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Boadu, Mary.

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Mark Naison (MN): Ok um I'll start. Today is Saturday, October 11th 2008. We are here at Fordham University with Mary –

Mary Boadu (MB): Boadu

MN: Boadu

MB: Yes

MN: Ok and this is part of the new African Immigration Research Initiative, with us is the director of that initiative, Dr. Jane Edward, our research assistant Amy Darfur, and I am Dr. Mark Naison. And we may be joined by Dr. Bernard Hayford. So Dr. Edward why don't we begin?

Jane Edward (JD): Ok thank you for coming Mary, before we start our interview, if you could spell your name? Your full name so it would help our transcribers when they transcribe the information.

MN: Spell it?

JE: Yes spell it.

MN: Oh, ok Mary, M-A-R-Y, Boadu, B-O-A-D-U

JE: Ok. And now to start our interview, if you can talk to us about your background information briefly. Where you come from, your family and things like that.

MB: I was born in Ghana in 1988, and I lived with my family there, and about 3 years after I was born my mother got the chance to come to the United States so she came here. And so –

MN: Was this on a student visa or related to work?

MB: It was actually through my grandfather who was – who has been here since the 70's, so he got a visa –

MN: Now what sort of work did your grandfather do?

MB: Um my grandfather I believe was working in stores and in nursing homes –

MN: Yes

MB: -- so home care, which is mostly what most African immigrants that I know, that's what they do. And so yes, then he got my mom to come here and my mom basically got involved in the same thing, she now works in a nursing home in the Bronx.

MN: That's very interesting because we interviewed a young woman Sonya Bansu whose mother worked in a nursing home and her father would [Inaudible]

MB: Yes

MN: Yes so my mom came here when I was around 3, and so I live – I grew up with my dad taking care of me and the rest of my family in Ghana --

JE: So she left you behind?

MB: Yes, to come here. And so it was interesting for like the first few years of my life I didn't really know her because I never – like you know, she would send me clothes and toys and things like that, and I knew I had a mother, but obviously I hadn't really seen her before –

MN: How many other children were there? How many of you were there?

MB: Um, back in Ghana?

MN: Yes

MB: Well, from my immediate family, it was me. When she came here she was actually pregnant with my little sister. So my little sister was born here, but it was me and my dad back at home with the rest of my family and my cousins

MN: Ok and where were you living wh-what city or town --

MB: In Ghana? Koumase*

MN: And where is that? What part of Ghana is it?

MB: Uh the Ashanti region, it's like southern close to southern Ghana

MN: And what language did you speak other than English?

MB: Um Twi

MN: Twi

MB: Yes, so after awhile she came to visit and she brought my little sister to come live with us permanently, And so – In Ghana yes, obviously she had to come back because she was working and –

MN: Now was your grandfather living in the Bronx?

MB: Yes, they were living here yes

MN: So was there a sense from Ghanaians that if you moved to New York you went to the Bronx?

MB: O yes [Laughs] I mean we didn't really know the Bronx but we knew the Big Apple [Laughter] That's why I remember when I was coming here everybody was like 'O you're going

to the big apple' you know -- it was a you know -- you knew the big apple new York, that's all we knew

MN: And was there a sense that you could better yourself economically by moving to New York and --

MB: Yes, Yes

MN: -- that was the major motivation

MB: I mean America is like heaven [Laughs] It's yes

MN: And did your mother send thi -- um money back home?

MB: Yes, money toys clothes everything, and it's interesting now because now you know she tells us -- I see the life she's living and she struggles and working so hard and everything and it's just kind of this dichotomy between African immigrants coming here and realizing that it's actually not as easy and heavenly as you were thinking that it is but you know people back at home still thinking that we are getting money off of trees

MN: Right right, the streets are paved with gold --

MB: Exactly [Laughs]. And you can't really convince them otherwise unless they come here and they see the life for themselves

MN: Yes

MB: Yes, so um after awhile my dad -- my mom was able to help my dad to put all his papers together to also come here and join her. So this was around like '95.

