover, development efforts appear unable to bear fruit in a context of gender inequality which leads to the argument that girls' education may be one means for overcoming this gendered poverty (Awumbila 2006; Tuwor and Sossou 2008). Sinha and Nayak (2008) argue that education is widely recognized as the basis for sustainable social development because it increases women's participation in economic and political activities. Inequality between men and women is considered a gender imbalance, and as most of the world's poor are women and children, poverty is gendered as well. These authors argue that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of basic education for all is the most important as the other goals will not be achieved without this one leading the way. Eradicating poverty and improving health standards are dependent on people becoming educated. Recognizing the gendered nature of poverty and promoting gender equality in education is a popular approach to reducing poverty (Sinha and Nayak 2008). Educating girls empowers them, and empowered women are recognized as contributing to the process of development (Tanye 2008:168).

Awumbila (2006) also takes the stance that gender and poverty are connected by pointing out that poverty in Ghana affects women more so than men, and arguing that development is hindered by pervasive gender inequality. According to Morley, Leach and Lugg: "Woman automatically implies constraint, restrictions and oppression" (2009:60). Social relationships and the social construct of gender need to be considered when addressing poverty and women's issues rather than set outside of their social contexts and treating these phenomena in isolation (Sinha and Nayak 2008; Awumbila 2006; Morley, Leach and Lugg 2009).

Tuwor and Sossou (2008) suggest that for compulsory universal education to be effective in Ghana and the West African countries with similar gender inequality issues, there needs to be a change in attitude towards the importance of girls' education. Governments need to ensure qualified teachers provide supportive learning environments and that curriculum is gender sensitive. The Nwoma School Project I was involved with for this research is an example of these efforts being put into effect. This school has the support of a locally situated mining company and an international NGO, and it only accepts teachers who have completed teacher training college, an asset most schools do not have the option to be selective about. Recognizing Nwoma's privileged position, it cannot be considered representative of efforts across the district. Through the Unique School Club, the school is introducing gender sensitive approaches in the classroom and is creating a learning environment that is encouraging to both boys and girls.

Tuwor and Sossou (2008) argue that parents should be held accountable for their children's enrollment, attendance and success in school. These authors suggest that parents should be required to sign an agreement that will ensure their children complete 12 years of basic education and that, should this agreement be breached, family courts be given the authority to intervene. While this perspective might have merit in theory, it is not in line with the resources I was aware of while in an area of West Africa that was dealing with the very issue of academic truancy and social barriers to children's education. As I will discuss in the chapter on "Autoethnographic Field Experiences", government policies are failing to prevent corporal punishment in schools and child labour in rural areas, therefore it is presumptuous to expect that government mandated parental responsibility will suddenly improve the situation. Tuwor and Sossou's argument that "parents, especially illiterate parents... should be held

responsible and accountable for their children's basic education.... This process should involve school districts making parents to commit to signing formal agreements" (2008:376), seems wrong as it suggests that the way to address an educational issue with people who are uneducated is to assert authority over them and force them into a legally binding agreement that they are unlikely or perhaps even unable to read. I find it problematic to promote the empowerment of some by asserting power over others, especially when they too are likely disadvantaged and powerless. The assumption that parents "should" be responsible for their own children is also ethnocentric. In the chapter "Autoethnographic Field Experience" I will discuss my observations about matrilineal lineage which designates a child's maternal uncle as their primary guardian; not their own father or mother.

Abane (2004) approaches the issue of addressing the importance of girls' education with parents in a Ghanaian community. She contextualizes the gender gap by explaining that there are nationwide disparities between men and women regarding positions held in the formal sector and decision making roles, and in literacy levels attained by adults. Abane describes higher drop-out and truancy rates for girls than boys and suggests that one of the reasons parents do not feel the need to support their girls' education is because the benefit is deemed to go to her husband rather than returned to the household (2004:49-51). In an attempt to change these gendered attitudes, a workshop was organized to involve men and women in a discussion about the benefits of education and obstacles that prevent children, especially girls, from obtaining basic education; realistic solutions to overcome these barriers; and how school environments could be more gender sensitive (Abane 2004:53).

One of the most important activities of the project Abane was involved with was having the parents themselves identify the disparity between the amount of time girls, in comparison

to boys, are required to spend doing household chores. The outcome resulted in the parents agreeing that they could reassign some of the chores to the boys in order to free up some time for the girls to rest, play and complete their homework. Parents were also encouraged to reconsider their spending habits and to redistribute some of the money spent on clothing and minor expenses and to invest it instead in their girls' education (Abane 2004:57-58). The approach described by Abane engages parents with the issue of girls' and boys' education through group discussion and brainstorming wherein they come up with their own solutions. This is likely a more sustainable approach to ensuring girls' education than Tuwor and Sossou's recommendation of forcing a contract upon individuals who potentially do not understand the necessity of such a requirement.

Suggestions that arose regarding how to make school more gender sensitive focused on teachers using positive reinforcement when girls provide correct responses in class, encouraging girls and boys to interact freely with one another, and incorporating projects that will raise girls' self-esteem (Abane 2004). As I will later discuss in greater detail, the Unique School Club at Nwoma is modeled to do just that. Cooperation and mutual encouragement between male and female club members has had a great impact in the overall school environment, according to teachers and the project coordinator. Activities that give both girls and boys the opportunity to showcase their knowledge and skills raise the confidence of those involved and inspire audience members to increase their participation.

Chapter 2: Misconceptions About “The Field”

Assumptions and Expectations

The job description I responded to when applying for the position of Assistant in Extra-curricular Activities with the Nwoma School Project was deceiving. One of the few requirements for the ideal candidate stated that the volunteer have practical knowledge of organizing and managing school clubs. The organization I am familiar with and which the school clubs seem to most resemble is the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC). ISV is a Canadian NGO with international partners so I put these two pieces of information together and naturally thought there might be some connection between the two. This assumption was further reinforced during my phone interview because when I discussed my interest in the position in relation to my knowledge and experience with the BGCC, I was not corrected; when I discussed the project with my interviewers over the phone, I formed the impression that we shared an understanding. There was no connection between the two organizations, however. In fact the implementation of the Unique School Club was very different from that of the BGCC, as I will describe below. That the Canadian organizers did not have an accurate understanding of the position they were filling identifies a breakdown in communication between the Canadian and Ghanaian ISV partners and the first fault-line that would give way to others in my fieldwork.

Thinking the Unique School Club would resemble the BGCC led me to hold certain assumptions about how it would be run. This was affected by my understanding of the meaning of “extra-curricular activities.” Following the job description, I expected that extra-curricular activities would include games and activities that would focus on promoting gender

equality and that would be held after school hours. The job posting indicated that I would be training club mentors. As the BGCC trains teenagers to run program activities, I thought that club mentors would be older youth, perhaps from junior high school, who would develop their own leadership skills by acting as role models and mentors for the younger children.

As it turned out the club mentors were adults, two of them full time teachers at the primary school, and they had already taken up their positions as club mentor approximately eight months before my arrival. So, training was not one of my responsibilities after all. In addition, the club did not meet after school but during class time, and while the activities aimed to involve boys and girls, most activities did not explicitly address gender issues in the school. The mentors insisted that since it was still school hours, the activities should be explicitly educational. Mentors did not want the activities to be “silly games,” despite the possibility that games might have educational outcomes, because it would not be fair to let these students out of class to play while their classmates were still in class studying.

The fact that the club mentors were already trained and directing club activities, and that they were already in agreement about how to manage the club, altered how I situated myself as volunteer. Because the job post stated that I would be training mentors and assisting them in running club activities, I expected my role would be that of supervisor or leader. As the mentors were older than I and as they held organizer and leader positions, I turned back to the job post and reinterpreted descriptions of assisting the club mentors to mean that I should provide support as an assistant, rather than assist as a leader. I did not feel comfortable taking charge and restructuring the organization of the club because I did not want to offend or imply that they were not doing a good job. I also recognized that my own position as a temporary volunteer should not displace someone who was permanently involved in the project.

Nonetheless, this role change also influenced the way I situated myself in the school. I made myself available as someone that any teacher could turn to for assistance if they were over loaded with work, or if they simply wanted me to get involved in their classroom.

I found myself in a different position than I had expected: my only responsibilities were to help organize and run a one hour activity once a week and to submit a newsletter at the end of the term describing the activities executed by the club, all with much less of a focus on gender inequality. I had planned to have the days to myself, to have the opportunity to meet people in the community, and to learn about their attitudes toward the project. I expected that I would be running games for the students after school, each day, with the help of the youth mentors. Instead, I found I was expected to be at school during school hours, despite not having anything to do most of the time, and I was told that the school grounds were off limits after school hours unless the headmaster granted special permission; this meant I could not organize after-school activities.

My involvement at the school and the requirements of my time influenced who I met and how I spent my time. As I will describe in the next chapter, spending my time in the school with little to do facilitated my relationships with teachers, teacher trainees and students. In terms of my research goals, it no longer made sense to study community responses to promoting girls' education because I was no longer putting myself in the position of advocating gender equality to a community that I had been led to believe would resist it.

Misinformation

Unfortunately, most of the information I received before heading to my volunteer placement and field site turned out to be incorrect or, at the least, incomplete. What this meant

was that I was less prepared for my field experience than I had hoped to be. I had been required to sign a contract stating that I would fulfill my obligations as a volunteer for three full months. Information provided by ISV emphasized that there would be little to no opportunity for personal travel during this time and that travelling alone would not be safe and was thus discouraged. I arranged with another volunteer to book our return flights to Canada a few days after the end of our placement so we could have an opportunity to travel and so that we could offer companionship for travel. Thus, I expected to have three full months for my field research.

As it turned out, my first full week in Ghana was spent in the capital with two half days of training and the rest waiting for a staff member to take me and one other volunteer to our final destination. Furthermore, the school term came to a close two weeks prior to the end of my contract, and with final exams bringing an end to regularly scheduled classes a couple weeks before that, the project I was assigned to, the Unique School Club, was also brought to a close. All in all I had only two months working with the Club. I was unaware of this timeframe until midway through my placement. If this information had been shared initially, I may have been able to plan accordingly to ensure I would have time to accomplish all that I had planned. For example, one of the final projects, a play, had to be abandoned because there was insufficient time, as timetables had been left unclear.

On another front: I had been informed by my contacts in Canada that I would be staying with a host family in Ghana. I had anticipated that by living with a family I would learn about gender roles in the household and that I would be able to compare this with the gender roles taught in the school; I hoped I would have an easier time fitting in as well as meeting people from the community because I would presumably get to meet the people who

would come to visit my host family. I thought a host family might offer some guidance with respect to culturally sensitive questions I might have. And, finally, because I had been warned that safety might be an issue as I was a single female, I hoped my host family could offer a source of protection and give me some advice on what was and was not safe or appropriate.

As is suggested by the above being written in the conditional, I did not end up living with a host family; instead it was arranged that I would live in a guest house. A guest house is similar to a motel in the sense that there are a few rooms which are rented out by the night or, in my case, for extended periods of time; but it is different than a motel as the structure is a free standing house with a common room, and with all the tenants sharing one toilet and one shower stall. The guest house experience gave me more freedom than a host family might have, as I was not expected to answer to anyone or fulfill the role of a surrogate daughter or sister or mother. On the other hand, I did not have the opportunity to learn the daily routine of a familial household or meet many people in the community who were not associated with the school. In retrospect, if I had been placed with a host family I might well have been assigned to live with one of the elite families on the top of the hill (more on this below), which would have limited my interaction with the local villagers even further. The guest house was situated, not in Kuro where I had been told I would be staying, but in a smaller village called Asaase. This locality likely did facilitate greater interaction with students and young adults from the community, as the house was in a convenient location so that people could visit me and I could walk to visit others.

Safety was not the issue that ISV had made it out to be. Walking alone at night was discouraged but the lack of street lights or flood lights accounted for this as it was far too dark to find one's way. Independent travel was not an issue either, providing a place to rest for the

night was arranged before nightfall. There was much more flexibility for travel on weekends than I had been advised prior to heading to the field; in fact it was often necessary. The nearest ATM was in the city three hours away so I would need to go every couple weeks in order to pay for my room in the guest house. Travel was time consuming but this inconvenience was exaggerated by the organization. Warnings about dress code were also exaggerated. ISV had emphasized to me and the other volunteers that women should only wear long sleeve collared shirts and skirts past knee length. Perhaps this information might be true in the Northern regions of the country where religious beliefs are different, but this type of clothing was unnecessary and impractical in Kuro. While I made sure to wear appropriate length skirts at the school, I was encouraged to wear tee-shirts and tank tops to school and shorts outside of school hours.

Misleading Secondary Research

Some of my misconceptions about the field cannot be blamed on ISV. My secondary research, which I discussed in the previous chapter, led me to believe that there would be a significant disparity between the number of boys and girls who are able to attend school and attain an education. The literature emphasized that there are social, cultural and economic barriers to girls' education and to women's ability to find their way out of poverty (Tanye 2008; Morley, Leach and Lugg 2009; Abane 2004; Tuwor and Sossou 2008; Awumbila 2006; Sinha and Nayak 2008). Along with the description of my role as a volunteer to help create a gender balanced environment in the school, which itself implies that there is currently gender imbalance in the school, my secondary research led me to expect that there would be resistance to girls' education. I anticipated parents would be refusing to send their daughters to school

and that there would be blatant prejudice against female students. While I am not disputing that these situations do exist across the country as evidenced by the literature, this was not the situation at Nwoma Primary.

Due to LMC's involvement in the community and the influence of the Nwoma School Project, which had begun the previous fall, enrollment in the elementary school was at 50 percent girls and 50 percent boys. The Unique School Club which was created to promote gender sensitivity and balance was also comprised of 50 percent girls and 50 percent boys. There were children in the village who did not attend school at all and there were students who were enrolled in school but were often truant. However, there was no overwhelming trend one way or the other in terms of whether children absent from school were male or female. There was also not the degree of resistance to girls' education that I had anticipated. As one of the teachers explained to me, parents are now trying to get their children enrolled in Nwoma so that they may have the opportunity to participate in the Unique School Club. Parents in this particular community recognize the benefits of the Club, and by extension the benefits of promoting gender equality in the school.

