THE REMAINS OF THE DAY: FAMILY RESILIENCE AMONG LIBERIAN REFUGEE FAMILIES LIVING IN BUDUBURAM REFUGEE CAMP IN GHANA

by

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(Under the Direction of Lynda Henley Walters)

ABSTRACT

Family rituals and routines are practiced by Liberian refugees in order to reestablish their family lives in the context of a refugee camp. With two focus groups and 20 interviews conducted with Liberian refugee mothers and female caregivers in the summer of 2007, daily routines of these women represented their concern for food acquisition and children's education. Their rituals reflected a persistent reliance on their Christian faith. The results of this study illuminate some of the family processes of long term refugees, and point to the meanings they attribute to their family's present circumstances. Their resilience is seen in their persistence in the face of overwhelming odds.

INDEX WORDS: Liberians, Refugee, Family Resilience, Family Rituals and Routines

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

War, political conflict, and persecution precipitate human migration across international borders in staggering numbers each year. Under the guidelines set forth by the United Nations (UN) at the 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is defined as any person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR, 1951). In the year 2006, there were an estimated 9.9 million refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2007a). This number is due in part to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the current war in Iraq (UNHCR, 2006).

Sixty percent of the world's population of refugees are not harbored in the tents of recent emergencies. The majority of the world's refugees have lingered in their place of refuge. They remain outside of media spotlight, away from the public attention that crises often attract. These refugees "find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile" (UNHCR, 2006, p. 106).

Statement of the Problem

Due to the repatriation of thousands, the Liberian refugee population at Buduburam Refugee Camp fell more than 40,000 to 24,000 (UNHCR, 2007b) by the summer of 2007 when this study was conducted. These have previously been considered protracted, or long term

refugees, by the United Nations, and are continuing in that status. Miles from the capital city of Accra, Ghana, the majority of Liberian refugees live inside of Buduburam Refugee Camp. Many of these refugees fled Liberia during the civil wars that virtually demolished the country during the 1990s. Others stayed in Liberia until the renewal of conflict in 1999 and the early 2000s required their flight.

The effects of displacement vary according to individual and circumstance (Dick, 2002). Some of the refugees represented in this study have lived at Buduburam for only a few years. Others have spent virtually their entire lives. Most adults can recall vivid memories of violence and unrest. Some have grown up to adulthood at the camp, and rear their children with ambivalence toward life in Liberia. Many of the children at Buduburam are too young to remember their parents' or caregivers' flight to Ghana. A great many of them were born within the confines of the refugee camp itself, and have very little experience of life on the outside.

The lived experience of refugee children and families has received little attention in the research and writing about refugees. The consequences of trauma, and the priority given to mental health assessment has dominated scholarly inquiry concerning refugees (Chatty, Crivello, & Hundt, 2005; Summerfield, 1999). Little research has been done regarding prolonged situations that are not characterized by emergency. Furthermore, few have investigated the adaptive processes necessary for refugee family resilience in the midst of uncertainty, the reality of marginalization, and the lack of resources to create positive change in their own, or their family's life.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lived experience of children and their families who have cobbled together a way of life unique to their experience as Liberian

refugees living in Ghana. Inquiries were made regarding the family rituals and routines practiced or foregone by the Liberian families at Buduburam Refugee Camp. An association has been found between family rituals and routines, and the resilient processes of adaptation and adjustment of families who endure hardship (Fiese et al., 2002). Given this link, I was interested in learning the relevance of family rituals and routines of these refugees. I also wondered whether rituals and routines were associated with resilience in refugee families.

Research Questions

First, what are the family rituals and routines practiced by Liberian refugees in Ghana? Second, what is the relation of these rituals and routines to the adaptation and adjustment of refugee families to life inside of Buduburam Refugee Camp?

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Background

In order to appreciate the situation in which these Liberians find themselves, it is important to understand the historical events that led to their flight from Liberia. The brief history in this section is by no means comprehensive. The goal is to offer a rough sketch of events in the evolution of the Liberian nation. The lives and thoughts of Liberian refugees must be understood in the context of circumstances that led to their exile in Ghana.

The Colonization of Liberia

Much of the political, humanitarian, and environmental turmoil that now shapes the continent of Africa is rooted within interethnic conflict and the imposition and removal of colonial rule. Liberia is no exception. As reviewed here, the Liberian civil wars were the eruption of a long brewing history of ethnic division and colonial imposition.

By the early 1800s, the arena of American politics was well trod with discussions of emancipation and the ensuing consequences of racial inequality between whites and freed slaves. Sanneh (1999) observed that the inequalities between whites and blacks produced a racial tension that could not be solved through emancipation. As a remedy for any negative results of racial tension, the United States government began planning a weighty scheme of ridding themselves of this moral dilemma, while procuring an opportunity for international enterprise and development. In 1816, the American Colonization Society was founded by a group of evangelicals and intellectuals who thought that the best solution to the problem of slavery was an

African colony composed of former African slaves. This colony would rid America of the social and moral problem of slavery, allow Africa to receive somewhat "civilized" Christians, and give blacks an opportunity for true freedom and opportunity. Through a long series of political debates, public awareness campaigns, and evangelical preaching, the idea was finally brought to fruition when President Monroe announced that he would begin work on an African colony for freed blacks in his 1819 inaugural address (Sanneh, 1999).

The first attempt to establish a colony met with abysmal failure. Unsuccessful negotiations with the natives were accompanied by a shortage of food and supplies. These crises were followed by an outbreak of malaria, and the subsequent death of several colonists. In America, President Monroe appeared undaunted by this set-back, and arranged for a second attempt to establish a permanent colony in Liberia. This time, he authorized the use of whatever means necessary to ensure that the natives agreed to sell land to United States government, and again deployed a group of freed slaves under the leadership of naval officer Lieutenant Robert Field Stockton (Sanneh, 1999).

Upon arrival, Lieutenant Stockton and his associate Dr. Eli Ayres engaged in several fruitless discussions with the native chief, King Peter, for a desired allotment of land. When the king failed to show for further discussion, the Americans took matters into their own hands. Having stormed into the king's village, they held him at gunpoint and demanded that he meet with them to negotiate the selling of his land for their purposes of establishing an American colony. Given the circumstances, the king appeared promptly to concede to the Americans' wishes. He sold them a selected area of land for a payment made in guns, beads, tobacco, gunpowder, rum and various other goods that totaled an approximate amount of less than $300.

The legal authority for this land was handed over, not to the American Colonization Society, or to any faction of the U.S. government, but instead to Stockton and Ayres (Sanneh, 1999).

Illegitimately conceived and birthed, the colony experienced problems that could be reasonably expected for a group who had forcefully taken over. King Peter launched two attacks of his own in subsequent years, and the colony was frequently at odds with other native tribes. Freed blacks continued to settle in Liberia, where the capital city was named Monrovia, after President Monroe. New settlements cropped up in neighboring areas, and a government was eventually instated, with the Americo-Liberians wielding power over the natives (Sanneh, 1999).

These settlers grew in numbers and power. Their affiliation with the United States was drawn on for an ample sense of prestige. In 1847 Liberia was given status as a republic, making it Africa's oldest republic. In 1869 settlers founded the True Whig Party, which became the sole avenue to political success. Their leading cultural and religious institutions, the Freemasons' lodge and the Christian churches, became the principal sources of social advancement (Ellis, 1999).

The True Whig Party dominated Liberian politics for all but six years between 1870 and 1980. Elite families within this party were known to be proud not only of their U.S. origins, but also of their Christian faith. By the 1950s is was common for the "country people" to establish links with the elites through membership at a Masonic lodge, or a Christian church. They also found it beneficial to attach their children to Americo-Liberian families as wards. These were the avenues necessary for gaining affiliation with the True Whig Party, and social and political benefits that come to those who are known by the elite class (Ellis, 1999).

The Americos set themselves in a class above the native people, holding a position between the indigenes and the international market. They exploited the natural resources of the

environment and the native people in order to progress politically and economically. Pre-civil war (pre-1980) Liberia recognized sixteen ethnic groups in addition to the Americos. The oppression and exploitation of these tribes eventually led to the upheaval of the government and the subsequent civil wars (Outram, 1997).

The Civil Wars

In 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, a native member of the Krahn ethnic group, seized control of the government. Doe's initial rhetoric promised liberation from ethnic inequality and stressed national identity. His theories put into practice, however, left much to be desired. Doe's regime was characterized by fear, suspicion, and liberal use of the machine gun (Sawyer, 1992).

Doe favored the Krahn, who dominated positions in the police and armed forces. The allegiance of the Krahn to the Doe regime was solidified with the provision of educational and economic opportunities not afforded to other ethnic groups. These and other events precipitated an attempted coup by the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, which ultimately failed. The subsequent discrimination against these tribes caused a great deal of interethnic tension within the infrastructure of the Liberian nation. This tension snapped when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) attacked government soldiers and officials in Nimba County during December of 1989. This was the beginning of the First War (Outram, 1997).