MN: Yes

MB: And then 3 years later -- um yes -- 4 years later my sister and I will also --

MN: Right now who took care of the two of you when you were back in Ghana when your father--

MB: Um my grandmother my uncles my aunts we all like lived in a big house together

MN: Now describe the house -- you know because many of the people listening to this know nothing about Africa -- describe the house that you were living in.

MB: Um yes, basically my mom um built a house, when she was here, she sent the money the resources for the house to be built you know because that's also an important -- like if you're here you have to do something back home for everyone else. So you know usually you build a house so that's what she did and um so then I remember like because then we were living in like another small neighborhood and it -- my whole family wasn't together, but once the house was

built me and my family father in my grandmother moved in my aunts and uncles cousins moved in so we all lived together and um yes so.

JE: Ok and when you're together, that family that lived by your mom, your mother still keep on sending—

MB: Yes yes yes, she uh- sometimes she send money to keep up the house and many other things so

JE: Ok when did you come here?

MB: Uh March '99

JE: Oh March '99? So when you came here you went to school in the Bronx and where did —

MB: Yes

JE: If you can tell us briefly about your educational background

MB: Yes um when I came here um where we were living there was a community public school right across the street. So that's where um — I came here when I was in the 5th grade, when I came from Ghana I was in the 5th grade so I just continued 5th grade when I came here in the public community school like right across the street

JE: In the Bronx?

Yes in the Bronx

MN: Now how would u compare going to school in Ghana to going to school in the Bronx?

MB: Um I mean the beginning going to school here was very difficult, because my accent — like I — thick Ghanaian accent nobody could understand what I was saying

MN: Now — did you mostly speak English or your — what was it Twi?

MB: Well, when I was in Ghana you only speak English basically when you are in school. [Inaudible] Yes and that was it, so mostly Twi, but you know at home with my family we mostly Twi, now we speak a little bit you know more English because we have been here for so long, but in the beginning it was all Twi. And so school was hard adjusting to the new environment the new students um mostly African Americans and Hispanic, that was also very different for me. Um—

MN: Did other kids make fun of you or tease you?

MB: Yes mostly about my accent, I remembered one particular kid who you know whenever I would speak she would laugh at me

MN: Now was it a she or he

MB: She, yes and so it made at some point, I didn't even want to talk anymore in class because I was just so self conscious about – and the work was a lot more homework

MN: Here?

MB: Yes here than in Ghana, um the work was more difficult it was built for higher level than I was learning in Ghana so I – yes. I was struggling with my work but my dad helped me a lot with that

MN: Um now how much education did you father and mother have in Ghana? How far did they go?

MB: Um my father actually he finished -- he went to Concumar(sp.) University, he graduated um he is a mechanical engineer and so yes so when he came here he actually continued his education in Public Tech University

MN: O yes in Brooklyn

MB: Yes yes so now he's a mechanical engineer,

MN: Right

MB: My mom basically after high school she didn't get to go very far so

MN: Now so what was the living situation like in the Bronx when you moved here where were they living uh what street?

MB: Um I remember the address, 918 Morris ave that's yes

MN: And Morris avenue right near the Grand Concourse

MB: Yes

MN: Between where and where? Do u remember was it near Tremont? Or it was further south? Or?

MB: Um ill say it was a bit – like we were close to Yankee Stadium 161st we could walk

MN: You could walk there

MB: We could walk to 161st Yankee stadium

MN: O ok we'll find it – now was it a big apartment building?

MB: Um – yes it was an apartment building our apartment was tiny

MN: Right was it an apartment building with an elevator or no elevator?

MB: Um I believe we took the stairs

MN: So it was probably a 5 story walk up?

MB: Yes

MN: Did it have fire escapes in the front?