Finally, I had thought more people might speak English as English is Ghana's only official language (GhanaWeb). I knew there were local languages and dialects across the country, so I thought English might be used as a common language between people who speak different regional dialects. English is taught in schools, along with Twi, one of the nation's most widely spoken languages. The people from the village I lived in, Asaase, spoke Sefwi: a local dialect and minor language of the Akan language group. Considering the low levels of completed education and thus literacy attained, many adults in the community were unable to

communicate with me in English and I was unable to learn much Sefwi in the short time I was there.

I found language to be a bigger barrier than I expected: I had hoped but was unable to converse with the parents of the students I worked with at the school in order to learn their feelings about my presence and my involvement promoting gender equality in the school. I became friendly with the women I passed on a daily basis, but my little Sefwi limited my conversations to the chit chat of ‘how are you?’ and ‘where are you going?’ I did find people who spoke English well; I formed relationships with them and learned a lot about the local culture from them and the older students at the school who could act as translators and explain aspects of their culture to me. What this meant, however, was that I was unable to get to know the people who had not been formally educated, specifically women, who I feel could have taught me more about their own lived experiences and their individual identities.

All of the misguided assumptions and misconceptions I took into the field with me influenced the way I experienced the field. When my expectations were not realized I was relieved or disappointed or confused as to how it would affect everything else. I had formed some of my assumptions lightly, simply because I was unsure of what to expect and so had imagined what to expect. Some notions changed and were easy to adapt and adjust to. Other changes affected me more deeply and created greater anxiety. When I realized that I could not communicate well with the parents of the club members and that the topic I had planned to discuss with them was somewhat of a moot point, I came to terms with the common and almost expected reality that I would have to change my original research focus. I knew this was a possibility going into the field and that it was a common enough experience among socio-cultural anthropologists; but I was overwhelmed by the pressures to redirect my focus when I

had no idea what I should study instead. I suddenly felt cut off from an academic support system; the closest reliable internet access point I was aware of was a three hour journey, each way, and I did not have a phone number to reach my then advisor who was on holiday anyway. Of everything that went awry, redirecting my research focus was the most difficult to deal with and I felt completely unprepared for dealing with this set back. I continued to write in my journal but, overwhelmed by a lack of direction, my journaling felt chaotic and unfocused. I continued to struggle with this issue for months after my return.

Some of these misconceptions could have been avoided had proper information been provided, but some of these probably could not have been avoided. Research topics may change for different reasons and the types of relationships researchers form cannot be anticipated. In my opinion, the information I received from ISV should not have been as influential as it was. The organization's liaison officers should have had more information about the location they chose to send their volunteers, what activities their volunteers would actually be involved in, and what resources the volunteer would need or have access to. Had I received more accurate information about my placement I might have been able to establish a different research project in the first place, one that was more in line with the situation I would find myself involved with.

Chapter 3: New Approaches

Ethnography as Autoethnography

Taking an autoethnographic approach allows the researcher to situate him or herself in their research and to draw on their own personal experiences of the research process. Conversations and interactions from participant observation are reflected upon and from this a theoretical analysis is constructed (Dillow 2009:1339). Theoretical paradigms are formed by the data analysis and reflection of the ethnographer. Rather than forcing lived experiences into structured notions of theoretical perspectives, autoethnography allows the process to be organic; theoretical approaches are thus holistically drawn from the context and experience of the research process and the data collected (Dillow 2009:1340-1341). Dillow explains her own issues with theory as an autoethnographer and comes to the realization that it is the very process of “*theorizing* that turns data into abstract knowledge” (2009:1342).

Dillow argues that theoretical perspectives do not need to be sought out at the writing stage of ethnography because researchers’ ontological and theoretical perspectives often shape their research from the beginning. For example, she explains that her own study was based on an interpretive and interactionist approach (Dillow 2009:1343). This starting point led her to conduct participant observation, allowed her to be immersed in her study subject, to draw from the interactions and experiences she encountered in the field, and to create meaning and “abstract knowledge” from the process. Autoethnography allows us to illustrate the connection between the personal and the cultural.

Like Dillow, I approached my field research with a focus on interaction and interpretation. My inward and outward reflections helped me to theorize by thinking

analytically about my own situatedness in the field and about the daily lived experiences of those I encountered, observed and interacted with. The argument that “relationships and institutions are examined and revealed through dialogue and action” (Dillow 2009:1345), explicitly reflects the outcomes of my own autoethnographic research. Drawing on interactionist and interpretivist perspectives myself, and using participant observation as my primary research method, I learned about the culture I was immersed in through personal interactions. I learned about social relationships relating to class, ethnicity, and race, as well as roles between teachers and students. I also gained insight about institutions such as gender initiatives in education, parenting and inheritance, and children’s responsibilities.

Anthropologists often find it difficult to identify themselves in the field in terms of what they are researching. Autoethnography facilitates the processes of reflection and expression these identity crises demand. Part of the anthropologist’s struggle with identity is due to the fact that we are caught in the uncertainty that comes with being a part of the field, while simultaneously a part of the institutions of our own daily life; such as the academy, family, and whatever other roles we hold (Lambek 2005:231-232).

Fieldwork has been considered a rite of passage to be overcome in order to do research, gather data and write ethnography. Similarly, “culture shock”, the struggle of adapting and adjusting to different norms, behaviours, beliefs and environmental factors, has been considered part of the struggle leading to the point where the researcher can learn about the culture and collect data. Sylvain suggests that culture shock is “an experience that can produce a more nuanced moral subjectivity” (2005:26). She also argues that fieldwork, as a rite of passage, influences the anthropologist’s identity as well as her sense of self. The experiences

of fieldwork and culture shock, therefore, are valuable in their own right as a means of learning about both culture and the self.

Sylvain argues that the ethnographer's position leads them to know what they know about various selves. She uses the example of how her own identity as a woman was different than the identity of the women she studied because her race, socioeconomic status and world view were also different. In the context she found herself, however, she was an "outsider-within" which allowed her to learn how the black women she worked with saw white people, and how they understood white people to perceive them. Similarly, she was able to gain an understanding of how the women saw her in relation to how she saw them and to how she saw herself (Sylvain 2005:35).

Coffey describes one approach to writing the self into autoethnography by using partial autobiographical accounts. Using this style, "what is presented are insider accounts of how the research evolved and developed: how access and relationships were negotiated and managed; what went wrong; what was rewarding or challenging" (Coffey 1999:122). Coffey comments that this form of writing ethnography is usually applied in a piece of work separate from the main fieldwork analysis, and is not included in the fieldwork analysis. She argues, however, that these pieces often write the self cautiously and that by discussing the personal experience of the researcher in an altogether separate piece, the self is in effect further removed from the research analysis: the very problem writing auto-ethnographically aims to correct (Coffey 1999:123). I argue that partial autobiographical accounts are pertinent to the fieldwork analysis because they contextualize all of the data that comes out of the fieldwork. Similarly Mykhalovskiy argues that autobiographical writing can provide insightful analysis that would not emerge if the author's personal experiences were not included (cited in Coffey 1999:133).

I use partial autobiographical accounts in this thesis as a way to contextualize how I ended up in my particular field site, how my research was reshaped by my experiences and my reflections, and how I have come to analyze the data I collected. Rather than using the valuable information within my personal experiences for a separate piece of writing in which I allow myself to be self aware and reflexive, written as a side note to the rest of my thesis while keeping said thesis clean and free from emotion, I am combining these approaches to show that one style of data should not be kept separate from the other. I hope this paper illustrates the utility of expressing emotion and the process of learning in relation to the *facts*. I acknowledge in the chapter “The Field After Fieldwork”, that my mood influenced my writing; so I maintain that it is absurd to think that our emotions might not influence what we write in our field notes or what lessons we learn in the field. If our emotions have such impact on the product of our work, it seems only right to reflect on those experiences in the product of our work.

Data Collection and Recording

Participant observation formed the primary basis for data collection. I engaged in the activities of the Unique School Club and the school in various capacities which will be described in more detail below in the section on “Situating Myself.” As well as participating in and observing the activities and relationships among those people directly involved in the Unique School Club, I was a participant observer in the local community. These interactions outside the space of the Unique School Club proved vital to my learning.

In order to keep track of the experiences, interactions and responses I encountered, I kept a daily journal. The notes recorded therein included descriptions of events, interactions and observations. There were also thoughts and reflections as I came to understand situations

and conceptualize the significance of what I was working on with the organization and how it affected its participants and staff. As I began to think of questions and concerns I recorded them in the journal. The significance of this note taking was that when I returned from the field, I would have therein the data and experiential insight to produce this thesis.

Participant observation and journal entries were the primary methods of data collection and data recording during this field research. I established my role in the local community as that of student and volunteer. This was how I introduced myself when I met new people. I lived as a member of the community for the duration of my placement during which time I observed and conversed with other members of the community.

As part of my field notes journal I reflected on how my own culturally constructed notions of gender, equality and social norms might be influencing my interpretations of these daily events and relationships. It must be recognized that interactions I experienced may have been influenced more by the fact that I was a foreigner than the fact that I was involved in gender sensitivity training, so I also reflected on these issues in my notes. I compared my perspectives with those of the local staff members by conducting interviews so as to understand whether my own interpretations of the strengths and weaknesses of the Unique School Club gender initiatives reflected theirs. These three areas of focus were vital to the development of my understanding and contextualization of the experiences I had as well as the lessons I learned.

Nwoma School Project

Despite all of the miscommunications and misconceptions associated with my heading to the field, I adjusted to the situation I found myself in, and proceeded with a project. I was

confident that I would still come out of the experience with enough information to account for my research requirements and I was excited by the opportunity to volunteer and to travel. I was assigned the position of Assistant in Extra-curricular Activities at Nwoma Primary School in Kuro, Ghana. This meant I was helping with the Unique School Club component of the Nwoma School Project

Kuro is in the Western region of Ghana and is an extraction site for the Local Mining Company (LMC). The school is located on LMC property, at the bottom of the hill that is currently being mined. Adjacent to the primary school is Nwoma Junior High School, and nearby both of these is row housing for LMC employees and their families. This area of land is commonly referred to as the Compound. Students attending these schools live in the nearby villages of Kuro or Asaase, on Compound, or further up the hill at one of the other points of residence.

Towards the top of the hill, just beyond the LMC hospital is Bepo: another area of row housing for employees and the location of the old elementary school building. The very top of the hill, Ewiem, is home to the head management of the mine. This area of free standing houses stands apart as the luxurious residence of the foreign and Ghanaian elite. Some residents of Ewiem send their children to school at Nwoma while others prefer to send them to live with relatives in a more urban environment. Although in general teachers do not hold high status roles, a couple of the teachers whose husbands held management positions also lived at the top.

ISV's project at Nwoma Primary attempts to address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of universal basic education, gender equality and women's empowerment. According to the headmaster's record keeping, the primary school enrollment at the time of my

placement was approximately 350 students from kindergarten to grade six. 50 percent of those students enrolled were female, and the other 50 percent, male. Unfortunately, these numbers are deceiving as teachers report a high rate of truancy for all students at every grade level. The overall goal of the Nwoma School Project is to increase the quality of teaching and to raise the learning potential in the school, as well as to improve the community potential for development in the future. Promoting girls' and boys' education and assisting teachers to develop new teaching strategies, the Nwoma School Project addresses the issue of universal access to basic education.

As resources permit, ISV volunteers are being sent to assist with various aspects of the program's development. By the time I entered the field, two volunteers have been assigned to help improve English lessons; these volunteers teach English to the various class levels and are supposed to work with the teachers, introducing them to new teaching methods and approaches. One volunteer has worked to introduce French lessons in the school. Students do not usually begin French classes until Junior High School but as teachers feel it is too difficult to introduce students to a completely new language at that late stage, the ISV project aims to introduce students to basic French to facilitate their learning in the near future. All three countries that border Ghana are French-speaking so it is in the student's best interest to have an elementary ability to communicate in French. Another volunteer taught computer software to students from grades one through six, as well as to the teachers.

Finally, addressing the MDG of gender equality and women's empowerment, ISV sent two volunteers, including myself, to assist in developing the Unique School Club. This club was introduced as a means to facilitate lessons that are not normally the focus in the educational curriculum: to promote gender sensitivity in the school and to encourage girls and

boys to continue to regularly attend school. These ISV volunteers are expected to bring new ideas for activities, to assist in organizing and implementing the activities, and to assist the project director with related tasks, such as writing newsletters to share with local stakeholders.

Though the Nwoma School Project is a collaborative effort with various local stakeholders, ISV is the primary actor in implementing the project and, as part of their commitment to local community development, LMC is the primary funding agency. As my own experience with this project was as a volunteer with the Unique School Club, I will be discussing the activities and outcomes of this aspect of the project as well as my interactions with people in the community.

Initiating the Unique School Club

The Unique School Club was initiated at Nwoma Primary in the fall of 2008. The project coordinator introduced the idea to the teachers at the school and asked for a male and female teacher to volunteer as the club mentors. The two teachers who decided to take on this responsibility were both new to the school that term and were excited by the prospect of getting involved. The new club mentors then went to each classroom, from grades one through six, explaining the project to the students and inviting them to sign up to participate. 160 students signed up to join the club before the mentors had to draw the cut off line. In its first year of existence, the club therefore consisted of 160 students from various grade levels, including 80 girls and 80 boys.