The NPFL, led by Charles Taylor, never formally allied itself with particular ethnic groups. Taylor himself was an Americo-Liberian, though he claimed Gola ancestry. The goal was to remove Doe from power. Doe's favoritism of some ethnic groups over others, however, naturally resulted in interethnic conflict, that ultimately produced a national blood bath of

retaliation efforts. In the midst of the chaos, Doe was killed by one of Taylor's officers on September 9, 1990 (Cain, 1999).

The eventual stalemate that ended the First War was shattered when Taylor launched a surprise attack on Monrovia in October of 1992. Unable to procure the presidency through brute force, Taylor agreed to peace talks in July of 1993, ending the Second War. The Third War broke out when Taylor's "capital" at Gbarnga was attacked in 1994. The Abuja Accords were signed in August 1996, ending the Third War (Outram, 1997). In 1997, Charles Taylor was democratically elected President of Liberia. The elections were said to be free and fair, though there is adequate evidence to the contrary to support debate on the subject (Levitt, 2005).

The Consequences of War

During the course of the wars that took place between 1990 and 1997, there were an estimated 200,000 casualties, the majority of whom were civilians. Additionally, the wars precipitated the expulsion of 750,000 refugees, and more than 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). The number of deaths, added together with refugees and IDPs represented 85% of the Liberian population (Cain, 1999).

The atrocities of the Liberian civil wars cannot be adequately expressed or counted. An awareness of carnage that took place is imperative to the context of the refugees in this study. It should be understood that the human rights violations documented during these wars include looting, rape, sexual violence and torture, the rampant use of child soldiers, and ritualistic cannibalism (Cain, 1999).

The Aftermath of War

Just as the civil wars were plagued by Taylor's relentless pursuit of state power, so was the aftermath plagued by repeated attempts to remove him. Taylor's government was inundated with internal and external difficulty. Taylor's administration came under frequent accusations of civil and human rights violations. The United States, and many other countries formally accused Taylor's government of backing the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Taylor's illicit arms-for-diamonds campaign, as well as his training of RUF soldiers led to increased distrust of his government, and had a destabilizing effect on the region of West Africa (Levitt, 2005).

In the years between 1999 and 2003, Taylor came under frequent attacks by the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), both of whom were rebel groups formed to remove him from power. The insurrections brought by these forces produced more refugees who fled to escape the repeated skirmishes between these rebel groups and Taylor's army. In 2003, after multiple cease-fire attempts, and increased international pressure, Charles Taylor announced that he would relinquish his power and accept asylum in Nigeria. On August 11, 2003, Taylor resigned his Presidency and departed for Nigeria. On October 14 of the same year, Charles Gyude Bryant was sworn in as president of the Liberian Transitional Government (Levitt, 2005). At present, Liberia's government is led by Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

After 14 years of civil war and conflict, more than 85% of the population of Liberia had been killed or forced to flee the violence. Adults saw their former lives collapse around them; children grew up in an environment of brutality. Those who fled left with disappointment, grief,

anger, disbelief, and familiarity with violence. They were not ordinary travelers. They were survivors searching for refuge in exile.

Previous Research at Buduburam Refugee Camp

When the civil wars broke out in Liberia, people fled to Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana. Ghana, in particular, is known for having a dense population of Liberian refugees, the majority of whom reside at Buduburam Refugee Camp (UNHCR, 2007b). Buduburam Refugee Camp was founded in 1990 in Gomoa, 20 kilometers from Accra, the capital city. It was established on an abandoned church site, with the first refugees numbering approximately 150 (Dovlo & Sondah, 2001). Over the course of the next 17 years, the population of Buduburam rose more than 40,000 (UNHCR, 2007b).

There are several researchers who have previously conducted social science research at Buduburam. These social science studies offered foundational information about the social and economic environment of Buduburam Refugee Camp. Each guided the present study by offering contextual information. The following section contains a review of some findings from these studies.

Kreitzer (2002) observed the involvement of refugee women in planning and implementation of programs within the camp. She found that some women were able to begin programs of their own, though many others were not. She observed a trend of apathy and discouragement in women. Many expressed lack of motivation which she attributed to the lasting effects of war trauma. She also noted the dependency of many women on other agencies and camp administration, neither of which promoted independence or confidence in women who might otherwise be interested in beginning programs of their own.

Dick (2002) observed the economic resourcefulness of the refugees at Buduburam in light of the dwindling humanitarian aid provided through the UNHCR. She updated some of the information from Dovlo and Sondah (2001) regarding church presence and functionality within the camp. From her assessments of church establishments and from her informal interviews with a variety of men and women, Dick concluded that refugees living without humanitarian assistance cannot be passive and survive; some activity is required.

Boateng (2006) investigated the social relationships of refugee women at Buduburam. She found that spiritual networks within churches proved to be a source of emotional and economic support for women. These networks were usually enclosed within the camp. Despite these networks, she also observed a notable theme of distrust of other refugees, and a great likelihood for the women to feel unsafe due to violence and crime within the camp. These women had few connections outside the camp except for the few who received money (remittances) from friends or family.

Refugee Camps

Governments in countries of asylum, where refugees flee to safety, often find it necessary to place these large groups of forced migrants into camps apart from mainstream locations of business and culture. The benefits and drawbacks of refugee camps are points of interest and argument in the academic literature. Black (1998) gave a summary of the major reasons necessitating the use of camps. Maintaining security appears to be easier when refugees are kept together. Health care can be monitored with greater efficiency in a camp setting. Furthermore, if refugees are kept together in large numbers, this bolsters their visibility, which may improve fund raising within the humanitarian aid regime. Also, aid can be delivered efficiently.

Although utility of camps may appear obvious, there are many functional problems in camps with consequences for the refugees who live within them. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2006) observed the isolated, insecure environments of refugee camps in protracted situations. They noted the distance from host populations along with lack of economic and educational opportunities as pivotal to some of the problems faced by refugees living long term in camps. This trend of distance and isolation has recently been termed "warehousing" of refugees, due to their long "shelf life" away from the mainstream activity in their country of asylum.

Furthermore, refugee camps are recognized as a sort of breeding ground for "learned helplessness." This is a term I borrowed Maier and Seligman (1976) to describe a reinforced sense of dependence on others. In this case, the others are the humanitarian aid regime and the host government who supply material resources for daily living. Refugee camp environments are acknowledged as atmospheres that cultivate dependency and a perceived inability to create change in present circumstances (Harrell-Bond, 1998; Daniel & Knudsen, 1995). This atmosphere is affected largely by the relationship between refugees, humanitarian aid organizations, and the host government (UNHCR, 2006). In many cases, refugees have difficulty obtaining work permits required by their country of asylum. It is common for permits, as well as other resources, to take lengthy amounts of time to arrive, if they are issued or delivered at all. This difficulty may be tolerated in part because they can survive without work outside the camp.

Additionally, refugee camps often foster a spatial and relational distance between migrants and nationals. Miller (1996) observed the isolation of refugees to Guatemala. In their case, daily living was relatively closed off from the host population. It is common for nationals to begrudge refugees, not only for the space and natural resources they require, but also because

of the overtly visible material resources they receive from the aid regime. The resources that refugees get are often just as needed by the host population (Voutira & Harrell-Bond, 1995). Harrell-Bond (1986) noted security problems experienced by refugees who received international aid that was not extended to the local population. Circumstances like these encourage feelings of hostility that often result in discriminatory treatment of refugees by the national people.

Furthermore, some have begun to question the effect that living in a displaced camp might have on refugee children. Harrell-Bond (2000) has questioned children's ability to develop and cope with life inside the confines of refugee camps. She particularly noted the development of autonomy, inquiring as to the likelihood that children would develop a sense of agency when their living environment fostered dependency.

Some positive signs of adjustment for children have been found in camps. Miller (1996) observed a community of Guatemalan families and children, who seemed to have reconstructed their lives with a sense of hope and purpose. Likewise, Hart (2002) and Tribe (2004) have noted the productive use of children's clubs and play activities as useful for encouraging morale and self-agency among displaced children in Sri Lanka. These studies scratch the surface of possible knowledge regarding refugee children. Although they are noteworthy, they are not enough to provide a well-rounded understanding of the lived experiences refugee children adapt to during their stay in camps.

Refugees and Mental Health

The vast majority of research on refugees worldwide, be they refugee families, children, or adult individuals, is focused on the traumatic consequences of fleeing war and conflict. Numerous efforts have been made to quantify the number of traumatic events experienced by refugees, the mental health outcomes resulting from such tragedies, and the specific symptoms

associated with DSM diagnoses like Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, and Anxiety. Research to assess the mental health of refugees has been conducted in refugee camps and settlements throughout the developing world (Sabin, Cardozo, Nackerud, Raiser, et al., 2003; Tang & Fox, 2001; de Jong, Scholte, Koetre, & Hart, 2000; Mollica, Poole, Son, Murray et al., 1997). Mental health research with refugees is also widely conducted in second countries of refuge like the United States (Robertson, Halcon, Savik, Johnson, et al., 2006, Begic & McDonald, 2006; Keyes, 2000). So vast are the assessments of traumatic events and mental health symptoms manifested in refugees that Hollifield and colleagues (2002) identified 183 research articles delineating the results of refugee trauma and health assessments. They concluded, however, that the majority of instruments used to assess trauma and health had limited or untested reliability and validity for use with refugees.