MB: Yes fire escapes

MN: Yes ok so – typical Bronx tenement

MB: Yes yes and there was a big space in the middle –

MN: Right

MB: I don't know what that's called where they throw the garbage

MN: O yes where they shouldn't have thrown the garbage right [laughter] they threw it out the window

MB: Yes and I remember thinking when we got in there and we you know we entered my moms apartment at first I was like O do you live in this whole building [laughter] you know because I was thinking you know America you know you have the house and the swimming pool and the dog and – yes that wasn't the case. And then you know they showed us the room and I was like – this is it? We have a bigger house back home [laughs] yes so

MN: Right, now was um – were most of the other people you know African American and Puerto Rican or Latino or were there other African people in the building

MB: Um there were a few African I remember my parents knew a Ghanaian family that actually lived on the 4th floor we lived on the 1st floor so I think it was them and probably like 2 more – 2 more families, but mostly African American and mostly Latino

MN: Right uh huh and your school was right on the same block? And you remember it was PS – what was it called?

MB: Uh CIS 166

MN: CIS 166? Um and then did you go to middle school after that? Or junior high?

MB: Yes then I went to high school cause I – CIS 166 was 5th grade – it was middle school

MN: Oo 5th to 8th grade

MB: Yes and then I went to high school

MN: Ok now obviously if you're at Columbia you ended up being a very good student [laughter] how soon did it take for you to start to you know – succeed and then excel? How did it

–

MB: Um I would say in 5th – when I 1st entered in 5th grade I was lucky – I guess they realized that you know I was a Ghanaian immigrant so they put me with the Ghanaian teacher actually, he was teaching in the school –

MN: Really?!

MB: yes

MN: What was his name?

MB: Um her name was Ms. Canaku(sp?) im not sure if she's still teaching there

MN: Miss Canaku, K-A-N-A-K-U?

MB: I think it's C, yes and she was from Accra in Ghana. So she helped me a lot, I remember like when I would write compositions and things like that, she would be like here you don't spell neighborhood with the ou -- the British way. So she would show me things like that. When the kids would laugh at me she would discipline them. [Laughter]. For you know – soo that she helped me a lot and after awhile I started doing well in her class and she very understanding so. But I would say it was probably like when I you know – 6th grade 7th grade when I – my dad was really the one who

MN: Right

MB: [laughs] help me you know homework

MN: Now which came easiest for you, math and science or the English and the writing?

MB: the English and the writing always, have been easier so yes

MN: And you ended up as a pre-med though

[Laughter]

MB: But even in Ghana my favorite subject was English and reading

MN: Right, now did your parents go to a church when they – were they Christians?

MB: Yes my parents are Catholics, very devote Catholics so my dad was like the church president of my church when we were in Ghana and now he's church president of our community St. Margret Mary so yes very I mean –

MN: You'll have to meet Father Ryan , the head of missions and ministry here is a catholic priest who has spent a lot of time in Africa, I'm sure he'd love to meet you father actually –

MB: I mean religion – I always joke we never go anywhere except church [laughs] basically, because we're always at home except Sunday we all go to church

MN: And the church was like the center of the family social life?

MB: Oh yes it still is, it's definitely is

MN: And it was the same church St. Margret Mary or was it a different church ?

MB: When I came here they were going to St Margret Mary and we're still going there.

MN: Now was there a reason – that seems like that's probably like 10, 12 blocks from where you were living then, why did they choose that particular parish?

MB: Um because the whole story is that when my parents were here apparently they went to a different church but it was a committee of Ghanaians basically that were going to that particular church

MN: To St. Margret Mary's?

MB: To St. Margret Mary's, so the reason we go there is because we have kind of formed a Ghanaian community

MN: In that parish?

MB: In that parish

MN: Wow! Ok

JE: And I think this is common among so many immigrants --

MB: Yes get together yes

JE: Inaudible

MB: And it's interesting because if it wasn't for church like we don't see each other, you like --

MN: Everybody's working?

MB: everybody's in their homes in their apartments, you know we don't see each other

MN: You mean so your family didn't have other Ghanaian families over for dinner?

MB: No that doesn't really – yes it's only basically church –

MN: Did you mother work at night?

MB: Yes she's working at night actually

MN: Ok so – your parents were on different schedules, your father worked during the day, either – and she worked at night?