The first ISV volunteer to join this project was heavily involved with the planning phase of the project. She worked with the mentors to come up with ideas for club activities but was not able to see many of these through. She was able to organize a health session in which

nurses from the local hospital spoke to club members about health issues such as personal hygiene and sexually transmitted diseases. The first volunteer is also credited with suggesting that the club members have the opportunity to go on a field trip so they may be introduced to the world outside of their village. One group of about 40 club members were taken on a trip to the nearest urban centre where they saw things they had never dreamed they would see: they saw what a city looked like, with its large buildings and traffic lights and they visited tourist attractions.

As the second volunteer, I was able to assist with the execution of more activities since the structure of the program had already been established. The club met for an hour every Tuesday afternoon during the last period of class when all 180 students would pile into one classroom. Club members were divided into four “houses” and each group voted for their house leader and assistant leader. Maintaining a dedication to gender sensitivity, each house had to elect one boy and one girl. Interestingly, each house elected a boy as the principal leader and a girl as the assistant. The teachers did not think this was an issue because the vote had been up to the students and as long as there was a male and female representative it did not matter to them who the leaders were.

Activities varied from week to week but the focus was always educational; the club mentors believed that since the club was held during class time there should be a lesson involved. At times, this made it difficult to design activities since there was such a range in academic ability among the students. As a result, for certain activities the group was split with the lower primary and upper primary students separated and placed in two different classrooms. During my placement, there were three more club excursions, which allowed a

different group of 40 students to participate each time. There was also a special day for games and races on Ghana Republic Day, when school was not in session.

Weekly Education Focused Games

The Unique School Club met for an hour every Tuesday Afternoon. At the first club meeting I attended, I introduced myself and a club mentor explained to the students that I would be taking over from where the previous volunteer left off; there was, however, a two month gap between her departure and my arrival. The rest of the meeting was spent organizing which students would be participating on the excursion that coming Saturday and explaining that school would be closing early that Friday so the students would have time to wash their uniforms and go to bed early in order to be prepared for the next day's early departure. Mentors told students they must look neat for the excursion and should only speak English so that people in the city would know that people from their village are respectable and educated. Students who were not paying proper attention during this meeting were shoved or tapped on the head with a wooden cane. Caning was a common method of disciplining the students in the school and became a practice I took issue with, especially within the environment of the Unique School Club.

At the following meeting, members who had gone on the field trip were called upon to share stories with their peers about the experiences they had had, the sights they had seen, and the lessons they had learned. Students from grades one through three reported that they had seen a high school and a traffic jam, while students from the upper grades, who were expected to be more proficient in the English language, were required to give more detailed accounts. One boy from the grade six class recounted the entire legend describing the origins of

traditional Kinte cloth weaving. To make sure students were getting the most out of these opportunities, all participants were required to submit a report written in English about what they had learned on these excursions.

The first club activity I helped to organize and facilitate was a spelling bee. For this event members were separated into two different rooms with the lower primary (classes one through three) in one and the upper primary (classes four through six) in another. In each room, each house selected three representatives, one from each grade. Each team was made up of at least one girl and one boy. Teams received points if the appropriate representative correctly spelled the word or if they correctly spelled a word that the team before them had misspelled. Members who were not actively participating, cheered on their house teams and were also offered the chance to spell a word if none of the others managed to do so.

Spelling words had been collected ahead of time from the teacher of each grade level to ensure that vocabulary was grade appropriate and relevant to the course curriculum. 'Mother and child' challenges were also included. For these, participants were given the correct spelling of a long word, such as 'accommodation', and were given three to five minutes to work together to spell as many words as they could from the letters in the word. At the end of this period, points were tallied and all participants received prizes of coloured markers or colouring pencils.

One challenge I faced when I was facilitating this activity was that I speak with a different accent than the students are used to hearing. One of the mentors would usually have to repeat the words after I said them so that the participants would understand what word they were being asked to spell. The students enjoyed this activity as it gave them a rare opportunity to engage with their learning material and to show off their skills in front of their peers. The

teachers were happy that the activity was educational for those participating as well as those in attendance, as everyone benefitted from practicing their spelling.

The second club activity I organized greatly affected my learning curve, introducing me to differences in epistemologies of primary education that made me reconsider my approach to the club and the degree to which I could affect change during my relatively short time with the Nwoma School Project. Drawing on the success of the spelling bee, I suggested a similar activity that would focus instead on local history and geography. In grade four, students begin classes in “Citizenship Education”: this subject offers a combination of geography, history and health education. With the approval of the club mentors, I took on the responsibility of organizing a geography contest. To come up with the questions for this activity I borrowed a Citizenship Education textbook from the teachers of classes four, five and six and read through them to get a sense of the information students were expected to know at the various grade levels.

The idea behind this activity was that houses would select a representative from each of the three grade levels, at least one girl and one boy per team, who would work together to come up with the correct response to the designated questions. As with the spelling bee activity, points would be awarded and, at the end, prizes would be distributed to the participants. Questions related to the geography of Ghana and West Africa and to the history and political structure of Ghana were developed. Some questions required participants to point to regions or cities on a map of Ghana.

I was confident that this activity was well planned and would run smoothly; I had not anticipated how it could quickly be turned off course and escalate out of my control. I had not considered the cultural understanding that had informed my student-centred approach to

education. I did not anticipate the difficulty this style of activity posed for the students and their teachers. It seemed to me such a 'natural' approach that I did not take the time to properly explain the procedures to the students or staff. I had also not anticipated the way the weather would affect the teachers' attitudes to working and, thus, contribute to the event spiralling out of control.

The day of the event was a rainy one. Certain aspects of daily life are not maintained when it rains in Kuro. If people are caught in the rain, they will continue to walk down the street rather than seek shelter. However, if people are not already out when the rain begins, they choose to stay home rather than venture out. As such, it is common to find students sitting in their classroom without a teacher at the front of the room because the teacher had not bothered to go to school that day due to rain. Teachers who make the effort to go to school when it is raining may choose not to teach simply because it is raining, or had been raining at some point in the day. An equatorial downpour on a corrugated tin roof does make the prospect of speaking loud enough for a class full of students to hear or for a class full of students to be able to concentrate, nearly impossible; but lessons do not necessarily resume after the rain has ceased. Students are required to remain at school and to be well behaved, but they are not given lessons, tasks or instruction.

The day of the geography contest I was excited and working hard to make sure the questions were well prepared and that everything was organized. As I was printing off the list of questions one of the club mentors, Kwaku, came to tell me that one of the other teachers would be running the event. Upset that the activity I had been working on was being hijacked, I approached Pat, the teacher who would be taking my place. He had not meant to offend, he was simply bored after a long day of not teaching and was looking forward to getting involved

as a way to pass the rest of the afternoon. I explained the goal of the activity, to promote cooperation among team members while reviewing information students had learned in class, and we agreed to facilitate the activity together. I wanted to encourage the teachers' interest in the club as I recognize that with the staff on board the program has a better chance of sustaining itself after the volunteers cease to come. However, already feeling under-used as a volunteer, I wanted to maintain my involvement and to have a sense that there was a point to my being there. In the end I was relieved we were co-hosting the activity: he stepped up and took control of the situation once it all spiraled out of my control!

The geography contest was a very stressful activity because it seemed like nothing went as I had planned. Many of the teachers and teacher trainees were bored because they had not taught all day; it had rained. So, too many people were trying to get involved and to take charge without knowing what my goals were for the activity. I explained the activity to the students but then one of the club mentors and a club mentee (the club mentee being a teacher trainee also regularly involved with the club) spoke up and began giving the students a different set of instructions. They had not listened while I spoke and consequently confused the students. Chaos erupted before the activity even began. Students were confused by the conflicting instructions, and teachers began caning the students when they believed they were not doing as they had been told. In fact they were doing what I had told them to do, and it was the teachers themselves who proved to be incapable of understanding my instructions.

Even once the activity had been sorted out and was underway, more of the teacher trainees kept coming in and trying to get involved. One began ringing a bell after five seconds to time the students because he thought it should be some sort of race or time sensitive event which undermined the goal: to encourage participants to discuss amongst themselves and agree

on the correct answer. The timed approach also resulted in only the sixth grade student on each team answering all of the questions because representatives from the lower grades would have needed more time to think about their responses. Further, with the increased pressure, all of the female participants became intimidated and refused to answer any of the questions; a clear indication that a gender balanced environment had been lost. A teacher trainee from the Nwoma Junior High School had come over and was hanging out at the front of the room, hovering over the participants and standing directly in front of the map, blocking it even when the participants had been asked to identify a specific city on it.

With 180 students in the room plus all of the extra teachers trying to take control, I was unable to speak up over the chaos and confusion. I was ineffective in my efforts to control the overwhelming teacher involvement and I felt terrible when some of the students were caned. Seeing my distress Pat, the teacher officially co-hosting the contest with me, began yelling at the others to step down and to cease their efforts to control the event. This led to a loud argument with one of his peers in front of all of the students and staff in the room. In the end, Pat regained control of the room and the geography contest. I stood back and watched as he finally managed to run the activity the way we had discussed it in the first place.

I later came to understand that the style of my childhood education is not the same as the one dominant in Ghana. I grew up in a system that emphasized student focused learning while Nwoma, and from what I understand most other schools in Ghana, is still focused on rote learning. The type of activity I had tried to organize was based on a specific cultural understanding of education. While I thought I was just introducing a fun and interactive activity similar in style to the spelling bee which the mentors had suggested and which had been a great success, I did not have a full understanding of the norms in the school and what I

was doing by encouraging cooperation and teamwork in the classroom setting. I did not appreciate how different my pedagogical background was and that, while it was difficult for me to adjust to the way things are done in Ghana at Nwoma, it was also difficult for the students and the teachers to understand what I was trying to do and to adjust to my methods. I was essentially asking them to instantly change their norms of acceptable classroom behaviour and procedure. For example, I was asking the participants to work together as a team but this is not something that is ever encouraged in the classroom setting. Regular classroom activities are independent, discussion is not accepted, and working with peers is punished. Students are afraid to ask questions if they do not understand the work because it is not uncommon for them to be insulted or punished for doing so. And, here I was, with my ideas of how great this geography contest would be, not realizing I was asking them to do everything they are not normally permitted to do.

I also did not realize how strange it would be for the teachers to adapt to all of this. Students watching the event were encouraged to cheer for their peers but this change in classroom behaviour was difficult for teachers to cope with. Trying to control the new environment I had created, teachers would cane students for not cheering loudly enough, then they would cane them for cheering for too long. The experience was very upsetting for me at the time because I felt the students were being pressured too much and it made me uncomfortable to watch as they were being physically punished for getting excited during an activity that was intended to be fun. I also felt it was my fault that the children were getting into trouble. I was new to this school environment and was still adjusting to my new cultural surroundings. I had cleared the activity idea with the club mentors and my co-host for the event and no one indicated that there might be confusion understanding the goals or methods.

Despite all my frustrations with the activity not going according to plan, I learned a lot about the cultural norms of student and teacher roles from this experience.

The geography contest became an emotional experience for me, but the point of my volunteer position was not to take personally whether or not staff and students listened to my instructions; it was to assist with the project, to promote education and gender equality, and to introduce resource ideas for the mentors to draw on and reformulate in the future. The geography contest had become a fight for control, a power struggle between the teachers and me; all of us set in our own cultural ways of doing things. The purpose of my being there was to learn about the local culture and how the project I was involved with affected the community. The teachers would remain long after my departure and their support for and commitment to the project was key. With this in mind I was able to relinquish my desire to control the club activities and instead focus my energy on learning as much as I could through my time at Nwoma Primary, my involvement with the Unique School Club, and living in the village of Asaase.

Situating Myself

As I had proposed, I kept track of what I was learning in the field by keeping a journal which I wrote in every day, or every two days if I was out of town. I recorded daily occurrences, regular events and interactions, and stories or bits of information people shared with me. I recorded my feelings about situations I encountered, trying to contextualize my position and trying to analyze and question what was happening, or not happening, around me. After relinquishing the responsibility associated with authority, I relaxed and took up a position wherein I could fulfill the requirements of my job description. I also made myself available

for regular conversations with teachers and teacher trainees during their free periods, and I played with the children during their breaks. I would make myself available to help teachers with tasks such as marking assignments or to assist those students who were learning how to read. I spent time in the library, helping students sign out books if they wanted to take one home, and I would tidy up after the kindergarten kids came through like a hurricane unshelving all the books. I would also spend time in the computer lab working on paperwork I was responsible for, or uploading pictures I had taken to share with the students.

These daily activities made me available and approachable to anyone interested in getting to know me or seeking my assistance. It put me in a good position to learn about what was going on in the school. Instead of feeling useless when I was not working with the Unique School Club, I maintained a presence in the school: I was someone who was friendly and interested. People always knew where to find me and some of the teachers and teacher trainees would often seek me out when they had time to chat. Sometimes they would tell me about their own home town or their own personal interests and goals, sometimes about movies or music they liked, and sometimes about the internal politics between the school and the mine and the process for getting things done. This latter bit of information helped me understand why it took longer than my entire stay for someone to reconnect the internet at the school! When something out of the ordinary occurred, one of the students would explain the situation to me. The students would also tell me what they thought of the teachers and what they did and did not enjoy about the Unique School Club activities.

Most of the conversations I had with people were informal. The teachers all knew I was a student and would be writing about what I learned, and I tried to be as open about this with strangers as I could. Sometimes in conversation, for example, when I asked for

clarification or to better understand some detail, a person who knew me well would say ‘oh you need to understand this for your paper’ and would proceed to give me an extensive explanation about an issue.

Acknowledging that I could only learn so much in the time I was there and that I lacked any form of comparison regarding how things were at Nwoma before and after the Unique School Club had begun, I conducted formal interviews with each of the club mentors. The purpose of this was to learn whether they believed there had been any changes in the behaviour or attitudes of the students at the school since the program had been introduced. I was interested to know whether the people directly involved with the Nwoma School Project thought it beneficial and I wanted to learn what they thought its strengths and weaknesses were. In addition, I wanted to gain some insight as to how the staff perceived and assessed the usefulness of the project. I clearly had my own opinions about what was going well and what needed improvement but, I knew that my opinions were influenced by my own cultural expectations and biases. I thought it important to document the opinions of those informed by local cultural norms and expectations. I turn to some of these reflections next.