Additionally, this heavily traveled path to knowledge about the traumatic consequences of war has met with ideological opposition (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1997; Summerfield, 1999). Scholars have argued that mental health concepts have been taken out of their context in the industrialized West, and applied poorly and prolifically among refugee and other war affected populations. For example, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) originated from the plight of Vietnam soldiers whose condition was assessed and packaged for diagnosis based on a complex set of experiences and behavior patterns. It has been argued that the symptoms they expressed as Westerners may mean something different when seen in other contexts such as Asia, Africa, or the Middle East. Regardless of how accurate a PTSD diagnosis may be, there seems little point in labeling refugees with a mental disorder that is virtually untreatable in their present circumstances.

Refugee Children and Families

Previously noted studies by Miller (1996), Hart (2002), and Tribe (2004) offer a glimpse of positive adaptation of refugee children. The majority of literature on refugee children is inundated with psychological assessment. Chatty and colleagues (2005) have pointed to the newness of research on refugee children, and to the overwhelming tendency for academics to focus on negative psychological outcomes for children. Much of the research on displaced children amounts to mere assessment of self-report surveys aimed to evaluate symptoms of depression, anxiety, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (see Stein, Comer, Gardner, & Kelleher, 1999; Papageorgiou et al., 2000; Paardekooper, de Jong, & Hermanns, 1999).

When it comes to refugee families, much of the recent research is produced by scholars in Western countries of asylum. Many studies have been conducted in Europe, Australia, and the United States, following the immigration of refugees from the Middle East or African. In Sweden, Hjern, Anders, and Jeppson (1998) examined the mental health of Middle Eastern and Chilean refugee children in relation to their experience of former political violence, family stress, and social networks formed in their new location. In Norway, Sveaas and Reichelt (2001) studied the experience of family therapy with refugees. Rousseau and colleagues (2004) examined the reunification of refugee families in Montreal. They focused on themes of separation, ambiguous loss, and re-establishment of family continuity once members were brought together. Also of note are the studies focusing on health and family life experience of refugees post-immigration (Samarasinghe & Arvidsson, 2002; Sourander, 2003; Weine et al., 2006).

These studies give accounts of family cultural adjustments. Additionally, the economic issues faced by refugee families have been studied. Once family members have migrated to safer parts of the world, like the U.S. or Great Britain, it is common for members to send remittances

back to their family members out of family obligation and concern (Briant, 2003). When families migrate as units, the economic stability of the family may rest on the entire group (Kibria, 1994). In a study on Vietnamese refugees in Philadelphia, family collectivism and family ideology were shown as a powerful source of cooperative endeavors toward economic stability. Though western scholars have begun to turn their attention to families, Weine and colleagues (2004) lamented the lack of family perspective given to refugees in research.

Family Rituals, Routines, and Resilience

The relation between family rituals, routines, and refugee family resilience is of particular interest to the present study. McCubbin and McCubbin (1988) suggested that family rituals and routines are valuable protective factors for families in the midst of transition and stressful life events. Family rituals and routines provide an opportunity for the transmission of values and beliefs, family identity, stability, and socialization (Schuck & Bucy, 1997). Children in families who practice meaningful rituals and routines have reported lower anxiety levels in the midst of stressful life transitions and health problems (Compan, Monero, Ruiz, & Pascual, 2002; Markson & Feise, 2000). Also, it has been suggested that the disruption of family rituals and routines due to alcohol abuse may be a factor in negative psychological outcomes for children with alcoholic parents (Fiese, 1993; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). In other words, these studies have found a link between the regular practice of meaningful activities, and the health of family life.

For the purposes of this study, Fiese and colleagues' (2002) definitions of rituals and routines will be used as a conceptual guide. Family *rituals* will be defined as familial events that are observed and repeated over the course of time. These rituals are performed with an affective commitment that conveys a sense of identity and cohesion through symbolic communication represented within the tradition, celebration, or event. Family *routines* involve momentary

patterns of behavior that are repeated regularly, perhaps rhythmically through the course of constant family interaction. Where family rituals symbolically reinforce identity and cohesion, family routines instrumentally communicate stability and consistency.

Family rituals and routines can have a stabilizing effect for families under pressure. It should be noted, however, that this idea has been generated by authors in the industrialized West. These studies are valid and easily integrated into our knowledge of life in America or Europe. I am examining the possibility of applying what we know in the field of human development and family studies in the West to an African culture.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF FAMILY RITUALS AND ROUTINES IN RESILIENCE AMONG LIBERIAN REFUGEES LIVING IN GHANA[1]

[1] Hardgrove, A. Submitted to *Journal of Refugee Studies.*

The family is the primary unit of survival, preservation of culture, and transmission of values and identity (Boyden, 1993). This is thought to be true in all parts of the world, regardless of religious affiliation, family structure, or cultural values. With a substantial number of individuals displaced across borders all around the world, my primary interest was in the nature of lived experiences among refugee families with long term refugee status. In this article, the specific questions to be addressed are: What are the family rituals and routines practiced by Liberian refugee families? And, what is the relationship of family rituals and routines to family adaptation and adjustment to life at Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana?

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of Liberian refugee parents or caregivers and their families. Changes that have occurred in families as a result of being displaced are described. Also, aspects of daily life in a refugee camp, and the meanings and purposes of their family rituals and routines are highlighted.

The vast majority of research on people who have been displaced because of war has focused on mental health outcomes and implications for psychological functioning (Chatty et. al., 2005). Though studies by Miller (1996) and Tribe (2004) offer a glimpse of positive adaptation of refugee families, the majority of literature is filled with psychological assessment. For instance, much of the research on displaced children amounts to mere assessment using self-report surveys aimed to evaluate symptoms of depression, anxiety, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Stein, Comer, Gardner, & Kelleher, 1999; Papageorgiou et al., 2000; Paardekooper, de Jong, & Hermanns, 1999). This heavily trodden path to knowledge about the traumatic consequences of war has met with opposition (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1997; Summerfield, 1999). Some scholars have argued that mental health concepts have been taken out

of their context in the industrialized West, and applied poorly and prolifically among refugee and other war-affected populations in other parts of the world.

Much of the research on refugee families is produced in Western countries where refugees have sought asylum. Many studies have been conducted in Europe, or the United States, following the immigration of refugees from the Middle East or Africa. For example, in Sweden, Hjern, Anders, and Jeppson (1998) examined the mental health of Middle Eastern and Chilean refugee children in relation to their experience of former political violence, family stress, and social networks formed in their new location. In Norway, Sveaas and Reichelt (2001) studied the experience of family therapy with refugees. Also of note are the studies that are focused on health and family life experience of refugees post-immigration (Samarasinghe & Arvidsson, 2002; Sourander, 2003; Weine et al., 2006). Still, Weine and colleagues (2004) lamented the lack of family perspective given to refugees by the scholarly community.

Social science research has been conducted at Buduburam in the past (Kreitzer, 2002; Dick, 2002, & Boateng, 2006). No study was directly focused on family processes, though Kreitzer (2002) found that Liberian refugee women bore the majority of responsibility of providing for and caring for their children. So great was this task that many felt incapable of becoming involved in camp leadership, or in beginning programs that could help their fellow refugees. Her work hints at the difficulty of parenting and care-giving at Buduburam, and notes the enormity of the task of simply surviving.

Theory

The theoretical framework that informed this study was taken from two sources. A family resilience framework was coupled with the research on family rituals and routines. Together

these two perspectives were used to understand the lives of the refugees in this study and to offer insight into the resilience of long-term refugees at Buduburam Refugee Camp.

Before proceeding with the theoretical framework, a word about my conceptualization of family is important. The Liberians have a very loose definition of what "family" means. This has been noted in previous research with these refugees (Dick, 2002). Friends and members of the community are often referred to by familial names like mother or sister, when neither is the case through biology or adoption. Additionally, their households are composed of a mix of friends and relations who may or may not share their daily activities of survival. Friends may be considered as family, housemates may not. Given all of these factors, an inclusive conceptualization of family is needed. In this study, I borrowed Rothausen's (1999) definition of family, in which members may be related through marriage, biology and adoption, as well as affection, obligation, dependence, or cooperation. This definition accommodated the Liberian's varied familial circumstances and guided my thoughts about family resilience.

Family Resilience

Resilience, the ability to endure adversity, is by definition, a quality of refugee families who survive persecution and displacement. Therefore, a family resilience framework was used to guide the design and analysis of this study. Walsh (2002) noted "a family resilience approach attends to adaptational processes over time." A basic underpinning of this theory is that stressful crises and persistent challenges influence the whole family. Likewise, family processes mediate the recovery and resilience of vulnerable members as well as the family unit. The family resilience framework is focused on *how* adaptation may be achieved through specific familial processes.