MB: Yes

MN: Um and you have a younger sister?

MB: Yes Yes

MN: And is she in high school now?

MB: Yes she's actually a senior in high school

MN: At what high school?

MB: um Monroe –

MN: Monroe high school

MB: Yes

MN: Yes right ok Um now, so your – how soon after you arrived was your first visit to the church?

MB: Um I think like we arrived like on a Wednesday and I was there that Sunday

MN: That Sunday?

MB: Yes

MN: Now do you come up to go to church every Sunday from school?

MB: Sometimes I do like this weekend tomorrow I'm going but mostly just because it's a 40 min ride on the train, I go to on campus church in Columbia

MN: Right, Now what sort of food did you eat in your house growing up? When you were in the United States did they have Ghanaian food?

MB: Ghanaian food. [Laughs]. Like for a long time I couldn't eat pizza it grossed me out [laughter] I was like bread with sauce on it [Laughs]I couldn't – now I can eat it but, no, Ghanaian food -- I mean -- yes that's what my mom knows how to cook so that's what she cooked

MN: Ok now give me an example did she make breakfast for you?

MB: Um breakfast, was mostly [inaudible] American like cereal and yes – but lunch, dinner, she makes stew, rice, plantains, yams, fufu

MN: Now where did she get the um –

MB: The ingredients?

MN: The ingredients

MB: Yes um there like African markets – good amount of African markets in the Bronx, and usually like the supermarkets they sell plantains and yes because Hispanics, also they eat that

MN: Ok so you see the foods of the African Diaspora are similar enough so you can use with –

MB: Yes so mostly from the supermarket ill say yes

JE: So how did you get to Columbia?

MB: Um I went to a boarding high after leaving CIS 166, in Massachusetts and um –

MN: Was that the ABC program or?

MB: No this was through a program called City prep

MN: City prep? Ok

MB: Yes so I found out about that and they you know got me connected to –

MN: So which boarding school did you go to?

MB: It's called the Governors Academy yes

MN: And where is it located?

MB: it's in Byfield, Massachusetts

MN: Massachusetts? So what was that experience like for you?

MB: I guess the closest that I can say was a bit probably similar to coming into CIS 166 the first time –

MN: It was like culture shock

MB: Exactly [Laughs] All over again, I mean because now it was like Latino and African Americans to mostly white [Laughs] and so that was very different

MN: And were they mostly wealthy also?

MB: Yes yes and just like the whole culture , I guess like also obviously now I don't have a thick Ghanaian accent people understood me but you know so like the mannerism they way they speak sometimes I really wouldn't understand the jokes so it was also very different. In the beginning it was hard for me I was very homesick I never been that, you know since I came here, I've always been at home with my family, so um it was hard for me to really connect with anyone but after awhile it got better so I, so it was a great experience –

MN: Were there any students from the Bronx there?

MB: Yes, there actually were a few students that had also come through with the City Prep program

MN: Now what was this – was this a program, what grade did it start in?

MB: Um when I was in 7th grade that's when the man who was in charge, his name was Mr. Gorg(sp?) he came to my school and he was telling us about it and I remember he asks like – basically he was going around asking teachers like which good students there are to get involved in this program so they could get more [inaudible] for higher education. So that's how my teacher recommended me and that's how I get involved

MN: Ok now which teacher was the one who recommended you? Was it the same one?

MB: No this was a in 7th grade and 8th grade I actually had two teachers who were there from Teach For America,

MN: Right

MB: So one of those teachers yes

MN: What was the – do you remember the name of the person?

MB: Um my teacher?

MN: Yes

MB: Um Ms. Ruley(sp.) yes that was her name so...

MN: Now how often did you come back home when you were in boarding school?

MB: Um during major break times like thanksgiving, Christmas, so that was also the difficult part about it that like I couldn't come home as often as I want just because it was so far

MN: Now let me ask you about music, did you parents listen to Ghanaian music in their home?