Chapter 4: Club Mentors and Their Experiences

Much of what I write about in this thesis is based on my interpretations of experiences and interactions I had in the field. I comment on how my expectations were affected by my cultural background, and how these biases influenced the way I interpreted events and situations. As a means of balancing some of these biases and to address the issue that my impressions of what was happening around me might differ from the opinions of others, I decided to conduct two key interviews. The data from these interviews is not intended to draw any sweeping conclusions or generalizations about how people feel. Rather, I use the input of two of the project's key stakeholders as a means of keeping my own perspectives in check and to assess whether my reactions were in line with those of the local culture, in this case generalized to mean culture in the Kuro area, Western Ghana.

The individuals I interviewed were the two School Club mentors. I selected them because I wanted to know how the Club was affecting the school and the Club members and they were the people who had been the most involved with the club up to that point in time. In addition to their Club involvement, these individuals were also full time teachers in the school, so they were able to comment on how classroom activity had changed in response to the Club's activities. Unlike other teachers at the school I might have interviewed, the two mentors knew what activities the club was running and the goals of these activities and were therefore more aware of any cross-over from club activity to classroom behaviour.

The female mentor and respondent was Akosua. She taught class five and had 18 years of teaching experience. The year she got involved with the Unique School Club was her first year at Nwoma Primary which meant she was new to the local community. The male mentor

and respondent was Kwaku. He taught class three and had four years teaching experience. This was also his first year teaching at Nwoma Primary, however he had been teaching at Nwoma Junior High School for two years before that, so he knew the local community fairly well.

Both respondents explained that when the ISV program coordinator requested a male and a female teacher volunteer for the project at the beginning of the school year, they had offered their services. Kwaku explained that he volunteered because the request was for a club mentor who was willing to dedicate his time to working with children. He implied that he was willing and qualified. Akosua was willing to take on the responsibility but explained that none of the other female teachers volunteered, leaving the onus on her.

It makes sense that this would be the case because, although there are equal numbers of male and female teachers in the school, the female staff are disproportionately divided between upper and lower primary. Two of the female teachers taught kindergarten, and as these students did not participate in the club, these teachers were not expected to get involved. The only other female teacher in the school taught the grade one class. Since the teachers involved with the club left their classroom duties during club meeting times, it would be more inconvenient for the grade one teacher to organize an activity for the class during her absence than for the grade five teacher, especially since the majority of the class five students became involved with the club activities.

When asked to reflect on the activities that the club had completed during its first year of existence, both mentors were positive. They both understood the goals of the club to be the creation of gender balance and equality in the school and to help the students engage in their schooling. They reported that activities were interesting and educational, although they were

somewhat disappointed that there had not been enough time to complete the final project which was to have some of the children perform a play.

Although they were interviewed separately, both mentors expressed the opinion that the students involved in the club were benefiting from the club activities. They believed the students who had been present for the career session had learned a lot from the presentations and had been motivated to begin thinking about developing their goals for the future. They both also expressed pleasure in the success of the excursions. They believed students learn about their cultural heritage from the museums and sites visited on the field trips and that their worldviews are expanded through exposure to new sites and information. Akosua believes that students travelling together facilitates an opportunity for them to come together and bond by sharing new experiences.

The two club mentors did not give the same answers to all of my questions. In some respects it is evident that their own life experiences shape the way they perceive the success of the project. Older than Kwaku and a mother herself, Akosua's responses show her maturity and experience. Meanwhile, Kwaku's answers reflect that he is not yet settled, he is still in the process of defining his life and career goals. Their answers suggest that Kwaku is getting more out of his involvement in this project than Akosua, possibly even more than the students.

When asked how the Unique School Club is affecting the school, Akosua cited the extra writing assignments (which follow participation in an excursion) as helping the students to improve the quality of their writing; she sees this reflected in their regular class work. There is an emphasis on personal hygiene and neatness in dress for the club, especially for those representing the club on the field trips, which Akosua sees getting incorporated into the students' daily practices. She enjoys seeing the students looking nice and neat.

Akosua says that even the name of the club *Unique* encourages the children to go the extra mile to improve themselves and stand out above others. When asked how she feels her involvement with the Unique School Club has benefited her, Akosua explains that she has gained a sense of pride through her work with this project. “Parents see me and they are happy”, she shares, “I really feel good”. She says the way the children listen to her and look up to her changes everything.

It is important to recognize the importance of these statements in the context they were made. Teachers are not held in high social regard in Ghana; there are often delays in receiving their pay and, as a consequence, many teachers are not motivated to work hard because they do not see fair remuneration for the hours they perform. Though these attitudes and behaviours may not be characteristic of all teachers, there is a general disdain for the occupation of teachers and they are considered poor because of their small stipends. The fact that Akosua feels pride in her job as teacher and role model for the students at Nwoma through her involvement with the club shows that it is making a difference in the lives of those involved. It is important to note that this project is motivating her to become a better teacher, because this is one of the overall goals of the Nwoma School Project.

Kwaku’s answers reflect his own interest to learn and the ways his involvement in the club has personally benefitted him. When asked how the club has benefitted the school he specifically commented on the excursions, explaining that it has helped the teachers as well as the students in completing classroom tasks. Excursions are academically enriching, he explained, because they provide experiences that the teachers can draw on and refer to in their lessons. The teachers themselves have a broader understanding and are able to raise examples that the students can relate to, making it easier for the teachers to teach certain lessons. Kwaku

said that enrollment in the school has increased since the introduction of the project; this is a form of recognition for the school's success in promoting education in the community. Also, Kwaku suggests that since some of the students have been prompted to think about their future careers, they are more motivated to study. He told me that he, too, had learned a lot from the career session.

It is important to consider what the teachers gain from their experience as club mentors. This information gives us some insight into how the project is going and what future course it might take. The fact that teachers are learning new things and are thus able to do a better job teaching their students is an important finding. It could be used in the formulation of future community and educational development programs. Kwaku thinks that this program should be used as a model and introduced to other schools. Akosua, however, remains logical in this regard and problematizes the issue of funding, questioning where other schools would find the money to organize bus trips to the city and entrance fees to historic sites without the help of the LMC.

The project is not considered perfect by any means; there are many problems and changes that need attention. Both mentors agree that there is not enough funding and that with more money they would be able to do and accomplish a lot more. While parents are asked to contribute a token amount of money in order for their children to participate in the field trips some parents do not feel that this is their responsibility, and their refusal to do so results in some club members missing out on the opportunity to travel to the city and to learn something new with their peers.

Both mentors also agree that there are far too many students involved with the club in relation to the resources they have. There are only two club mentors for 160 members. In

addition, the meeting space, a classroom, is too small to accommodate such a large number of people. In fact, students who did not sign up to be members when they had the chance, now ask the mentors if they may join because they want to learn too. As Kwaku pointed out, students who are not officially part of the club are not isolated however; many join in the weekly activities even though they are not official members.

Akosua and Kwaku are discouraged by the limited resources at their disposal and by the fact that they are unable to do as much as they would like. Akosua suggests that there is not enough time dedicated to regular Club activities. “I need time, I really need time. With what we are doing we are not doing much; maybe we could do more”. A key change anticipated to come the following academic year was the limitation, and obligation, of club membership to students in classes five and six. This change will ensure that all students will become Club members at some point, and it will limit the number of students involved at any time, making it easier to organize activities and events for the academic ability and age range of these specific grades. In the first year, students from grades one all the way through grade six were enrolled in the Club. Understandably, this made it difficult for the mentors to plan activities that would be appropriate for all age ranges and grade levels.

The mentors’ different perspectives were most obvious when they were asked what changes they would suggest for the future. Akosua suggested planning more time to work with the kids in the club while Kwaku discussed the excursions, suggesting new places he would like to travel to. I asked what they thought of holding club meetings after school hours and both mentors explained the difficulties they would face keeping the children after school. Akosua thought the parents would thwart their children from staying after school because they needed them to assist them with a range of chores. Kwaku pointed out that the children are

hungry at the end of the school day and suggested that if there was money to provide food for the members they might be able to stay for a couple of hours after class. Both were willing to give their own time after school hours. As mentors are required to set aside time for the children, it is possible these mentors had expected to give up more of their free time to the program anyhow.

With the mentors' dedication and interest expressed, both of whom plan to continue their roles into the future, and with the changes proposed to improve the organization of meetings and activities, the Unique School Club should continue to benefit the students and staff at Nwoma. It may even expand their influence to benefit the local community at large. Club mentors' input and advice should be heeded by other NGOs, especially those who are considering implementing similar school projects.

Chapter 5: Autoethnographic Field Experience

The experiences I had while in the field shaped what I came to learn during my research. My reason for being in Ghana was to volunteer in the Nwoma Primary school, but the majority of my time was spent outside of school. Hanging out with friends I made led to interesting conversations. I was fortunate to meet people who knew that I needed to learn about their culture for my own educational purposes, and who were keen to provide information. Even still, it was often the information I learned in passing or when I was involved in events that were not intended to be of great significance that interested me the most and from which I later drew patterns or trends. It is some of these trends that I will be discussing in the following sections. A sample of stories has been selected to illustrate how daily events, some simple and seemingly insignificant, others dramatic or moving, came together to make me consider and reconsider the way things seemed to be: in Ghana and in relation to my own expectations as a Canadian.

Children's Responsibility

How childhood is experienced varies depending not just on the individual but on the culture in which the individual is immersed. How adults treat children, the expectations placed on youth, and the age at which children are considered capable of certain responsibilities are influenced by and influence the culture around them. Some differences may be related to economic opportunity, but others are due to cultural norms. A series of learning experiences helped me to adjust my cultural lenses with respect to childhood and the roles and expectations

adults place on children. I had expected to see younger children working in Ghana, but this did not prevent me from feeling uneasy about some of the tasks children were responsible for.

Most children helped with house chores, including carrying heavy loads of water or produce, which was sold at market. Some children had jobs outside of the home to earn extra money, either to support their family or to pay for their school uniforms and supplies. Some chores required children to use machetes. Students would have machetes at their desks in school and sometimes teachers would punish a child for missing class by sending them out to cut the grass with their machetes.

It was common for teachers to ask students to do chores that personally benefited the teacher. They would send students into the woods to cut down branches, or to market to buy sugarcane. I was not surprised by these chores, but coming from a background where children are hardly trusted to use scissors to cut paper without supervision and where teachers are not permitted to personally gain from students' tasks, it took me some time to adjust.

One day I went for a drink with a couple of friends and the bar was being run by a girl who looked to be about ten or twelve years old. I was already uncomfortable drinking alcohol in front of a child, let alone having her serve it to us. She took orders and managed the money; there was not an adult in sight. I asked the people I was with if it was normal for children to be managing a bar and they said that technically it is against the child labour laws, but that no one checks and no one reports it, so the practice continues. They were not bothered by the situation and I wondered if I was simply imposing my own sense of what is or is not appropriate for a child. Considering it is technically illegal, I did not feel out of line by questioning the girl's job; but also, knowing that it is part of a complex relationship between economy and family

responsibility, I did not dwell for long on the reasons why a young girl would be working there, or why others had not reported it.

In general, most children I met did not have toys to play with, but, as kids will be kids, they did have creative ways of entertaining themselves. Girls played ampe, games involving jumping and clapping, some that required a few lines drawn in the dirt, and some with songs or chants to accompany them. Boys played soccer. Some young children played at doing grownups' chores, like using a stick to pretend to cut the grass with a machete. Bottle caps, that were otherwise discarded, were used as counters for games played by the kindergarten kids. Even the kindergarten classrooms at the school lacked toys. Sometimes when children visited me at my house, I would bring out coloured pencils and blank paper so they could draw. Arts and crafts is another leisure activity these kids miss out on because the necessary supplies are costly. As such, children only know how to draw the few things they have been taught in class and, since they are graded on their drawings at school, they do not attempt to draw images they have not learned because they are afraid to get it wrong. While they are creative in games they find to entertain themselves, their creativity is also hindered by restricted access to resources and their negative associations with drawing "imperfectly".

It is easy to say that children in Ghana, at least in the village I resided in and the school I worked at, bear more responsibility than most children of the same age in Canada. Some of this may be attributable to necessity, but it is also more socially acceptable to have children take on a range of responsibilities. Children are expected to help with more arduous tasks, such as carrying heavy loads of water, and to use utensils that are potentially dangerous, such as machetes. This is not necessarily a bad thing as it means that children are entrusted with these responsibilities and are prepared to take them on in the future.

Some of what I have described must be understood through the right cultural lens. Instead of condemning the teachers for taking advantage of the students by making them do extra chores for their own personal gain, it should be understood that culturally it is a sign of respect to help ones elders and the children even enjoy the opportunity to lend a hand. Lundgren suggests that it is part of the socialization of the child as it teaches them their place in the community. “There is a clear hierarchy in which seniors are responsible for juniors, and juniors must obey seniors, so that at all moments most children are both junior to some and senior to others. In this way, everyone is in some way responsible for someone else and everyone must be obedient to others” (Lundgren 2002:115).

When I was told that I should tell the children to do things for me I was uncomfortable especially if I was perfectly capable of doing it myself, like throwing my banana peel into the garbage. I refused to let the children carry my bag for me when they offered because I thought it was something they were expected to offer but did not actually want to do. I was thinking of how I would feel, having grown up in a culture where it is expected that youth will rebel against authority, including their parents and elders, and I thought that these kids might want to rebel as well. Whether they want to rebel or not is not something I can comment to here, aside from acknowledging Lundgren’s (2002) argument that the hierarchical social structure provides children with a sense of belonging and a sense of security; which suggests that perhaps the children are content with their position in the community and do not feel the desire to rebel. What I did come to learn was that, in fact, the students really did seem to enjoy the chance to help me when I finally allowed them to. Most of these incidents involved assistance with the maintenance of my footwear, as over time the straps of my sandals began to snap and fall apart.