The basic tenets of a family resilience framework guide understanding about families in crisis. First, the central focus should be placed on family strengths under stress, rather than deficiency, or pathology. As mentioned already, much of the literature regarding refugees is focused on psychological distress and deficiency. In the context of the prolonged refugee experience of Liberian families, this theoretical framework calls attention to adaptational processes from a strengths based perspective.

Second, a family resilience perspective asserts that no single model fits all families or their situations. Family functioning, according to a family resilience framework, must be assessed in context, relative to each family's values, structure, resources, and life challenges. This too, is a pertinent concept when assessing the adaptational processes employed by refugee families. Family structure, resources, and life challenges may vary considerably due to the nature of flight from their country, and their prolonged status in exile.

Third, family relational processes vary over time. As challenges unfold and families evolve, the dynamics of family functioning are also subject to change. This is relevant within prolonged refugee situations where families have resided in camps for many years. Family resilience highlights the dynamic qualities of adaptation processes, and makes the evolution of these particular processes a primary focus.

Family Rituals and Routines

Family rituals and routines are the family processes of Liberian refugee families theoretically linked to resilience in this study. The definitions of rituals and routines proposed by Fiese and colleagues (2002) are used as a conceptual guide. *Family rituals* are defined as familial events that are observed and repeated over the course of time. These rituals are performed with an affective commitment that conveys a sense of identity and cohesion through symbolic

communication represented within the tradition, celebration, or event. By this definition, celebration of birthdays is an example of a family ritual. Celebration of a birthday communicates identity by acknowledging the passage of time and the coming of age. *Family routines* involve momentary patterns of behavior that are repeated regularly, perhaps rhythmically through the course of constant family interaction. Preparing dinner or getting ready for school are examples of family routines. These regularly occurring patterns of behavior form a daily structure for family interaction. Where family rituals symbolically communicate identity and cohesion, family routines instrumentally communicate stability and consistency.

McCubbin and McCubbin (1988) suggested that family rituals and routines are valuable protective factors for families in the midst of transition and stressful life events. Family rituals and routines provide an opportunity for the transmission of values and beliefs, family identity, stability, and socialization (Schuck & Bucy, 1997). Children in families who practice meaningful rituals and routines have reported lower anxiety levels in the midst of stressful life transitions and health problems (Compan, Monero, Ruiz, & Pascual, 2002; Markson & Feise, 2000). Thus, it appears that family rituals and routines can have a stabilizing effect for families under pressure. This being the case, I sought to apply these ideas about family rituals and routines to a stressful family situation in West Africa.

Methods

Camp Context

Buduburam Refugee Camp was founded in 1990, to receive the initial influx of Liberians who fled civil war that erupted on Christmas Eve, 1989. Approximately 140 acres of camp space was established on an abandoned church site, a 40 minute drive outside of the capital city of Accra, Ghana. The estimated population in the summer of 2007 was 24,000, down from a high of

over 40,000 (UNHCR, 2007). This was due in part to the repatriation initiative sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who agreed to take refugees back to Liberia at no cost. UNHCR oversaw the governance of the camp along side factions of the Ghanaian government and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Dick, 2002) until the time of this project. As of the summer of 2007, UNHCR was no longer a governing presence at Buduburam. The organization no longer provided food and material aid, nor would they supply medical care to the refugees. This forced the Liberians to assume full responsibility for their daily sustenance and to acquire medical care and treatment from each other or from institutions outside of the camp.

The refugees who chose to remain at Buduburam lived in small houses made of cement block and capped with tin roofs. The camp enjoyed the benefits of internet cafes, schools, markets, hair salons, clubs, and corner shops. Additionally, Buduburam has been home to 40 churches established by the refugees, branches of Ghanaian churches, and international religious establishments from other countries (Dick, 2002). There were well established foot paths that followed the general contours of erosion lines. Sections of the camp could be accessed by automobiles. Taxis and trotros (public transportation buses), lined the yard outside of the camp gate, coming and going with refugees and visitors. Running water was not available. Toilets were placed throughout the camp, where refugees paid a fee for use. Water sachets (small plastic bags of purified water) were purchased from Ghanaian businesses that delivered large pallets of water sachets to the refugees who subsequently bought and sought them to each other.

Means for survival dominated the movements to, from, and within the camp. Many refugees received remittances, money sent from family and friends living outside of the camp or

the country (Boateng, 2006). Some work in Ghanaian businesses. Most rely on income they can acquire within the camp.

Participants

In the summer of 2007, participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Liberian refugee parents and caregivers. The results come from participant observation, two focus groups conducted with women, and 20 subsequent in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women. These focus groups and interviews were focused on family life and daily experiences as perceived by refugee parents and caregivers.

All of the participants were Liberian refugees. All were mothers of, or caregivers to, refugee children. Women were selected for this study for two principal reasons. First, Liberian women, as in many cultures (Walters, Warzywoda-Kruszynska, & Gurko, 2002), have the primary responsibility for care and nurturance of children. The second reason is logistical. When recruited for participation in this study (explained below), the women in these focus groups and interviews constituted the majority of voluntary participants. This is most likely the case due to the particular need of single mothers for additional monetary help. Only two men were available and willing to be interviewed. For the sake of offering results from a semi-homogenous group, the content of those interviews are not included here.

All of the refugees who participated were originally from Liberia. They left in several waves of forced migration due to political turmoil and violence that began as early as the first civil outbreak in December of 1989. Civil war and conflict continued for 14 years, and ceased only after the removal of former President Charles Taylor. The human rights violations documented during the perpetual civil conflict include looting, rape, sexual violence and torture, rampant use of child soldiers, and ritualistic cannibalism. Before Taylor was removed from

power in Liberia, more than 85% of the population had died or been displaced (Cain, 1999). Most of the women who were interviewed found initial refuge in the countries of Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. Violence in those regions, family issues, and difficulty with language or food acquisition prompted many to pursue refuge in Ghana.

Data Collection

I gained access to these refugees through contact with a pastor of a church on the camp. We were introduced through multiple contacts made by instructors at my university and at an academic institution near Buduburam Refugee Camp, where he was working on a bachelor's degree. This minister was a Liberian refugee himself, and also served as the local director of an NGO established by an American couple. Their NGO recruits donors who sponsor Liberian refugee children to attend school. This local site director and pastor recruited refugees who benefit from scholarships provided by the American NGO. In so doing, he acted as a liaison between the refugees and me. His position of status as a pastor, and a leader with access to humanitarian aid, played a significant role in my introduction to life at the camp and to the refugees he recruited. As my guide, his connections to people in the church, community, and NGO allowed me to meet many people, and also excluded the possibility of meeting others. In this way, he mediated my experiences of Buduburam life and culture. As a trusted member in the community, he was a reassuring presence for participants during data collection. He also assisted me in implementing many of the research procedures, and guided my understanding of the nuanced differences in the Liberian's use of English.

Data were collected inside Buduburam Refugee Camp in a local place, well-known to the participants. The women met with me in one of two office rooms used by the NGO. Data were collected using methods of participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews.

Participant observation took place during a week in which I lived with a family inside of Buduburam Refugee Camp. As a participant observer, I was able to observe family life inside their homes, to attend church, to visit a school, and to stroll at leisure through the camp pathways and markets. During this time, I took detailed notes of my observations to be reviewed and compared with other forms of data.

Participant observation served this study in two important ways. First, it allowed me the opportunity to build rapport (Bernard, 1994). Participant observation enabled me to become familiar with the environment and the refugees I was studying. This served to enhance my understanding of their situation, and allowed them to begin becoming comfortable with me. This was especially important in a refugee camp, as the experiences of refugees often lead to what Daniel and Knudsen (1995, p. 1) referred to as "an erosion of trust." As a new comer to their community, it was helpful to become visible among the refugees, allow them to become familiar with me—and I them, and to be known in relation to trusted members of the camp.

Second, participant observation was useful for triangulation. Being a participant observer in the comings and goings of the camp enabled me to check the statements participants made during interviews. My observations during church services, school visits, household activities, and walks through the camp provided valuable information about the way of life at Buduburam. These observations informed me about the content of interviews by providing sensory information to compare with participants' descriptions of life at the camp.

A focus group procedure was used before individual adults were interviewed. Focus groups, or group interviews, served the research in several ways. Focus groups allowed me to "test" my general interview questions before using them (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups provided a lot of participant response about several themes of interest to the research project (Patton,

2002). The opportunity to receive a lot of feedback in a short amount of time allowed me to assess the congruence of my questions quickly.

Also, as a new comer to the community, I knew that there was a potential for these Liberians to feel uncomfortable speaking with me. Though I had become a familiar presence in the neighborhood, I knew that my questions might seem unusual or unfamiliar topics of conversation for the refugees. Focus groups tap into human tendency toward social interaction (Patton, 2002). It was my hope that any awkwardness or discomfort about discussing topics surrounding family might be relieved by the social support of a group experience. Also, by speaking with groups first, I would be better prepared to discuss family issues in a more culturally sensitive way during individual interviews.