MB: Yes my—we mostly listen to Ghanaian gospel music

MN: Ah! And how does Ghanaian gospel music differ from like American gospel music?

MB: Gospel music? Um I mean like the tempo the beat I mean it is very interesting because African – African American gospel music I guess is similar just you with the tempo and the beat and but I've listened a lot also to like um contemporary Christian music here which is – not the American gospel kind, in terms of like – that's more like guitar like and piano and things like that so it differs a lot but I would say African American gospel music is kind of similar in terms of you know.

MN: Do you have any CD's of this?

MB: Yes

MN: That you can bring up at some point

MB: O sure yes, I really like one particular group of singers there called the Daughters of Glorious Jesus. And I really like their songs so

MN: Was there any – Did anybody listen to the secular Ghanaian music like the high life?

MB: yes um, we don't really listen to it that much as far as I can remember my dad always listen to gospel music but mostly um when at church when we hold parties like Christmas parties that's when you know you hear the secular it depends on family, but my family mostly um yes.

MN: Now was there a teen group at your church, that had a teen center where young people could gather?

MB: We have among the Ghanaian community we have a youth group which is mostly the student the student of the parents, but there isn't much of like a teen center yes just because like there so much can do in that parish because it's not like our parish you know it's Latino community etc. we just have like a small Ghanaian community yes

MN: Are there any Ghanaian priests in your parish?

MB: No not in our parish but we have Ghanaian priest in parishes that come from Ghana and stay here maybe for vacation and there hear about us and they'll come to say mass

MN: Now when you saw the cover of [inaudible] you saw a Ghanaian

MB: Yes bishop?

MN: And he came to your church?

MB: Yes

MN: How long ago was this?

MB: This was like 2 or 3 Sundays ago, yes I was actually there when I heard he was coming I came back home to go to church. He was our bishop in Ghana in Kumasi, so I remember seeing him when I was a little child so it's interesting

MN: Now in Ghana are there certain regions which tend to be more Christian and others which tend to be more Muslim?

MB: Yes um usually the Northern part of Ghana is the Muslim community, I mean it's all interspersed there's the Muslims. In the south the Ashanti region where I'm from is predominately Christian, protestant catholic.

JE: I understand the Ghanaian community they organize like social gatherings every year?

MB: Oh is it the summer picnic?

MN: Does your family go to this?

MB: Um it's interesting the first time that I was here, this was prob around like 5 6 years ago I remember we went to the picnic but I think my parents told me that stop going to the picnics after a while because they realized that, usully when they go the organizers of the picnic would be like we are raising money to send to Ghana to do this – and I think they started feeling like they weren't really doing what they said they were doing.

MN: O right they were taking the money and –

MB: That they were collecting –

MN: -- for themselves

MB: Yes so they just they stopped going after that, I mean our church we hold picnics during the summer and like the church picnic –

MN: Now how many people are we talking about in you're the Ghanaian community in your church is over 100?

MB: Oh yes probably like 200 250

MN: Wow

MB: Yes we get visitors like all the time so it's growing

MN: Now are there – does your family ever eat in Ghanaian restaurants in the Bronx?

JE: That's a very good question

MB: No [Laughter] no um it's very – it's different it's cultural wise it's like you wouldn't go eat in a restaurant if you can make it yourself and I remember once me and one of my cousins she's Ghanaian and we were talking about it, this whole sense like if you go to like a Ghanaian restaurant and you were eating like the mom the guys the kids and everything it's kind of like this judgment from other Ghanaian families like what's wrong she doesn't know how to cook for her family? So like once in a while ill go with my dad and we'll get something when I'm in the mood, but no my mom makes everything and she doesn't want to go spend money no. which is why I was like apart from church we don't really go anywhere [Laughs].

MN: Do the Ghanaian community have any sports clubs or soccer clubs in the Bronx that you knew of?

MB: yes I don't really know, I know like once in a while like someone I know will go like the park the play with like other groups of people etc but not of any organized like sports team

MN: Now when we did our last interview – were there any gender issues with you wanting to become a professional wanting to become a doctor or?