When my first sandal broke, the children who were walking with me noticed even before I did and they were horrified to see me walking through the village looking disheveled. I am not sure if they would be as upset if I was their family member or if it was because I was a foreigner and as a white person, (the significance of which will be discussed below, in “Being White”) I was expected only to have the best of things. Regardless, one of the boys insisted on taking my shoe and fixing it for me. He explained that he would use a shoe needle and shoe thread and that he would stitch it up for me. He brought it to school the next day for me and I made sure to praise him for his wonderful work because positive reinforcement is not something the children hear very often and he seemed very happy, even proud to have helped me.

At a later date, and with a different pair of sandals, one of my shoes broke while I was at school playing ampe with some of the girls. They insisted that I should sit on the bench where the teachers often sat outside: the idea of me standing without a shoe on and getting my foot dirty upset them enormously. Three of the girls from class six, the highest grade at the school, insisted I give them some change so they could take my shoe to the shoemaker in Asaase and have it repaired for me. It was the last week of school and exams were finished so the students did not have any classes to attend or assignments to complete. All of the other girls insisted that I should cooperate, so I agreed and sent them off with my shoe and my money. I sat in the shade feeling quite useless, but happy that they were so excited to be able to do this for me. Within half an hour, the girls returned with my mended shoe and the rest of my change.

In both of these stories, Canadian children at that age would be rebelling; for despite their grade level they were teenagers. It is common for children in this area to begin school

late, and I was shocked at how common it is for students to fail a grade level and have to repeat it two or three times. I found it interesting, therefore, that youth in their early teens were still so willing to help others, when those from my own cultural background would be expected to stubbornly and indignantly refuse to offer their assistance.

Notions of childhood, what it means to be a child and what age one is no longer a child are culturally determined. In the capital city, Accra, a man named Bill told me the story about an event that had happened that very day while he was at the hospital for a doctor's appointment. He had noticed a lady crying, had asked the nurse to call her over to him, and he asked her "my dear, why are you crying?" The woman explained that she had left her daughter in charge of her purse while she took her baby to the pharmacy and when she returned her daughter was crying because someone had stolen the money out of her purse and had disappeared so she did not know who had taken it. The amount taken was 30 Ghana Cedis which, for some, is as much as they might earn in a month; this lady probably needed the money to buy whatever it was she was getting from the pharmacy to treat herself, her daughter or her baby. A wealthy man himself and the owner of a guesthouse, Bill told her to wipe her eyes and from his own wallet gave her the amount that had been stolen. He believed that God would repay him and when he returned home to find he had a new guest to stay the night in a room that cost approximately the amount he had given her, he understood that God had repaid him.

This story was originally told to me as an example of why Bill believes in God and Jesus and why I should convert to Christianity, but I think it is interesting to consider what we can learn about how people treat children and what they understand about childhood. The lady in the story entrusted her five year old daughter with her valuable possessions (her money and

whatever else was in her purse), which suggests she believed her daughter was mature enough to handle such a responsibility. Meanwhile, someone nearby saw the girl as an easy target who could not defend against the theft, which suggests she was perceived as vulnerable enough not to be able to handle such a situation.

Thinking of this scenario as a Canadian, I was surprised at first to hear that such a young child would be left with such a responsibility. In the culture I was raised in a five year old is not even trusted to sit in one place without getting bored or distracted; they are definitely not considered competent enough to be put in charge of large sums of money. At a later date when I thought about this story again, I realized that I had grown accustomed to my surroundings to the extent that I had become desensitized to certain aspects of the culture and daily life in Ghana. I realized that I had not questioned the behaviour of the mother in this story nearly as critically as I would have if I had not yet grown to accept the norms of the new world around me.

It had not occurred to me, for example, to consider the fact that the woman had left her five year old alone in a public space; I was only thinking about the valuables in the purse. In Canada, a parent would never intentionally leave their five year old alone in a crowded area with or without a purse full of money. If a parent ever did such a thing they would be considered a bad parent because culturally it is not deemed appropriate for young children to be left unattended. I am not criticizing this woman's competence as a parent, indeed the child might not have been thought to be alone as she was surrounded by other people. Also, Lundgren notes five years as being the age at which children are expected to become contributing members of the community, assigned with responsibility and treated with respect (2002:115). Here, I am merely taking notice of some of the differences between cultural

expectations about children. In the following section, I reflect on what I learned about tradition, inheritance and familial responsibilities.

Inheritance and Family Values

One afternoon I met up with a friend of mine, Pat, to celebrate his birthday. He explained to me that in Ghana it is the person having the birthday who is responsible for paying for the drinks his friends consume so we went to Ofie, a nearby village, to avoid running into too many people he knew. We met up with his friend Paul and Paul's boss, Louis. I believe the conversation that we engaged with was influenced by the higher level of education each of us had attained. Pat had completed teachers college and was working towards completing a university degree through correspondence. Paul was the manager of the cold store in town and a university graduate thinking about studying abroad to complete a Masters' degree. While I do not know the level of education Louis had attained, he was the district manager of the cold stores and I expect, due to his position above Paul and his level of critical thought and insight, that he too held a university degree. I feel this is relevant information because most of the people I encountered in the village had not attended university and perhaps this is why I had not had such a critically engaging discussion until this point. Also, all three of these people had traveled to different parts of the country so their world view had expanded beyond the district's limits; another rare trait among the locals.

The conversation this day centred on tradition: concepts of the family and the importance of lineage among tribal groups in the different regions of Ghana. Inheritance has been an issue in Ghana and is still creating problems as some regions of the country are predominantly patrilineal and others are predominantly matrilineal. In areas that are

patrilineal, inheritance and descent are traced through the father. In areas that are matrilineal, including the one where I resided, inheritance is passed through the female line; from one's mother's brother. It is the mother's brother who is responsible for her children and not the father himself, as his responsibility is to his own sisters' offspring. This system is different than the patrilineal one I am accustomed to as a westerner and two of the men in the conversation were used to as members of the patrilineal Ewe tribe; Louis had been raised in a matrilineal system. All three of the men resided in the local Sefwi area, a tribe following matrilineal descent, and all three of them had criticisms of the system and raised some key issues. While I cannot generalize, I set this scene in order to illustrate the range of opinions expressed by these informants.

In a matrilineal kinship system, men understand their loyalty and responsibility is to their nieces and nephews. Even if a man is rich he may provide the best opportunities to these family members while allowing his own children to remain uneducated and neglected. The problem raised in this conversation was that, since women understand their brother to be the provider of their children, they do not concern themselves with the reliability or accountability of the men they marry; couples often have children out of wedlock because they do not feel this burden of responsibility. Louis passionately blamed this aspect of Ghanaian culture for parents' lackadaisical and apathetic attitudes with respect to raising children. He suggested that some parents are not accountable for their children's education (as problematized by Tuwor and Sossou (2008)), because they understand they are accountable only to their nieces and nephews.

Louis, who is himself from this matrilineal society, asserted that cultural progress begins in the home. He told me that he believes this so strongly that he brought change to his

own home by telling his mother and sister that he would not be responsible for his sister or her children. He said his mother was very upset at first but, regardless, he told his sister to choose her husband carefully because she needs to marry a man who will take care of her and her children. He asserted that he will be raising and supporting his own children instead.

Throughout this conversation I thought of two younger people I had met up to that point: Samuel and Monica. Samuel was a boy who lived with his grandmother and older sister. He had not attended school as a child because his parents would not, or could not, pay for his expenses; now he was 20 years old and putting himself through grade six. Samuel's father and mother lived in the village as well, but all he said about his father was that he was unhelpful and that he disliked his father for refusing to give him money. I do not know if this man supports his nephews and nieces any better, but he seems to be the kind of father who does not feel obliged to provide for his children.

Monica is a girl from the grade five class and an active member of the Unique School Club. I had spoken with her a month before, on the way home from a field trip to Kumasi. Monica told me that she had been to the city before because her uncle lives there. He owns a store so she can get whatever she wants from his store, and that once they are in the car, she knows she should not ask for anything else. I expect from this description that he is well off because he owns a well stocked store and a car. Monica explained that when she and her siblings visit their uncle they watch a movie or TV until around 6:30 or 7:00 pm and then they have study time and everyone takes out a book or works on practice exercises. Her uncle asks them what they have learned in school and if they cannot answer him he admonishes them for not paying enough attention in school. Monica's father does not quiz them or encourage their learning by making them do their homework, but she said she studies hard anyway because she

knows that when she sees her uncle again, she will have to answer to him. This is an example of the matrilineal system in action; it is this girl's uncle who has her best interests in mind and is encouraging her to succeed in life, while her paternal father remains uninvolved.

Pat, Paul and Louis explained a problem that has become a public issue: legal rights to inheritance. Whether a man chooses to support his own wife and children or his sister and her children during his lifetime, there is often conflict after his death as to who should inherit his assets. As with the child labour laws, policies have been written and government bills passed, but the enforcement of these rules is difficult when people do not have access to lawyers, or the power to stand up for what is rightfully theirs. More and more men, they said, are beginning to choose to support their own children rather than their nieces and nephews. Since the traditional custom has been for a man's assets to go to his matrilineal dependants after his death, these nieces and nephews will show up and claim ownership to his house, possessions and money, leaving the widow and children with nothing. Nowadays some men, those who have the means, have a will written up stating that they want to leave their house and money with their wife and children; but according to my informants, often this does not ensure that the nephews and nieces will not claim their rights to inheritance anyhow.

Lundgren explains that though many Ghanaians are matrilineal, they may also be patrilocal; that is, although the responsibility of the woman and children is on her family, they live in the husband's family's village and often their housing compound (2002:79). When the man dies, the women and children must vacate the home of the family of the deceased and turn to her family for shelter and resources. Lundgren describes one man who lost his home as a child when his father passed away and who, hoping to avoid the same fate falling on his own

children, builds his own housing compound separate from that of his paternal family (2002:74-75).

If what Louis argues is true (that change needs to begin in the home), is there any place for development projects in this process? Do the public sector and NGOs even have the right to promote this type of change? Lundgren explains that an attitudinal shift from polygamous matrilineal families to monogamous patrilineal families is a product of the rise in Christian teachings and beliefs (2002:79-80). I wonder to what extent ISV and the local stakeholders considered local family structures, values and responsibilities when designing the Nwoma School Project? What assumptions about family norms and values informed the development of this project in this location? With a focus on encouraging children to attend school, how much thought went into questioning whose household or financial responsibility it actually was?

The teachers at the school told me that some parents do not care if their children attend school because they do not see the value in their children being educated and they do not see a return for their investment. I am beginning to wonder now if this is because the parents themselves do not see the importance of a formal education (following the findings I referred to in an earlier chapter: “Plans for a Development Project: Gender in Education as a Development Issue”), or if it is perhaps as likely that parents understand the value of education but do not see the education of their own children as their responsibility. Whatever is the case, unless a change takes place, either in the home, or in the teachers’ expectations, I anticipate the Nwoma School Project will continue to encounter fairly unenthusiastic responses by parents.

It is important to note that ‘parents’ should not be understood as a homogeneous group. Some parents were actively involved in their children’s education, enthusiastically

participating at the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting I attended, and approaching me of their own volition to thank me for my involvement at the school. There is evidence that the project has raised gender awareness after its first year. From this perspective alone, it would be ideal for the project to continue and gain support from community members. In any case, it is important for ISV and other development projects to recognize that tribal norms and values vary from location to location, that a country is not made up of one homogeneous 'local' culture, and to understand how these variables can affect the effectiveness of their projects. It is to these issues that I turn next.

Division and Discrimination

Living in Asaase and working at Nwoma Primary offered an interesting opportunity to understand the concept of "local people." Though people lived and worked in the area and children had lived most of their lives in this locale, they did not all identify as belonging to the local culture; this is because Nwoma was situated on the compound grounds belonging to the Local Mining Company (LMC). Many LMC employees had relocated to the Kuro area for employment, so they did not consider themselves locals. They originated from different regions, and belonged to different tribes. Ghanaians identify very strongly with the tribe their parents are from, to the point that, according to those I met, even if they have never been to the area from which their lineage descends, they will still claim that is where they are from. Tribal identity is linked with language, rituals such as scarification, and the history of the people, including paths of migration. Due to the demographic of the area, I was able to meet people who were from the local area and self-identified as Sefwi, the local tribe, as well as people

from various other regions of the country and who identified themselves as members of other tribes.

Evidence that it was common for students and parents to speak languages other than the one shared by the local population came as I was entering marks into students' permanent records. It was on the first page that I noticed there was a section listing the student's first language as well as the first languages of the student's mother and father.

As for the social boundaries in the community, they are stark. People are defined by their location in relation to the LMC hill. Because many people come from other areas to work for the mine, LMC has employee housing on mine property. Compound, the area at the bottom of the hill where the school is located, has row housing for the lower class employees' families, while an area with more spacious housing is reserved for those employees with more seniority. Mid-way up the hill is Bepo, where one finds more row housing reserved for mine employees and teachers. Until quite recently the school had also been situated at that altitude and so this is where the headmaster resides, though while I was there a new house was being built for him on Compound. Ewitem, at the top of the hill, has luxury housing for the mine managers. Houses at this level have servants and come equipped with air conditioning and internet connection. Those living in this location also have access to the golf course, tennis courts, club house, and restaurant. At each level there is a security checkpoint which ensures that only those with reason to go further up the hill are permitted to do so.

The most obvious social distinction was of those who lived at the top of the hill, as they were the elites: Ghanaians holding powerful positions, foreign general managers (LMC is an internationally owned company), and the doctor in charge of the LMC hospital. The other significant social divide is between those who live on mine property, who come into the region

for employment and those who live in the villages of Asaase and Kuro, that is, with kin relations and connections to the local population of Sefwi.