In addition, these group discussions allowed for triangulation when analyzing. The responses voiced during focus groups could be compared to those given in individual interviews and to the observations I made at the camp.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews complemented the focus groups by providing detailed individual information. A general interview protocol was followed, as in the case of a structured interview, but further questioning on a variety of topics was allowed to surface and be explored. This combined approach (Patton, 2002) gave me a chance to gather information on a few key concepts and gave participants flexibility to share further information about their lives. By so doing, I was able to gather information that was coherent on core issues but represented diversity of experience among participants.

Focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded. Recording equipment was demonstrated prior to each focus group or interview. I did not know whether participants would be familiar with devices such as the one I used. Having the participants speak into the recorder,

and listen to the playback, allowed them to see and hear how the equipment worked. This exercise was important for reducing the chance of misunderstanding or suspicion about the device.

Signed consent was obtained prior to focus groups and interviews. Consent forms were distributed before data collection, and reviewed before each session. Women signed the consent forms only after they were given an opportunity to read the forms and ask any questions pertaining to their participation. Participants were informed of monetary compensation for participation at the time of signed consent. No information about compensation was given prior to data collection. This limited the spread of information about money. If refugees in the camp heard that an American was "paying" people to discuss their experiences, it was quite possible that large crowds would gather purely for the sake of receiving money. No compensation was given until the conclusion of all research procedures. At the end of data collection, participants were invited to the office at a specified time to receive compensation, take pictures, and say good-bye. This was done to reduce safety risks for women. If word spread that women were leaving the research site throughout the week with money in hand, the chance of theft might increase. Inviting them to return for an additional meeting, unknown to the community, was an attempt to protect the women.

Data Analysis

Focus groups were analyzed by comparing responses to each question asked in the group interviews (Morgan, 1988). All recordings were transcribed word for word. Comments were compiled under each question. Focused codes (Charmaz, 2006) were assigned under each question to accommodate efficient and accurate comparison. This revealed similarity and diversity within the responses these Liberians gave about their daily lives and familial practices.

An adaptive approach to grounded theory was used to analyze the interview data (Ezzy, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). As the researcher and principle analyst, I constructed an emergent theory through a constant dialogue with the data. The results and conclusions are offered as an interpretive lens for understanding the information communicated within focus groups and interviews.

Coding the interview data was a crucial part of the analysis. Initial, focused, axial, and selective coding was employed to systematically analyze transcripts. Coding is a process of disassembling and reassembling the data (Ezzy, 2002). During initial coding, emergent themes were tagged line-by-line throughout each transcript. At this first stage of analysis, I gave extensive attention to detail and attended to nuance with creativity and experimentation (Ezzy, 2002). This process forced me to remain "close" to the data.

At the conclusion of line-by-line coding, the initial codes were reviewed. Focused coding followed with the application of more direct, conceptual codes. In this stage of analysis, larger sections of data were coded to synthesize line-by-line codes (Charmaz, 2006). This process of focus coding began the work of situating the data in a coherent manner.

Axial coding was used to assess contextual factors that might be linked to certain focused codes. During axial coding, data were reassembled by linking categories and subcategories that combined to form a coherent whole (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage of analysis, biographical and contextual information was particularly relevant for linking codes.

Last, selective, or theoretical codes, were assigned as a means of summing up the central story of the interpreted data (Ezzy, 2002). These codes provided broad brush strokes of central themes that came together in the analysis of interviews. In this final stage of analysis, preexisting theoretical concepts were compared with the selective codes, in most cases informing the

interpretation. In the case of humanitarian aid for school fees, selective codes provided additional information that did not fit within the conceptual base of family rituals and routines. In this way, the emergent grounded theory went beyond the use of the family resilience framework coupled with family rituals and routines, to produce an additional concept that pertained to the specific circumstances of these Liberians.

Individual interview data, focus group data, and participant observations were then reviewed together. These three methods provided triangulation within the analysis (Bernard, 1994). Answers given in group interviews were compared with those in individual interviews, and with the field notes taken during participant observation. This triangulation of data increased validity by allowing me to check responses in one source alongside of the data in the other two.

The results in this article reflect the family processes discussed by Liberian women who struggle to survival and support their families at Buduburam Refugee Camp. To protect their anonymity, all transcripts were assigned a number that corresponded with a number given to their consent forms. The identity of participants was thus kept separate from transcripts to reduce any bias during data analysis. Furthermore, all interview transcripts were assigned a random letter, which appears at the end of each quotation, and provides additional identity protection for the participants.

Results

Crisis: Families in Transition

It was not my intent to request that participants tell me about their personal stories of hardship and loss in Liberia. The original goal during focus groups and interviews was to probe for information regarding their families' endurance in their present circumstances, and the daily experiences and ritualistic celebrations, traditions, or events that facilitated part of their

adaptation to life as refugees in Ghana. What occurred during most of the interviews, however, was a natural digression into circumstances that caused their expulsion from Liberia. The women who participated regularly brought up the hardship and the inciting incidents that led to their flight. This information provides valuable perspective about their past, context for understanding their present adaptation to life in Ghana, and illuminates their orientation toward the future.

Before Crisis

The refugees in this study left Liberia in varied stages of family life. Most were parents at the time of their departure. A few were children and some were grandparents. Many of the participants referenced the positions they and their spouses had held in their former communities. Some were small business owners. They were independent and self-sufficient. Some worked in the government. Others were leaders in their local churches.

> Life was very good. I was the principal of a school there…I was a principal and I was a businesswoman also. I was selling dry goods, and also I was working in the pharmacy. So life was all right with me. (Interview N)

> I was the head of deaconess in Liberia. I am confirmed on district. I was on the district level…I had my own prayer house in Liberia when I was there, I had my own prayer house. I have my morning service and my night service. (Interview V)

Because work is part of identity, it is evident that there are aspects of a former identity that were left behind when these women were forced to flee from their country, their communities, and their culture. Positions of authority and leadership provided opportunity for autonomy and influence within their families and their communities. Not all women were selling pharmaceuticals. However, most were independent, self-sufficient, and able to carve a life for themselves with the help of their families and within the context of their communities.

Inciting Incidents

The crisis of civil wars during the 1990s, and the subsequent unrest and renewed fighting in the wake of Charles Taylor's acquisition of state power affected the lives of all of the families who are represented by the women in this study. Fear and loss was at the center of each refugee's story of flight from Liberia. Some referred to the general insecurity and unrest that eventually led to their departure. Most of the women recounted or referred to personal stories of traumatic events that resulted in their flight from the country.

> I left Liberia downhearted. I lost my parents, I lost my sister. My sister was raped and because of that, she didn't make it. She couldn't survive. A whole lot of things. It's a long story. (Interview W)

> We have enemies that were chasing us. And then my daughter father was shot…So, we have to leave to come in Ghana. (Interview S)

> I was beaten, I was raped, and my husband was skinned alive. So I left. They took me and carried me to Ivory Coast. So when I came to myself, I was in a hospital. (Interview N)

The threat of, or personal experience of, violence dealt to themselves or their family members was ultimately the deciding factor for all of the women who spoke about their inciting incidents. In most cases, families were separated by the disappearance or death of members before they reached safety across national borders. In this way, the women lost more than their income or their livelihood. They lost family support. They lost relationships. In many cases, women fled Liberia uncertain about the life or death of husbands, parents, or children.

Journey to Refuge

Liberians began coming to Ghana in 1990 (Dovlo & Sondah, 2001). Women in this study departed as early as 1990, during the first civil war, and as late as 2003 during a resurgence of

insecurity. Most traveled with their remaining family members. Some set out for Ghana, making their way through other countries or by way of ship. Others migrated to Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Nigeria. For those who established themselves in communities or refugee camps in other parts of West Africa, subsequent difficulty and crisis was often the catalyst for their journey to Ghana and Buduburam Refugee Camp. One woman described the difficulty of providing for her family in Cote d'Ivoire:

> We used to go by the near-by villages to fish for food for ourselves. And, you can't just go and get food that easily. Even if you go into the bush and get food, the owner of that land will come and take the food away from you. "This is my land!" I thought they would give you the go ahead…and find whatever you supposed to go and find. But when you come with it, they come and take it. So one of my friends told me, "in Ghana, they have a big refugees camp there. And they don't harass anybody. So we thought we would go and live there. That's how we all came here. (Interview B)

For this woman, and many like her, inability to reestablish a home and a means of provision for her family became a second crisis. In her case, integration into the local society was more demanding than she expected, or felt that she could manage. Under these circumstances, the difference in her expectations and the expectations of the nationals produced a social incongruity that resulted in a second migration. For other families, an additional encounter with war or conflict caused subsequent migration. This woman describes her family's plight in Sierra Leone after leaving Liberia in 1990:

> We are grateful for God, for being on the camp all these years since '95. We left from Freetown, there was a war in Freetown…So we had to flee the war and come to Ghana. So we were affected two times, Liberian war and Sierra Leone war. Sierra Leone we

> establish everything. We had to flee when the war came and come to Ghana. When we came to Ghana we had to start afresh. (Interview W)

The crisis of war and forced migration leaves refugee families with few options, and frequent experiences of frustration and disappointment. In Ghana, Buduburam Refugee Camp has been spared war. Over the course of nearly 20 years, it swelled with a population of people who built it into a makeshift town of its own. Though food acquisition remained difficult for many, it had not caused the participants of this study to relocate again. In the following section, the family processes that have led to adaptation and adjustment to life at Buduburam are explored.

Adapting to Family Life in a Refugee Camp

Adjustment to refugee circumstances is difficult in many ways. The crisis of war leaves families fragmented and in mourning for their lost and their dead. For many refugees, there is an abrupt change from economic independence to impoverishment—at least in the beginning. The added frustration of paying for use of the toilet, and fear of an unsafe camp environment for their children added a miserable burden of responsibility for many of the Liberian parents and caregivers in this study. For the Liberians at Buduburam, there is also a perceived social distance from the Ghanaian cultural mainstream. Regardless of the reasons for this perceived distance, it seems apparent that feelings of alienation and distrust cause lack of access to important resources like job opportunities and medical care.

Change in Family Structure

Adapting to life as a refugee varies based on circumstances. Family structure was, in almost every case, altered by death or separation from family members. Parents and

grandparents, extended kin and relatives were, at best, a fragmented support system and network for the women who sought shelter at Buduburam.

Most of the women in the focus groups and interviews came to Buduburam without their husbands. Some were sure of their spouse's death. Others were not. This proved to be a difficult situation, not only because of the relational loss, but also because of a key family role that was left unfilled. It created a significant gap in the family's structure, and functioning. One woman explained:

> But when they kill my husband, and hurt me so much I decided to leave the country. Because he usually encourage me, or helping me do everything. For we in Liberian woman our husbands help us. If you're married your man take care of you, you take care of your husband. (Interview G)

Only two of the women who were interviewed had husbands who were living with them at Buduburam. In these cases, there was a marked difference in their tone of voice, their confidence, and general willingness to volunteer thoughts about their children or their family. In both cases, these women were the primary sources of income and parental care for their children. Regardless, both appeared to feel the presence of support from their spouses, and showed notable hopefulness compared with the majority of single mothers and caregivers. Though these are only two examples among thousands of cases at Buduburam the difference in their interviews suggests the significance of spousal support. It also points to the loss of a spouse as a major factor for adjustment to life as refugees.

Lack of Autonomy

Another component offered throughout the data was the lack of autonomy and the refugees' inability to provide independently for their children.

> Being a refugee, we have never seen refugees before and we did not experience it before. And is a very hard thing to describe to be a refugee…You just abruptly be a refugee. You use to provide your own food and your own support for your children education and you cannot turn around to do anything…It is very dark…The problem is there—you cannot solve it. (Interview T)

This difficulty of providing for their families was consistent with previous observations made at the camp (Kreitzer, 2002). Acquisition of money and food dominated the conversations with women in the focus groups and individual interviews.

Cost of Basic Necessities

The most significant frustration brought forward in all of the interviews was the cost of basic necessities: the necessity to pay for clean water to drink and to take baths, and the requirement to pay for use of the public toilets. Buduburam houses were, as many in West Africa, built without indoor plumbing. The camp also, was built and expanded without the installation of a sewage system. Though refugees would, in some places, be content to use the bush to relieve themselves, fear of gangs and criminal activity kept most within the confines of the camp. Coming from homes or other camps where clean water was within walking distance, and the bush was relatively safe, the price placed on bowel movements was no small thing to the refugees in this study.

> Sometime we go to the toilet that you have to pay money and if you don't have, you have to go in the bush, to go use the bush. And while you're using the bush you have some gangster boys, sometimes will come to attack you because they see you are naked. And they will attack you. So for that reason I don't encourage my children to go in the bush. I

> rather buy this plastic and there they will use it…Because they will be raping the little girls. So I don't allow my children to go in the bush. (Interview W)

The financial obligation connected to basic bodily functions was a notable source of frustration and stress for the Liberians. As refugees, the environment dictated even the minute details of their daily lives—right down to where they could relieve themselves. Even using the bathroom was a choice that was made for them. This was frustrating because it was restrictive and expensive.

Safety

Safety inside and outside of the camp was a significant concern for mothers and caregivers. Many expressed fear of child abduction and rape. Parents of younger children chose to keep them near the house, and to bring them inside in the early evening hours. The menacing activities of mischievous Liberian adolescents and the hate crimes of Ghanaian outsiders were a constant source of concern. One woman described her fears of child abduction and murder:

> Nearly everyday children are lossing on the camp…So I can't allow her [a young daughter] to, and go far from the house. So while she playing, I will be checking on her to see where she is…It didn't happen to not only one child. It happened to so many children. Yeah, all they killed. So if you have your little children, don't allow them to go far away. (Interview F)

These fears expressed by participants are consistent with Boateng's (2006) observations of women's fear of criminal activity within the camp. In this study, fear was particularly expressed in regards to the safety of their children. Though insecurity within refugee camps is common, a heightened state of arousal in parents and caregivers appears to contribute additional stress to their difficult way of life.

Marginalization

Distrust of Ghanaian outsiders reinforced social distance between the Ghanaians and the Liberian refugees. The refugees complained, as has been the case in previous studies (Dick, 2002), that work is difficult to find outside of the camp, and that they are not treated fairly when it is available. Many of the women in this study expounded upon the discrimination they feel from Ghanaians in the surrounding community. This woman described a commonly discussed issue of doing business with Ghanaians in a local market:

> When you are by someone, you have to change your tone and talk like them. If you [talk] like them, they say this to you, five dollars, U.S. If you speak the Liberian dialect, like the refugee, they sell you ten dollars because you are not Ghanaian. So it's very, very difficult to live here. (Participant, Focus Group 1)

The frustration of discrimination was heightened in the context of medical care. Many of the women talked about the hassle of receiving care for their sick children. Poverty and refugee status were noted as reasons for denial of treatment or proper information about their children's condition.

> The refugee life is a very bad life. Even in the hospital if your child is sick, you don't have physical cash to pay, they won't touch our child. (Participant, Focus Group 1)
>
> I lost my grandchild two Thursday ago because we are refugee and we go to the place, they calling for medicine and we pay for it. That medicine there is suppose to use on that baby, but they never used the medicine. (Interview Z)

As a result of inattention or neglect, the medicine this grandmother paid for was not properly administered. The result was her grandchild's death. The refugees attribute injustices like these and many others to their marginalized social position in Ghana. Lack of access to basic

necessities like health care and job opportunities anchored most of the refugees to the camp. The requirement to pay for basic necessities like water was an additional hassle for these people, who were already living-hand-to-mouth. Perceived inability to obtain the essentials for well-being frustrated all of the participants. The added loss of spousal support was a further deterrent to a healthy and productive life. Despite these, and many other difficulties, the Liberian women continued to provide for their families. The adaptational processes that foster family resilience offer valuable information about the practical influences that family rituals and routines can have on familial adjustment in the midst of great adversity.

Family Resilience

Buduburam is filled with a people who have managed to reestablish a structured way of life in a difficult and marginalized situation in Ghana. In many respects, this camp stands out from others due to the development of its markets and the number of churches and religious organizations (Kpatindé, 2006). One aim of this study was to inquire into the familial processes that have enabled Liberian families to endure the loss of their homes and their way of life, and to adjust and adapt to their present poverty and social marginalization in Ghana.

There are several ways that this was made possible for women. Shared responsibility for provision with their remaining family members, including their children, increased the number of hands needed to match the workload. The social network and spiritual support surrounding their religious practice offered a significant source of comfort and social connection. Lastly, the provision of funds for school fees through the American NGO kept them in their present situation, and provided hope for a way out of it through their children's attainment of a better way of life.

Family Routines

Family routines provide structure for continual family interaction. For the Liberians in this study, family routines of daily life revolved around provision of sustenance and children's education. As is the case for many of the world's impoverished families (Boyden 1993; Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesch, 2000), shared responsibility for provision of household income was shared by multiple family members and multiple generations. Many of the women rose in the early hours of the morning to prepare for the day before their children left for school. Children who were old enough to help, and were not attending school, often contributed to the family effort for survival. One woman described her son's weekly routines surrounding school and work.

> Only on Saturday he help me, because he don't the time. When he come [from school] he has to go back. When he come he get small thing to eat and he go back to study class. He will not come from study class 'til six o'clock. When he come then he get to me at the church because every evening I have service at the church. (Interview X)
>
> We will make market together. Ah, we roast fish. My daughters roast fish at night to sell and I sell kerosene. (Interview Z)

Those who could piece together a survival strategy were less likely to show or express symptoms of anxiety and depression. All said that life was hard and that living hand-to-mouth was difficult and uncomfortable. However, those who expressed feelings of anxiety and stress were often women who were unable to share the burden of provision with other family members. In their case, the responsibility for multiple children was overwhelming, and their reliance on others outside of the family was more established. The participants who expressed the least hope for their situation and the future of their family were more likely to beg from their friends and

neighbors. One grandmother who juggled the responsibility of caring for ten children and grandchildren explained the stress of caring for so many without a stable income or reliable sources of family support:

> It is really a problem. The children, the grandchildren be all around me. I feel really miserable and tired. I don't even have to sleep at night because I still praying to God 'what will I do? How will I get help for these children? How will I get these children to be what they are aimin' at?' Some of them have big plans, but then how do I implement it? (Interview T)

Though all of the women expressed frustration with the difficulty of providing for children in their limited situation at Buduburam, it was the caregivers with sole responsibility and few resources who appeared and sounded the most downtrodden. Their circumstances were the most overwhelming and the least hopeful.