Living conditions at Bepo and Compound were relatively equal. Row houses with close living quarters, consisting of two room units: a front room that was used as a sitting room and to host visitors, and a back room that was used for sleeping and that would be shared by all members of the house. Some of these units had communal flush toilets and showers with running water accessible nearby while others had to rely on pit toilets and water collection from the water pump. The differential access to running water was not based on the social hierarchy in this instance. I was told that accessible running water was a project under way and those who did not have access to it yet, were merely waiting their turn. All of these units were built from concrete and had electricity.

Housing in Asaase, the village I lived in, varied in size and layout as these houses were built and owned by the residents. Houses were spread out, each with a yard of its own. Houses were built with concrete block, many also had separate cooking huts made of mud and thatch, and some had wooden pens that kept animals in at night. Most of these houses were connected to the electrical lines, though I was not in every home and it is possible that some did not have electricity. None of these houses had access to running water. There were two water pumps, one at either end of the village, which meant that no one had to carry their water very far, but they did need to pump and carry water everyday. Of course, no one had a western style shower.

My accommodations at the guest house were different still. The house was built of concrete and while there was a common room, each guest had their own private bedroom. Though not truly connected to running water, as this infrastructure was not in place in this

community, there was a reservoir to collect rain water and a syphen to pump the water through the toilet and the shower in the washroom. This technology only worked when rain had fallen and collected; when the reservoir ran dry the 22 year old care taker of the establishment and some younger boys he would employ to help him, would collect enough water to fill storage containers to last a few days. Though I offered to help, I was not required to collect water because this was part of the service provided for all tenants.

While I learned that the children I met at school came from various geographical and tribal communities, it took me a while to learn that some students faced discrimination by other students. Interestingly enough, it was the local Sefwi people who were considered ‘other’ and those who came from other areas that considered themselves dominant or superior. Roberts (1982) notes that teacher entries in the log book from a school in a nearby town between 1915 and 1930 suggest that there was discrimination of the Sefwi people then as well. The teachers who were then assigned from other areas of the country saw the local people as less developed and *backward* (Roberts 1982:2609-271). Many developments and almost a century later, disdain for the Sefwi is still prevalent and discrimination pervasive.

The first indication of negative representations of and about the local population emerged from a conversation I had with two girls: Emma and Toni. They were upper class Ghanaians, living at Ewiem, whose parents were wealthy, highly educated and held management positions. These girls spoke negatively about the local people, calling them ‘backward’, and told me that the locals practice Juju, a form of black magic, also referred to as “Sakua.” I was uncomfortable with their use of the term ‘backward’ as it reminded me of colonial ideas of African populations and I assumed that their high social status was what made them feel superior to the people who lived in the villages. I was intrigued, however, that

although they criticized the locals for practicing Juju, they also believed in the effectiveness of the practice.

Emma and Toni explained that Juju is a get-rich-quick scheme that requires the use of human body parts. A person must take human organs to the practitioners of black magic; the practitioner then concocts a spell or curse and the person will become wealthy. Certain body parts are considered more valuable than others. The example that was offered was that a person might take the hunch off of a hunchback and use that in the magic as this body part is considered rare and valuable. The girls insisted that this worked and that there were many cases where people who had been poor would suddenly become wealthy with no explanation as to where the money had come from. I had trouble wrapping my head around this; I had read about witchcraft but had never personally encountered it before. I was surprised that formally-educated students would believe that Juju worked.

The next day I was in the city and came across a newspaper article that caught my attention. It was about the practice of Sakua, black magic, specifically a court case concerning the murder of thousands of albino people. Because albinos are rare and different, they are considered more valuable and are in high demand for Sakua. The article described the fear of victimization that other albino people and their families experience. What I had thought to be an old wives' tale just one day before turned out to be a serious issue affecting the lives of thousands of families. The article noted that people practicing witchcraft is a development issue. Poor, uneducated women are usually the ones accused of being witches resulting in these disenfranchised members of society being further oppressed and socially outcast. This issue was clearly a public and social one. Still, I thought it was something that happened

elsewhere; that it only made it to my locale through gossip. Just a couple days later, this too changed and I had to rethink the issue once more.

I was walking home from school, accompanied by an entourage of children who were also heading home. Two young children were holding my hands, a boy on one side and a girl, Gifty, on the other. A couple of other young ones began trying to break my hand away from the girl's and I thought it was because they wanted a turn at holding my hand; but Gifty looked so sad when this happened that I told them to stop and I continued holding her hand as we walked. The other children got more aggressive in their efforts to separate us and grew louder, but they were speaking one of the local languages so I was unable to understand what all the commotion was about. Finally, one of the older girls spoke up in English and said "please Miss Juliet, I beg you, let go of her hand. She's a witch." I could not believe what was happening. I laughed, responded "no she's not, I don't believe you" and continued holding Gifty's hand. The girl continued "she lives up there", and pointed up the hill leading to the market area of Asaase. Soon it was time for us to part ways and for me to let go of her hand. Once I did, one of the boys chased after and kicked her. I was concerned that such a young girl had been accused of witchcraft and assaulted.

Gifty was in kindergarten but looked a couple years older than the others in her class; she may have started school late or failed and repeated the level once or twice. Her uniform was more noticeably tattered than the rest. Could it be like the newspaper article suggested and she was just being picked on for being poorer than the other kids? Or did one of her elders in fact practice witchcraft? I later came to wonder if it was simply because she was from Asaase, a member of the Sefwi tribe but, at that point, I had not yet learned the discrimination faced by the Sefwi.

One day on the way back to Asaase from Kumasi, I was sitting next to a man I had never met before. As we neared Abrannaa, the first town as one enters the Sefwi district, the man became very agitated and told me that he does not like the area or the people. He told me to be careful in these parts because Sefwi people are bad people and are not to be trusted. This was the first time I noticed any criticism of the Sefwi people. When Emma and Toni spoke negatively about the local people I attributed it to their difference in social class, and when the children were picking on Gifty I thought it might be because kids are kids and they can always find a reason to pick on someone. This man made it clear that his bias was against the members of the local tribe. After this conversation, division and local discrimination became apparent to me.

In another instance, the discrimination felt more threatening. I had become close with Roberta, a teenage girl from the village I lived in, so one day I gave her my phone number. A girl who lived at Compound saw this and got quite upset. She came over to me once Roberta had left and begged me to be careful about whom I give my number to. She said that Roberta was from Asaase and therefore should not be trusted because all people from Asaase are witches. This was the second time someone had stated their discrimination so blatantly. I assured her it was alright but I know she was unimpressed with my disregard. Despite repeated warnings, I could not bring myself to be prejudiced by local beliefs. I had been told that people could use someone's phone number to put a curse on them and that this was a good reason to be careful, but I felt my lack of belief in curses and witchcraft would protect me from them.

Towards the end of my stay in the village nerves tensed. A man asked for my number while I was at the shoe repair waiting for yet another sandal to be mended. I felt

uncomfortable so to avoid any confrontation with him I agreed, comforted by the fact that I was leaving the village in just a few days and would never run into this man again anyway. Two of the girls from school were with me and as we left the shoe repair, they gave me a stern warning about giving my number out. Again I was told “you can’t trust people around here”, but this time it was coming from people who were themselves from the village.

At 6:30 the next morning, I received a visit from Roberta: one of these girl’s sisters and the very teenager I had been warned about. She had heard that I had given my number to a man and had come to beg me not to see him because I needed to be careful of Sakua. These warnings came at a time when there was actually good reason for caution. I did not hear the news until after the incident at the shoe repair, but the day before a woman had been murdered just a few villages over. Because of the way she had been murdered everyone knew it was for Sakua: the murderers had cut out and taken her most valuable organs and left the baby she had been carrying unharmed. Word spread quickly and signs with a picture of the victim were posted along the road.

After this incident, I spoke with Paul, someone I had known for most of my stay but who had not opened up about his feelings toward the local population until then. Paul is from a different region and had mentioned before that he does not have friends or a girlfriend in Ofie, the town he lives and works in, and that when his friend Pat and I did not come visit him he would stay in his room by himself. I had always assumed he had exaggerated in order to encourage us to visit with him more often, but finally he explained why he did not make local friends. He and Pat had grown up in the same neighbourhood in a different region of the country. They had both moved for their jobs and coincidentally found themselves living just a couple villages apart. On this occasion, Paul explained that he needs to be careful who he

associates with, because the local Sefwi people are not to be trusted. He is careful not to frequent the same spots or make a habit of where he goes so that someone could follow him, learn his pattern and intercept his path; essentially he is afraid of being stalked and attacked. He said he does not plan to get involved with a woman as long as he is living in Ofie either, because sometimes bad people use women to lure a man into a place where they can attack him. It is possible that his story grew exaggerated in response to the recent murder, but I had heard enough warnings leading up to that point to believe his story was what he truly believed.

It is not my intention to negatively portray the Sefwi people. I never felt threatened or unsafe during my stay and, as I have mentioned, most of the adults I was closest to were teachers and teacher trainees who hailed from various tribes and regions so I have no basis on which to pass judgment. I am merely describing the events that lead to my understanding of the discrimination against the local people.

These stories are important because they paint a picture of the local social dynamics. The children on both sides of this story, the local children accused of being bad people and witches, and the children who live on Compound, bonded despite their diversity, are affected by the social dynamics and carry this knowledge to school and into class with them every day. I was told the Sefwi people used to be known for practicing black magic more so than other tribes and, regardless of whether or not it was or is still true, this history and associated stereotypes have lingered. This discrimination hurts some of the children and allows other children to act as bullies.

In terms of the Nwoma School Project, I think that this aspect of the social dynamic was overlooked when the project was designed. The ISV project manager was not from the region and had never worked in the area before; the stakeholders from LMC were not locals

either and lived at the top of the hill, thus they are removed from the daily life of the community. Issues of gender equality and quality education are hot topics and easily funded and supported. ISV has created school clubs in other areas of the country and has reported these projects to be successes. Indeed the Club at Nwoma has had a deep impact on the students, even those not directly involved in the activities, but I think that to properly address and overcome inequality in the school, more attention needs to be paid to the diversity of the community.

Nwoma is a multi-ethnic school in which the children are being treated as a homogeneous group. Once the bridge has been made between the girls and boys in the school and a gender sensitive environment has been established, I think it would be beneficial to extend the project to raise awareness about cultural diversity. I expect it might be harder to raise funds for this but it is relevant for the Nwoma school population. One problem that could be engaged on more immediately is the teachers' biased opinions about the locals. Having themselves descended from other tribes, the club mentors will need to keep their own biases in check if they are to set an example for their students. The Unique School Club is intended to promote awareness and encourage acceptance of differences between peers; thus, it is reasonable to transition to include acceptance and cooperation between cultural groups. As Ghanaian newspapers continue to report accusations of witchcraft, oppression continues. Addressing this public issue in the Unique School Club appears relevant if the aim is to foster the empowerment of an oppressed population. Even if it is deemed that this extension should not be incorporated into the Club's efforts, I think it is important that the teachers of the school, and specifically the project manager, recognize the additional social pressures that some of these students have to bear.

Jean and John Comaroff (1999) have written about the rise of witchcraft and other occult economies in a way that addresses this social situation. Though their primary focus was in post-apartheid South Africa, they argue that this reflects a worldwide trend. The globalization of occult economies, they argue, is a response to people's frustrations with the market economy, especially in post-colonial nations where, despite promises that independence would improve their lot in life, the majority of people remain impoverished.

The Comaroffs, following Gluckman, note that there are likely two factors influencing the turn toward occult means of gaining wealth (1999). The first is that impoverished people know that some of their fellow citizens have gained great wealth after the colonial period ended and they are unable to conceptualize such quantities of money or the means by which other people came into their positions of power and wealth. The only reasonable explanation for how some gained while others remained bereft is that such ends could be achieved through mysterious or mystical means. The second factor is "the dawning sense of chill desperation attendant on being left out of the promise of prosperity" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999:284). National liberation and independence, in South Africa and other countries shedding colonial control, promised change and wealth. Frustrated by such broken promises people turned to a market they thought they could profit from. As the Comaroffs write: they turned to a means "of expressing discontent with modernity and dealing with its deformities" (1999:284).

Such situations are found most commonly where the global meets the local, where capitalism divides the rich and the poor (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). This model helps to explain why this community, in particular, might have fears of occult practices. The presence of the mine acts as the global market, embedded as it is in the global landscape. The mine develops projects to benefit the local community. These projects include a medical centre, new

school facilities, and clean water and sewage development, just to name a few. These projects mostly benefit those members of the immediate surrounding villages, Kuro and Asaase, as well as the mine employees. People in surrounding areas and even those living in the immediate villages who are not affiliated with the mine, for example those whose children attend a school other than Nwoma, do not benefit to the same extent by the presence of the mine. The mine represents the global; it houses and provides for the elites, it creates benefit for some while for many others there is much wealth nearby, but it is just out of their grasp. Perhaps it is this history of local people being excluded from the benefits of the global entity in their midst that has provoked the reputation of the local tribe's occult activities.

This is only one suggestion of a cause and effect in the Kuro area. In fact, Sefwi inhabit an area far greater than that influenced by the LMC. Furthermore, there are other internationally controlled mines around the country; therefore if this theory is to be applied here we must also question why the increased occult activity would not have resulted in these other areas of global economic influence.

The Comaroffs suggest that the people most commonly accused of practicing witchcraft are socially isolated and defenseless (1999:287). This corresponds to the newspaper article's argument that women are disenfranchised and are further socially oppressed by accusations of Sakua against them. From the Comaroffs' description of the occult economies it becomes clear that the trade in human body parts is a complex market. There is an increased demand for body parts as it is these spells that are supposed to give people wealth, fertility, success in business, and other valuables. This demand has stimulated production and has attracted the attention of people desperate to provide for their family, as they can earn the money they need

by collecting and selling human body parts for the occult witchcraft economy (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999:290).