Family Rituals

In circumstances of persistent adversity, the presence of ritual, symbolic communication of identity can be a powerful source of interpersonal support. Family rituals symbolically communicate identity and cohesion (Fiese et al., 2002). When asked to discuss the family rituals practiced in Liberia, and continued in Ghana, the relinquished family celebrations of national Liberian holidays came up almost without fail. Lack of monetary resources and general feelings of malaise prevented most from engaging in these cultural rituals throughout the year. In most cases, pride and celebration of national identity was unimportant when compared with feeding children.

Traditions and celebrations clung to by most were those pertaining to religious identity and the regular, daily and weekly practice of Christian faith. Christmas and Easter were holidays

with significant family rituals that extended into participation with the community. Other family rituals that engaged their faith included morning or evening devotions, attendance of nightly services, and weekly attendance at Sunday morning church. These served two instrumental purposes. Women were provided with a social network which functioned to provide relational and occasional monetary support. Religious rituals also reinforced their spiritual identity and symbolically reinforced a belief system that provided answers for their current situation and hope for their future.

The social support of their religious practices was evident throughout the interview data. Participants talked about feeling happy when they were at church, a description given to no other circumstance that they discussed with me.

> The church is important to me and when I don't go to church, I don't feel good…And also, reading the word of God, it helped me a whole lot. It encouraged me that I will not feel lonesome, me being refugee. (Interview X)
>
> You have comfort at church. You go to church to meet up with friends. You meet up with people to give you words of encouragement. (Interview T)
>
> Our pastor that is here, he speak to us. When we get back home I feel so happy when he finish preaching to us, advising us, talk to us. I feel good. If there were no church—eh-heh! But church is here. So anything that come to me I put it before the Lord and I know the Lord will take care of everything. (Interview V)

The reinforcement of their Christian beliefs in a God who loved and provided for them was strewn throughout conversations about nearly every part of life that they described. Health, daily provisions, well-being, and hope for the future were all attributed to the God they served. These Liberians believed that God was not only present and aware of their circumstances, but

actively working on their behalf. One woman described sharing among friends as God's active care for her family:

> Sometime we don't have it and by his grace people can just come to visit. People will just come and say 'I have been looking for you, I have a present for you,' and that's it. So it is not me or not the person. It is by his grace. (Interview S)

This woman gave God the credit for prompting someone else to help her family. In this example, the kindness of others was believed to be an extension of the kindness of God. This and many other examples were given as illustrations of the detailed care that the Liberians believed their God extended to them. Another woman spoke of God's role in her daily life, and in her family:

> Every day important because if I wake up, I see the sun then I give God the glory. Because He the one who woke me up. He protect me through all that, me and my children. So everyday I give him thanks, for his protection and love. Not by my own strength, but by his. (Interview F)

For these women, the motivation to keep struggling to survive was rooted firmly in their belief that God's sovereign will was at work in their past, their present, and their future. These refugees believed that God had helped them in the past, he was helping them at present, and he would help them in the future. God's provision for their lives, no matter their loss or difficulty, was cited over and over again as the empowering source of meaning and purpose for their families and the well-being of their future.

Point of No Return

Family resilience was also aided by mother's/caregiver's view toward their circumstances at present and in the future. Their perceptions of their current life in Ghana and their expectations

and goals for the future of their families were a part of what enabled them to remain where they were and continue to work for the provision of their families. The future, as seen by the Liberian families represented in this study was one of prolonged life in Ghana, with no interest in repatriation to Liberia in most cases. Their knowledge of present hardship was more appealing than the potential difficulty they might have if their family were to move out of the camp or return to Liberia. Their unwillingness to repatriate was exacerbated in many cases, by the corruption of government and by social consequences of fleeing civil war. Additionally, the provision of educational funds through an American NGO provided further motivation to remain at Buduburam. For families who were sponsored through charitable donations, their hope for a better future rested on the enriched lives of their children, which was made possible through their dependence on humanitarian aid.

Many of these Liberians perceived reestablishment in Liberia, or on the outside of the camp, as too difficult to manage. In a culture where extended kin provide a valuable network of relational and economic support, moving away from their few remaining family members did not appear wise. Lack of means to find a residence and a new occupation gave further credence to staying put.

> We would be willing to go back. Liberia is our home. But we have been here for quite a long time. You go home and your family all are gone. You go home and you don’t have no where to sleep, no where to live and no one to help you, to say, ‘I be willing to help you to start,’ to be able to start from. You go back, you are going back the same as you in refugee camp. So some of us decide that we will stay here, and we will manage here. (Participant, Focus Group 1)

> At least you are comfortable to where we are. We have our own place. But if you pack yours things now and leave, where are you going to stay? That mean you have to start afresh. Find a house and you don't have money to pay rent. So what are you going to do? So when we look at it, we see better and we stay here. (Interview W)

The establishment of their current homes at Buduburam was a key component of their unwillingness to move out of their camp or out of Ghana. With no family left in Liberia, and no occupation or place to return to, many preferred the difficulties of their present circumstances over the possibility of the unknown.

Another factor in their refusal to repatriate was their fear of future violence and insecurity in Liberia. As previously discussed, most of the women encountered severe violence, trauma, and loss as a result of multiple conflicts in Liberia. Many feared that their past run-ins with government troops or officials would result in what they referred to as "hunting."

> They hunt you if for example, you live here and work in the government, huh? And something happen and they get rid of you. They will have to get rid of all your children because they don't want them to come back and work in our government again. So they have to get rid of your children. That what I mean, 'hunt you.' That mean they will be looking for you all over. (Participant, Focus Group 2)

> Not with children. Now if, if we decided to go back, we'd go alone…Our level is risky, they will kill us and get our children, you see? (Interview F)

Given the severe brutality of 14 years of interethnic civil wars and political unrest, it is little wonder that these victims would feel apprehensive about returning. In the case of these Liberian women, a plausible argument could be made for severe trauma and recurrent negative psychological outcomes. However, the survival and prominence of former war lords who

continued to live and move within Liberian society (Stack, 2008), offers further credence to their fears and unwillingness to return.

What appeared to be another significant motivation to remain was the hope for what the participants referred to as a "bright future." These Liberian women believed that God's grace was the way through their present struggles as refugees in Ghana. They voiced hope for the future in God's provision of education for their children. In a situation where returning was not an option and acceptance in the host country did not appear possible, hope for their children to obtain an education and therefore better means of survival, was a major motivation to remain where they were at Buduburam.

The women in this study were caring for children who received funds through an NGO based in America. These funds provided for school fees. In refugee families who could not always provide daily food for their children, money for school was not possible. The relief from this financial burden came to these women through the donations of Americans who sponsored their children. By remaining where they were, these women knew that their children had access to education.

> The whole world is education. That best thing you can give a child.
>
> I also want to say something. It's not easy, especially being a single parent, sending child to school and feed them. It is not easy, especially on refugee camp. My only daughter is scholarship and myself they gave me money to send her to school. So I thank God for the organization and the person that formed it. (Participants, Focus Group 2)

In most cases, this ready source of finance for education left little motivation to move from their present place at Buduburam. Doing so would eliminate this valuable resource. This hope of an education offered a small light at the end of a very long, dark tunnel of impoverished

struggle. Not only would education enable children to become independent, contributing members of society, it would also provide a better means for their future responsibility to care for their parents.

> I want for them to be real educated, go to school and be educated. Yeah, then they can help me. (Interview C)
>
> I am hopeful about life because I have children I know…in the future, my children will live better life then me. I will also live better life through their support. (Interview B)

The ability to endure their current circumstances at Buduburam revolves largely around their ability to provide family needs. An additional asset was the social and spiritual network of support and provision that came through the family's involvement in consistent religious rituals. They also constrained themselves to the camp because of the funds provided through the humanitarian efforts of a locally operated American NGO. Family resilience came through these means as these Liberians formed a base of survival and hope for the future.

Discussion

This study offers insight into the processes that foster adaptation and adjustment to prolonged refugee situations on a family level—as individuals, these Liberian refugees might have made different decisions. Although refugee family processes have been explored in the context of resettlement to the West (Sveaas & Reichelt, 2001; Weine et al., 2006), little has been done to explore the family processes employed for adaptation and adjustment to life in exile. These data offer new information about the family processes utilized in a refugee camp.