I do not plan to delve into the complexity of the economic situation in the Kuro area in this paper; neither occult nor mainstream. Much could be discussed regarding global economic pressures on the local community and the way that the introduction of western wage economy valuing male income affected a matrilineal system. As the history of economics in the community was never my point of focus, I will not discuss this further.

The issue of representation, how I have chosen to portray the local population and how this differs from how they, as individuals or a community, might choose to portray themselves, has been raised earlier in this paper and will be discussed further in the next section as this relates to social interactions and requires my critical reflection on my role and limitations in the field.

Being White

It is important to reflect on whiteness and how it influenced my relationships and interactions in Ghana. It is also important to acknowledge the politico-historical significance of this whiteness. My light skin tone made me stick out like a sore thumb, but it is the social construction of race that played the defining role in how I was perceived. In anthropology courses, we are taught that “race” does not exist in reality; that it is a social construct of difference and of relationships to power. Ghanaians pride themselves on their friendliness and the positive way in which they welcome visitors. I could credit some of the special attention I feel the other ISV volunteer, Nancy, and I received as being attributed to this desire to make us

feel comfortable and at ease as visiting foreigners. I would be naive not to recognize, however, how this is also tied to modern colonial influences and whiteness.

Nancy and I considered ourselves to be bridging the divide between other westerners who have come to the area because we were there as students and volunteers rather than as management or government officials. We lived in the village rather than at Ewitem with the Ghanaian elite, we took shared taxis rather than private SUVs, and we walked in the rain when we had somewhere we needed to be, just as the locals did.

People often went out of their way to be accommodating. Lights would be turned on in a taxi at night for the duration of our journey; fans would be turned on at patios when we would stop for a refreshment; and shelter would be offered to us when we got caught in the rain. These are all thoughtful and generous offers extended to strangers. The generosity is more pronounced, however, when contrasted with the reality that the light in the taxi would be turned back off once we exited the vehicle despite other passengers remaining in the cab, the fan had not been turned on for the customers already in the restaurant or patio and would not be left on for them once we departed, and the local people would continue walking through the rain without taking refuge. There is more at play in these situations than our foreignness: it is tied to the appearance of our foreignness and what this aesthetic represents.

Lundgren (2002) argues that racism in Ghana is part of the colonial legacy. Just as colonialism is evident in the insufficient infrastructure, the ownership of land and resources by foreign entities, and an educational system out of date with the western one it is modeled after, so too is it evident in the way white people, like Nancy and myself, are given preferential treatment and special attention. “It is a racism that persists in elevating one perceived race above others. It is a racism that does not recognize the equality of all human beings”

(Lundgren 2002:121). It is for these reasons that I felt uncomfortable receiving special attention or accepting concessions. It is for these reasons that I questioned whether people were truly being hospitable hosts or whether they were acting on a cultural expectation that I *should* be treated this way because I am white.

At school one day at the end of the term, the staff were enjoying a celebration with food that had been prepared by some of the parents of students. I was happily participating, entertaining their excitement that I was sharing food from the same bowls as they were when one teacher commented on how lucky they were to have two white men at their school when most schools had none. Long since used to being called a “white man”, this comment struck me as odd because Nancy had left weeks before which meant the two people being referred to as “white” were myself and my supervisor: a man named Joseph who had been born and raised in Ghana, and whose skin tone was barely a shade lighter than everyone else’s. I asked about this comment later and was told it was in reference to his slightly fairer skin tone. Despite this response, I cannot help but question if his whiteness might not be associated with his social status. Holding a masters’ degree Joseph is highly educated. As manager of the school project, he is in regular contact with the foreign (read “white”) managers of the mine; and as a car owner, Joseph is in possession of that which characterizes “whiteness”.

Lundgren explains that “(r)acism is imbedded so deeply in the fabric of life that it does not even have a name. It looks like love. It looks like respect” (Lundgren 2002:44). Indeed calling this man white was a compliment. The teacher was exclaiming his appreciation for the presence of two people whose very presence raises the standing and credentials of their school, who have access to the means to bring resources that they would not have otherwise, such as a

new facility, books in their library and computers in the computer lab. It is evident in this light that race is not just an ideological construct; it has practical and tangible consequences.

At this point I am forced to stop and consider my role in the field. I am all the things I knew I was entering the field: I am a single 26 year old female (which a few of my young friends told me means I am an old maid and unmarriageable), I am a student, I am a volunteer, I am white, I have entered this community to learn and to help. Here I must turn to Lundgren's critical question "what does it mean to "help?" What does it mean to be *able* to help?" (2002:6), and I must extend this question to ask what it means to be a student, a volunteer, and white? The basic answer to all of these queries is that it means I have access to resources. I have access to resources that enable me to continue my studies; though in my own cultural context I am still marriageable, to the people I meet I am perceived as someone who can afford to continue my studies in lieu of "acquiring a spouse" who would be expected to provide for me. I have access to resources that enable me to travel, to volunteer and, consequently, not work for wages. I will have access to health care if I fall ill; arrangements will be made to quickly return me to home should anything happen, environmentally or politically, that might put my safety at risk; I will not go hungry. Helping implies that I have skills or knowledge to share that the teachers do not have, but that they can learn from me. In this way, it implies that I am superior to the teachers and that they must learn from me, but I know that this is not the case; the teachers have completed a three year teacher training course and some have years of experience while I have never taught a class in my life. This begins to reveal the problems behind the assumptions of what it means to help. What it means to be white I will return to in a moment.

In her research with volunteers, Cook (2008) also addresses the implications of volunteering and the assumptions that motivate people to help. Her primary goal is to encourage individuals who travel from first to third world countries to volunteer to reflect on their actions, their understanding of their role in the development enterprise, and who and what they represent. The volunteers she works with do not have any training or educational background in international development; they are adult women working for local wages as teachers and health care providers who seek to improve themselves and gain personal autonomy while applying their skills to help those in need. Cook problematizes those volunteers who see themselves as superior to the very people they are trying to help and she argues that by their actions, attitudes, and their failure to build meaningful relationships with the local people, these volunteers reproduce imperialist ideas and further subjugate the very people they think they are benefitting.

While I was not able to avoid my implicit relationship with structures of imperialism, I did my best to be aware of the implications of my actions. I renegotiated my responsibility with the Unique School Club so that I was playing a supportive role rather than taking charge or suggesting that I was better equipped to run club activities. I made a conscious effort to recognize the strengths and contributions of the club mentors and was careful to articulate my ideas for club activities as simply suggestions that could be revised. Cook advocates “relinquishing the development driver seat” (2008:24) through mutual learning, arguing that volunteers need to be willing to learn from, as well as to share knowledge with, the people they are working with. This mutual learning allows volunteers to develop a critical understanding of the who, what, why, and how (not to mention the who not, what not, why not, and how not) of social needs and social change.

As a student aiming to learn from the people I worked with and encountered, I can safely argue that my goal as a volunteer in the field was primarily to develop a critical understanding. Though ISV only recruits student volunteers, I cannot assume that this is always their aim, however. The cautions Cook (2008) and Lundgren (2002) raise with respect to volunteers' manifest and latent intentions to help and of the imperialist consequences of their involvement in development, is significant. I am reminded of one Canadian girl I met who shared the story of how she tried to teach some children to say "please" and "thank you" when they ask for things. "Please" and "thank you," considered polite responses in Canadian culture, are not used in the same context in Ghana; rather, "please" might be used at the beginning of a sentence directed to an elder or superior as a sign of respect, but not when asking for a candy. This volunteer told the children in her story that if they said "please" she would give them a candy; the one child said the magic word and was rewarded as promised, the other child refused to say it and was denied a candy. She thought she was teaching the children good manners and argued that they would never learn if she did not impose such rewards and sanctions. This volunteer clearly had no idea what her actions were really communicating to these children. Aside from imposing her own cultural concept of manners and what behaviours are polite, she was essentially teaching the children that if they want the resources the white lady has, they need to do what the white lady tells them to. In this case, her instruction to address her with the word please could be interpreted as her demanding that they address her with respect. Again this can be translated to imply that if they address white people with respect, they will be rewarded.

Volunteers and travelers need to be critical of their position in the realm of development and they need to understand what it means for them to be involved in the

promotion of social change and modernization. They need to be aware that their actions are situated in a historical context of colonialism and imperialism; they need to question how their intentions to ‘help’ might be reinforcing white privilege, and how by establishing their own autonomy, they also might be exerting power over others.

Occasionally during my stay in Ghana people would ask me about how black people are treated in my country and whether I would be friends with or marry a black person. Usually I enjoyed this question because I was happy that people were questioning racism and the contradiction between how white people have historically mistreated blacks and how Ghanaians today treat white people with such respect and distinction. I thought it was an interesting topic of debate and I enjoyed the mutual learning that came from it.

On one occasion this discussion became more personal than I was prepared for and it pushed my comfort zone in a way I had not anticipated. I had been sitting in the common room of the guest house with Nancy and a few of our friends when a man named Vincent entered and, upon seeing us enjoying each other’s company, questioned whether Nancy and I would be as nice to them in our home countries. His unexpected outburst and tone was accusatory, and instantly made me feel that I needed to defend my character.

Vincent explained that he has family living in America and they have told him that white people are mean to them and that they are poor and struggling. I found I was flustered, searching for words and explanations to differentiate Canada from America and myself from the people his relatives knew. I felt I needed to be Canada’s ambassador. I was trying to explain that thousands of people in Canada and America were struggling because of the recent global economic downturn, all the while knowing that this was not necessarily the root of his family’s struggles and knowing that people in Canada can face just as much racial

discrimination as those in America. I felt personally attacked and wanted to defend myself, the whole while knowing that the questions he raised were legitimate and that the struggles his relatives faced were real.

Perhaps the very recognition that the points he raised were valid was what made me feel guilty. I had already begun to appreciate how warmly people were welcoming me and helping me to adjust to their culture, was already humbled by their acceptance, that I was ashamed of the legacy of discrimination and mistreatment against black people in North America and Africa. So when Vincent, a stranger with whom I had not built any kind of rapport or relationship, confronted me on this very issue I felt not only guilty but ashamed. I began questioning my privileged status as a white foreigner and began to recognize what this symbolized to the various people I was meeting.

Overall people were so welcoming and accommodating that it did make me second-guess how much effort I put into helping foreigners feel at home in Canada. This interaction was an educational one. It made me aware of how the people I met perceived me, and how they might think I perceived them. This reflects Sylvain's (2005) discussion about being an outsider developing an insider perspective and how an anthropologist can learn about others and their own self through their experiences. Interactions and relationships can take different turns depending on how individuals think they are being perceived, how they perceive each other, and whether or not they share mutual understandings. One incident, in particular, opened my eyes to the degree to which some people value whiteness, the way I am seen because of my race, and the way some people think the western world sees them.

Nancy and I had decided to treat ourselves by going to dinner at the restaurant attached to the nicest hotel in the area. We found the prices reasonable and they served a pasta dish that

was as close to food from home as we could find: comfort food as I was recovering from a bout of malaria. Being a smoker and having forgotten to buy a new pack of cigarettes, Nancy asked Brock, one of the servers, if they sold smokes at the hotel. They did not, but he offered to bike to town and buy some for her if she gave him the money to do so. She took him up on his offer and, as a thank you when he got back, offered to buy him a beer, or another beverage of his choice, and invited him to sit with us. He was ecstatic. He told us that he had served many white people before, but had never had the opportunity to join them. It was the first time he had ever “dined with whites”. Having grown up in an area where there were people of all different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds, it had not occurred to me that someone might never have sat at a table with a person from a different community or ethnic background. What Brock said next I found very moving. He asked if we would take a picture with him so that he could show it to his mother who would be pleased that he was now “a somebody.” Having a drink with two white women indicated that he had succeeded, that he had moved up in life and social class and that he had become someone important. I was humbled and embarrassed that someone could think this way about me when I had done nothing to deserve it. I did not feel worthy of such status and it made me uncomfortable and sad that an interaction that originally meant so little to me meant the world to him. Eventually we invited the other two servers to join us as well, one of whom was Gracious.

While Brock made me think about how Ghanaians perceive my whiteness, Gracious made me think about how Ghanaians may think I perceive their blackness. Gracious asked me what I had learned about how Ghanaians live and if I was at all surprised by what I had learned. He explained that magazines and other media represent Africans as uneducated people who allow their children to run about barely clothed. He wondered if that was what I

had expected coming to Ghana; he wanted to know if everyone in Canada thought all Africans lived the way that National Geographic or World Vision portrays them. Gracious asked me if westerners look down on black people living in Africa and if we see them “as animals”. In the moment I was horrified by this question; I would not have been surprised to read or hear this second hand, but this sensitive, personal interaction in which I was being asked to my face whether I had anticipated this individual and his family would remind me of animals upset me. This question explains why some people might have been cautious around me, why some were so much harder to get close to. Aside from the normal fact that some people are just more outgoing or shy than others, some people might simply have been nervous that I might judge them.

This time I did not feel attacked. I felt awkward and uncomfortable having to face the reality that some people felt threatened. What made me feel worse was that this was not a skin I could shed, so as long as I was there I would be walking through peoples’ homeland making them feel threatened by my very presence. I felt like I was imposing. I was careful how to answer Gracious’ question. I acknowledged that there probably were still people who thought that way, that I thought it might have been a common misconception among those in my grandparents’ generation, but that I believed the younger generation knows better. I explained that part of the reason I was in Ghana was educational: to learn and to gather information. I told him I would be presenting and writing papers about what I had learned. I suggested that this process could help clear up some of the still-lingering misconceptions. He was very pleased to learn this and asked that I write about him in my paper so people in Canada could know he was there.

Gracious was concerned with the issue of representation and how he, as a resident of a third world country, is represented to, and by, westerners. Mohanty addresses this point arguing “a comparison between Western feminist self-presentation and Western feminist re-presentation of women in the third world.... are predicated upon... assumptions about Western women” (2006:85). Though her discussion is focused specifically on the representation of women, her point is still important here: that western representations of third world others is based in contrast to how they choose to represent their first world selves. In this way, a representation of either the first or third world “enables and sustains the other” (Mohanty 2006:86).