The crisis of war and displacement has a lasting effect on any person forced to flee his or her country because of persecution. This study highlights the implications of such crises for refugee families. The human rights violations that took place during the Liberian civil wars have

been well documented (Cain, 1999; Swiss, Jennings, Gladys, Aryee et al., 1998). The refugee women in this study experienced such human rights violations—they were raped, beaten, their family members were murdered. They have these and many other traumatic experiences in common with refugees around the world (Mollica, McInnes, Sarajlic, Lavelle et al., 1999; Macksoud & Aber, 1996).

In this way, their experiences of trauma and loss are similar to many other refugees. The focus on families' experiences of trauma in this study reveals some of the difficulties of adjustment to refugee life when family structure has been altered by death and separation. The loss of a husband's role in the family proved a great challenge for women who struggled to provide for their children without spouse support. This renegotiation of family roles could be stressful and overwhelming. Though much of the literature about refugees addresses depression in the wake of trauma (Stein, Comer, Gardner, & Kelleher, 1999; Mollica, McInnes, Sarajlic, Lavelle et al., 1999), little attention has been given to the daily experiences that are affected by the death or separation of close family members. Further research with single mothers and/or caregivers might reveal specific challenges to refugee family functioning and family relations in a camp context. The narratives of these Liberian women make it clear that changes in family structure have altered family functioning and have proved a significant challenge for adjustment to life in exile.

In many ways, life at Buduburam strongly resembles the way of life for others throughout the world who live in enclaves of poverty (Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesch, 2000). This impoverished struggle is common in protracted refugee situations throughout Africa (Crisp, 2003). Refugee or not, many of the world's poorest live in similar or more extreme situations of poverty in which material resources are difficult to acquire, and earning a living is a task met by

the entire family in order to survive. Livelihood activities and shared responsibility among Liberian family members offered a means of provision for the present and provided the necessary resources for enabling younger family members to finish their education and further enhance the family's state of well-being. This team effort across generations is consistent with what we know about shared responsibility among family members in developing countries (Boyden, 1993).

The Liberians in this study, and those who share similar experiences around the world, were set up to fail at almost every turn in their displaced experience. Their loss of home and family could be devastating, emotionally and economically. Their journeys into exile were often riddled with frustration and additional loss of agency. Life in exile, especially for prolonged refugees like these Liberians, rarely improves (Crisp, 2003).

How was it that they continued to survive, to endure, to bounce back from extreme trauma and loss? In essence, what made them resilient? The family processes explored in this study provided some answers to these questions. Family routines that provided structure for provision of necessities and children's education made survival at Buduburam more stable and produced less stress for caregivers. These family routines played a significant role in the stability and well-being of refugee families, and appeared to have stabilizing effects similar to those found in the research on family routines (Compan, Monero, Ruiz, & Pascual, 2002; Markson & Feise, 2000), though they were manifested in a different context.

Family rituals surrounding Christian faith among these Liberians had a profound influence on their ability to cope with the difficulties at hand and the uncertainty of the future. Family rituals symbolically communicate identity (Fiese et al., 2002). In a situation when many

were unable or unwilling to continue their family celebrations of national identity, spiritual identity was reinforced with vigor through the practice of their religious rituals.

These family rituals served two primary functions for these Liberian refugees. They provided families with social support and interaction as well as a sense of purpose. Many of the women mentioned feeling happy when they were with other Liberians in church. Their discussions of religious rituals often referenced feeling encouraged and hopeful. These events gave them a sense of common experience and reinforced their belief system through structured religious interaction.

This mutual exchange of beliefs also fostered a sense of hope for these families. In a situation where women felt so little control over their circumstances, a belief in a loving God who was bigger than their problems, and actively working on their behalf, offered hope in their present hardship. It is possible that my similar belief system may have encouraged selective attention to the faith of these women. There were, however, no questions about faith or religion in the interview protocols. Conversations about faith sprung from the prolific, spontaneous references to religion and trust in God made by participants. Given the highly religious environment previously described by Dick (2002), and Dovlo and Sondah (2001), I am confident that results pertaining to religion of these Liberians have not been over exaggerated.

The role of religious beliefs of these women for coping during crisis is in keeping with other research conducted with groups in complex emergencies. Religion has been observed as a powerful source of purpose for people who suffer from persecution and marginalization (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1995). It has also been observed as a protective factor, a buffer against negative psychological outcomes (Mollica, Cui, McInnes, & Massagli, 2002). Further research into the ways different religions promote coping could offer insight into potential family

and community responses to stress (Wessells & Strang, 2006). It would also reveal potential hazards of maladaptive adjustment that could result from particular beliefs and practices engaged in by certain religious groups. This information could inform humanitarian intervention methods. That is, an understanding of the psychosocial resources that are offered through various religions could alter the design of interventions to focus on resources not provided within a particular faith and to make room for those resources that are already naturally occurring within a given religious group.

In the case of these Liberians, the belief that God was working through Americans to provide school fees for their children was ample motivation to remain in a situation that appeared undesirable in every other way. The American funds made the experience of these women unique. These funds represented two major ramifications for this research project. First, their experience was not representative of other refugees at Buduburam. Their experience as refugee parents and caregivers was unique because their children were provided education. Their dependence on external economic resources might resemble more closely the experiences and perceptions of other refugees who receive funds or resources from other NGOs or remittances sent by friends and relatives.

Second, those represented here were in large part, resigned to their current plight, and were unwilling to return to Liberia. Funds for education appeared to be a significant part of their choice to stay. The top-down support from the Americans who donated money for these children begs the question (see Kibreab, 1993; Harrell-Bond, 2002): is humanitarian aid from the outside ultimately beneficial for refugees? Movement out of refugee status was repeatedly offered through UNHCR's repatriation plan to resettle Liberian refugees (UNHCR, 2005). In the case of

these women at Buduburam, scholarships for school fees provided a resource that was too valuable to leave.

Another motivation not to repatriate was the fear of additional harm dealt by the hands of former enemies. This is an unfortunate commonality among prolonged refugee populations (Crisp, 2003). Though Crisp (2003) has compiled a reasonable set of solutions for long-term refugees, many of them, including integration in the host community, have met with little success when applied. There appear to be few sustainable solutions for refugees like these Liberians who have tarried in Ghana out of fear of returning to a home that is still full of danger. Further policy and intervention methods must be explored in order to restore the best living circumstances for refugees and their neighbors in countries of asylum.

Conclusion

For these Liberian women, what remained at the end of the day was a chance for survival tomorrow and a hope for their children's future. These possibilities were interwoven with their belief in a God who loved them and surety that he would provide for them. They anticipated little other than some relief in their elder years. They had not revived an old self, long lost or suppressed in civil wars and flight from their homes. They had adapted. Their resilience hinged on a profound faith in God to provide for their present needs and the hope of a bright future for their family through the education of their children.

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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The plight of the world's refugees has gained international recognition in many ways over the course of the last several years. As wars shred the homes and livelihoods of civilians around the world, governments, the United Nations, and NGOs grapple with policies affecting the protection, security, health, and well-being of the displaced. Many of these subjects have been investigated and argued over by the academic community. Though the larger, more global issues of prevention and intervention for groups have been widely discussed, the adaptational processes for families have remained generally untouched.

In the summer of 2007, I engaged in participant observation and conducted focus groups and interviews with Liberian refugee mothers and caregivers living at Buduburam Refugee Camp, in Ghana. The women who participated in this study fled their homes during the 14 years of civil war in Liberia. Some left as early as 1990, right after the first war broke out. This means that some had lived in exile for as long 17 years at the time of this study. Many were torn from their family members during the fighting—either by death or disappearance. All lost their homes and their way of life in Liberia.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the family processes that have enabled these women to reestablish family life in exile. Specific research questions were: what are family rituals and routines practiced in Liberian refugee families? And, how do these rituals and routines promote adaptation and adjustment to life in a refugee camp?

Major findings include the family rituals and routines that lead to successful survival of the family, as well as the contribution of humanitarian aid to the experience and adaptation of these refugees. Family routines that fostered adjustment were the livelihood routines engaged in by multiple family members. Women who were able to depend on consistent help from children, siblings, parents, or grandchildren, were generally better equipped to cope with the physical and emotional difficulties of living at the camp. They also tended to express more hopefulness and fewer symptoms of distress.

Most important to the women in this study were their family rituals surrounding their Christian faith. In a camp circumstance where getting food was difficult, they did not have the money for celebrating their former national holidays. What were not put aside were the celebrations of their religious holidays. Daily prayers or devotions as well as celebrations of Christmas and Easter were fervently practiced by the women and their families.

The hope of a "bright future" for their children was significant. Funds given through donations for school fees relieved a financial burden for all of the women, who expressed how difficult it was to provide food. Additionally, this aid for school fees appeared to be a factor in the choice of many to remain at the camp. The benefit of free education, which was a source of hope for families, was a significant reason to remain in a marginalized situation.

The results of this study offer new information about the experiences of refugees at the family level. Rituals and routines provided family processes that promoted adaptation and adjustment to life in exile. Humanitarian aid provided hope for the future, and became part of the reason to remain. Resilience was evident in these family circumstances. The ability of these Liberians to endure great hardship and to adapt following crisis and trauma is evidence of the resilience of their families.

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