This lesson on how local people think we think about them is important; not just in anthropology, but in all fields, especially those that encounter disadvantaged groups. People in the developing world have been subjugated throughout history. I am calling them disadvantaged in this case specifically in regard to the lack of access to resources they have to represent themselves to the rest of the world.

Gracious and Brock want the means to self expression and self representation, to be able to represent themselves for who they are and what they aspire to be. But they are caught without the means to do so, leaving room for news and entertainment media to control the images shared with the international community. Aid organizations represent Africans in heartbreaking pictures in order to elicit funding for their projects; travelers and volunteers show their friends and families pictures that are shocking or exotic. This is not to say that there is no truth behind those dramatic images, but that these pictures misrepresent Africans and what people abroad can know about Africa. It is as though all there is to know about Africa is that its people are impoverished. This is hurtful to people like Brock and Gracious who want

change, who want to be seen as living decent lives, and who see their international misrepresentations as limiting their progress.

Chapter 6: “The Field” After Fieldwork

My interest in the field of international development led me to join the ISV program to gain some field experience and to collect data for my Master’s thesis. This project took me to Western Ghana where I was volunteering in an elementary school organizing activities for a group of the students. The goals of this project were to encourage both boys and girls to attend school, to encourage a gender sensitive environment within the school, and to promote gender equality in the community. I expected to return to report on how the community responded to the promotion of girls’ education and gender equality but, as I have explained, my experiences have helped me to focus instead on my own interactions with people in the field and to reflect on what I learned using interactionist and interpretive approaches.

My class work in anthropology inclined me to conceptualize “the field” as a place one travels to and returns from; and which one can separate from one’s own everyday life. Spending three and a half months in Ghana led me to develop an engaged understanding of what “the field” actually means. I now see the field as a place where people form relationships and share experiences. Most of all I now see the field not just as a physical locale, but an experience that stays with the researcher long after her reintegration into her own society.

Anthropology students study research methods to help us succeed in our fieldwork and theoretical paradigms to help us shape our analysis. We are quizzed on ethics, epistemology, and application of course material to hypothetical situations. Drawing predominantly on research conducted during the twentieth century, course material has often not addressed some of the concerns of the contemporary anthropologist such as the utilization and influence of mass media in the field. “The field” has often been positioned as a distinct, usually distant

location. As an anthropology student, I have learned the importance of demystifying the cultures we study; trying to move away from the distinctions of “us” and “them”. I have learned to recognize the impact our work can have on informants if confidentiality is broken, and to be aware of how our research could be used against those we intend to help. Even as I had read about researchers studying their own culture, their analyses seemed far removed from my everyday life. Honestly, how many anthropological studies have focused on the lives of white women growing up in Kingston Ontario?

This summer I finally had my chance to go to the field; to volunteer with a project, and then return to Canada. The plan was that upon my return I would objectively look back at what I had learned and experienced. I have found, however, that reflecting on the field takes a different form when you continue to be in contact with people and to continue to hear about changes in the field. This happened in the past, of course, but with increased access to telecommunication services, people in remote locations can easily stay in touch with the researcher, altering the dynamic of the relationships formed in the field.

Thanks in part to this change, I have been contacted by people living in the community I left behind. As a consequence, I continue to be emotionally present. I exchange emails with those who have internet access, and I receive phone calls from those who do not. Cell phones are common place, even in rural Ghana, and phone credit is affordable, with the cost per minute the same regardless of whether the person is calling within the country or internationally. Continued communication with people in the field has kept me in touch with my informants, and with the the project’s development. This communication serves as a reminder that while I may have left the physical space of the field behind, the daily life and

efforts of the people I became friends with continue; and that although I have left, the people I encountered continue to feel the impact of my presence and interactions with them.

My affiliation with ISV also increased the degree to which I was kept informed about the status of the Nwoma School Project because I became the primary point of contact for Lacey, the next ISV volunteer. Lacey experienced many of the same problems, from being misinformed by the NGO and taking on a position that did not make efficient use of her time, to adjusting to cultural differences and being constantly compared to the volunteers who preceded her. We exchanged emails regarding how to deal with unmet expectations, how to negotiate relationships, and how to determine which attitudes were cultural and which of them were particular to certain individuals.

Facing that reality made me more aware of how the local community could be affected by my writing. Some people explicitly asked me to share their story, while others who let me into their lives might be hurt. I think the concept of *the field after fieldwork* is increasingly relevant as an aspect of the research process because maintaining ties with people in the field may influence how one communicates one's findings. After all, this dynamic affected the way I remembered and interpreted my experience in the field. How data is interpreted, what information makes it to the final draft of the research report, and how material is presented in the final draft are subjective issues to begin with, but they have the potential to be further affected by who the researcher is keeping in touch with, as well as what type of relationship she maintains.

I found that the days I heard from a close friend, I felt compelled to focus on the positive aspects of what I learned during the summer, and I strove to uphold the utmost cultural relativity for the situations that I had earlier perceived as negative or upsetting. On the other

hand, the days I heard from someone I did not want to keep in touch with, but who managed to get my Canadian phone number from a mutual friend, I became frustrated. When I received phone calls at four in the morning or from people I barely knew asking me to send them money or to write them an invitation so they might come stay with me in Canada, I began to feel manipulated and I began to resent them. Consequently, I would begin to focus on the more negative aspects of what I learned and to condemn situations that I might otherwise have excused for cultural difference. I am sure all anthropologists have days when they need to keep their biases in check; however, I suspect that continued and frequent interactions with friends and informants from the field make the researcher's biases fluctuate more often, and from one extreme to the other, in a way that would not happen if one could maintain a certain degree of distance from the field: not just physically but emotionally.

Anthropologists, then, must consider how our post-field interactions allow us to feel more confident about sharing our stories or more inclined to protect those we are talking about. My post field interactions remind me that what I say and publish is never detached from the reality of my informants' lives. I came to this realization soon after one of my contacts in the field added me to Facebook. This was a stark reminder that it is not just the final draft of my thesis that may reach the community; any stories or pictures I share with my online social network could also be seen by my field contacts.

Extended relationships may also change the concept of what constitutes "the field"; they also blur the line between the terms "informant" and "friend". This distinction is important as we are keen to protect those we meet during research. In my experience these terms are difficult to manage in the field because "informant" seems to *other* the person while "friend" raises issues of objectivity as well as degrees of confidentiality.

While I was in the field, I began reflecting on the relationships I had formed and I grew more and more upset as I reflected on the extensive use of the term “informant” in ethnographies I had read. I could not comprehend how people could truly integrate themselves in a community for an extended period of time, and not come out having made some solid friendships. I thought about how information could have been gained under the guise of friendship by a researcher who could then turn around and distance himself or herself so much as to negate the depth of the relationship and simply refer to the individual as their “informant”; a label that suggests there was some lack of intimacy or care. I did not consider the people I interacted with on a daily basis strictly as a means to gain information; I appreciated their company and their assistance in my getting accustomed to a new way of life. Many of the people that I considered to be friends would normally be labeled simply as key informants.

Since returning from the field I have made the same concessions that others have, and I have used the term “informant” in this thesis despite the fact that I have also developed friendly relationships with some.

My disdain for the term informant grew stronger as one informant-turned-friend described his disappointment with the unreliability of those he had developed relationships with in the past. He was happy to have had Canadian friends, but was troubled by the fact that after he had shown them around and introduced them to his friends and family, he would never hear from them once they returned home. He seemed to feel he had been exploited and abandoned. After telling me this, he asked if I was trustworthy. I realized then the complexity of our relationship. He did not expect any gifts or exchanges; simply that our friendship would continue after my departure. He was fully aware that I was there for my education and that I

would be writing about things he had shared with me. He offered to respond to questions after my departure and he even called me to ask how my paper was coming along. I feel obliged to maintain this friendship now that I have left the field because otherwise I will have broken his trust as other Canadian friends had before me. I do not want him to feel my friendship was only a ruse, just as I do not want to distance myself so much as to “other” him as an informant, just a means to obtain information.

Friendship adds a layer of complexity to the field experience because it has the potential to influence the way the anthropologist constructs her own understanding of the data. Friends tend to want to keep in touch, and keeping in touch with people from the field can influence what the researcher reports and how it is represented.

Perhaps my qualms are not generalisable to all socio-cultural anthropologists, but it seems to me that how we deal with the field after fieldwork is an important issue that we should all consider. I think this is especially relevant if you get involved in a community-based project like the one I was involved with, where the goal was not simply to gather information, but to find ways to help the community in the process. Sure, you could take the approach that you should be up front with everyone you meet in the field. You could tell people that you do not want any contact with them once you have left the location. But how do you build rapport and convince people that you truly have their best interests in mind when you have just told them that you want nothing to do with them over the long term?

I made the decision to share my contact information with the people I had grown close to and who had helped me in the field, because I genuinely wanted to know how they were doing after I left. I had grown accustomed to the cultural norm of people calling their friends

daily, but I did not think that this might persist after my departure or how this might clash with Canadian norms of personal space and privacy.

I must admit I wanted to have the opportunity to do some follow up upon my return to Canada. I suppose in this way I had premeditated a continued relationship with the field after fieldwork. I had not, however, considered the range of implications of that decision. I had not thought that my phone number would be shared with other people or that I would hear from them nearly as frequently as I do. It did not occur to me that maintaining ties could further blur the lines between informant and friend. Moreover, I had not considered how this decision would influence my impressions of the field or the direction of my thesis as much as it has.

Part of the reason I had not thought about what would happen in a post-field situation is that these issues were never raised in course work or readings in my six years of anthropological study. Anthropological study should assert the degree to which our informants, friends and even relative strangers have the ability to find us online. Our information is available through social networking sites we may belong to, web-based phone directories and on our institutional websites. I learned in class that people in the field befriend anthropologists for various reasons; while access to resources has always been cited as a motivation, what constitutes a “resource” is changing. Furthermore, notions of reciprocity are no longer limited to the exchange of information for goods; rather I was often questioned on the disparity between my being welcome to visit Ghana while most Ghanaians have great difficulty obtaining a visa to Canada. I was often asked if I would write a letter of invitation so that people I met could come to Canada just as they had welcomed me to theirs. Anthropologists today, especially those just beginning to find their footing in the realm of fieldwork, may have challenges to consider that were not relevant in the past. We need to

consider, not just how to handle ourselves and our relationships in the field, but how accessible we make ourselves once we leave the field, and how we should manage post field relationships.

Anthropologists, new and old, should be encouraged to discuss this reality and even be given some guidance on how to deal with this situation. Have anthropologists maintained friendships in the past? Surely they must have; so why has no one ever discussed it in my classes? I am told it is something that is discussed in private but that is not included in publications. I am arguing that this is a pertinent topic that needs to be included in the published literature so that students may learn what to expect. I had been told that ‘reverse culture shock’, the estrangement one feels while reintegrating into their own society, can be more difficult than the initial adjustment to the host culture; I believe this is related to the fact that we are taught what difficulties to anticipate going into the field, but we are not made aware of how our field experience may influence, even alter, our own daily lived experiences upon returning home.

The field after fieldwork is a worthy topic of discussion and further development in anthropology as well as for those engaged in volunteering. These discussions could be incorporated into the methodological literature as well as in handbooks prepared for volunteers. Whether or not we stay connected to the field after fieldwork, and the nature of the relationships we maintain, need to be acknowledged as factors that influence the interpretation and reporting of our “findings”. These factors should be debated so that contemporary researchers will be prepared for some of the challenges the discipline has not been so concerned with in the past.

Conclusion

Autoethnography relies on the ethnographer's reflections to produce cultural analysis. Analyzing my own thoughts, emotions and the relationships offers me new insight and allowed me to convey this to my audience. Participant observation as a research method is about being aware of one's surroundings in order to learn about the daily life of a culture. By getting involved in the daily life of Asaase and Kuro and the people I met there, I learned about school procedures and community relationships to the school. I learned how family structure and familial values affect students' academic success; as well as how children's lives are affected by ethnic division and discriminatory practices, and how these lives are structured by social responsibilities. I learned about the social structure of the community and discovered the relationship between ethnic and economic discrimination and widespread beliefs in witchcraft. I gained an appreciation for the teachers' constant struggle with the school's lack of resources, a frustration that I held even though I was in the school for a relatively short period of time.

My self-reflections have also inevitably led me to learn about myself: how I respond in strange and testy situations, how I have conceptualized my worldview, and how I perceive and am perceived by others. My use of partial autobiographical accounts has allowed me to describe what I learned through my fieldwork experience. Incorporating this approach throughout this thesis, rather than reserving it for one particular chapter, I avoided separating the ethnographic and autoethnographic data, instead creating a holistic and contextualized representation of the field. I have also avoided severing methodological approaches. By describing events and cultural phenomena in conjunction with my thoughts, feelings and impressions of them, I have shown the utility of this autobiographic approach to writing

ethnography. I have illustrated how being reflexive of the fieldwork process itself is beneficial, not only for the researcher's personal understanding of her experiences, but for exploring the valuable data that emerged upon further reflections.

Reflection provides us with the means to analyze as well as to call into question ideas we form and then change along the way. Reflection guides us back to solid ground when our ideas run astray. My own reflexivity allowed me to understand how what I learned was influenced by what I had expected to learn as well as by the unexpected: that is, the force of whiteness and the colonialist assumptions embedded within notions about "helping" and "volunteering" practices, especially at the international level.

Analyzing the stages of preparation for fieldwork, situating myself in the field, conducting fieldwork, and returning from the field have allowed me to illustrate some of the strengths and weaknesses of NGO and volunteer involvement for the combined purposes of conducting ethnographic fieldwork.

I think it appropriate, then, to conclude with the Unique School Club's motto:

"The Sky Our Limit, The Pen Our Weapon".

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