MB: Yes like our mom

MN: In your family? Was this something -- did you get support for going to medical school?

MB: o yes! I think actually you know, you get encouraged a lot to become doctor lawyer one of those things, it doesn't matter whether you're a boy or as girl when I tell people I'm doing pre med there usually like o great you know keep it up

MN: What if you said you wanted to become a singer?

MB: I actually told my dad once that I wanted to become a writer [Laughter] and he was like you know whatever else that you do you can still write [Laughter] so tell me something else [Laughter] I mean my I love my parents there very understanding if I told them right that I a doctor is not going to work that I wanted to – they may not agree with it but they wouldn't force me they'd be very understanding.

JE: And we understand that the cultural difference between Ghana and the United States is completely different

MB: Oh yes oh yes

MN: I just want to know your experience when you came here, did you parents allow you to, go out? Or there very strict on how you should behave where you should go

MB: Yes yes yes I wouldn't say that – when I came here I was obviously like 10 years old so I still young

JE: but when you were in high school what happened?

MB: Yes I think like personality I always been the kind of person whose always been very attached to my family, brought up like religious laws, so I wouldn't really try do anything that I knew that they wouldn't agree with me doing that's just the kind of person I am. And um I would say especially when I came here I still feel more – I wouldn't go anywhere really just because i don't really know anyone it's not like o I have my friend living right across the street let me go you know it's very isolated in the sense that I guess the Bronx and the way the whole apartment building thing was like nobody really goes to talk to anyone – you live in an apartment with your family –

MN: Now where there – did kids play on the street in your block?

MB: Yes yes

MN: And did you play in the street with them?

MB: no cause I didn't know them, yes yes this would be like African American kids Latino kids I just

MN: And there was a whole street scene –

MB: Yes

MN: Did your parents ever say to you, know you did they argues that this is a bad influence?

MB: um no they ddint tell me that you know certain things that I should be like you know the whole hip hop [Laughs] you know

MN: Okay so they didn't want you wearing baggy clothes --

MB: -- Exactly exactly! [Laughter]

MN: But they didn't want you to wear bear midriff right and shaking your booty all that --

MB: -- or god forbid bring like a guy like that one day

MN: Yes some guy with a hooded sweatshirt don't bring them home.

MB: -- like my friend [Laughs] no. Yes yes but I mean just because like I will play with my sister you know in our apt building etc. we go outside we buy something in the store etc. but yes we didn't really –

MN: Now did you have feeling that you got were much more academically serious than most of the young people around you

MB: In like um public school? Yes

MN: Dr. Hayford! Hi how are you?

[Greetings with one another]

MN: So this is – we're being joined by Dr. Bernard HAYfrod from [inaudible] Connecticut State University. So um was this true of the other Ghanaian immigrant children at your church that they lived lives apart from the African American and Latino students

MB: Yes I would say mostly [inaudible] most in a while you hear story of like – and it's usually like negative stories of like the rebel like who comes here from Ghana and already she's going to parties and [inaudible] you know those are the negative stories. The good child stays at home you know.

MN: Now could listen to hip hop in your house

MB: I could but it's funny, my parents would just be like it's interesting the worst my little sister went through this whole phase where she like hiphop music she would listen to hiphop music

and then I guess like it just came to a point where my parents were kind of I guess thinking she was kind of getting to become a bit insolent and etc and they attributed that to the music she was listening to so they told her that you know you need to stop listening to that

Right, now did your sister rebel against the academic path at all? Or is she as academically serious as you?

MB: I would say she's serious she works hard not as much as I am um she's definitely not looking into like the kind of schools that I looked into when I was applying but um she takes her work seriously she's a bit more laid back like sometimes my dad will try to get her to study do homework etc. and you know she wants to watch TV and yes so

JE: and what about – we asked one somebody who can explain in one of our interviews about Ghanaian weddings?

MB: Ghanaian weddings?

JE: yes I just want you to tell from the religious perspective because it seems like some of the Muslim religions –

MB: -- yes

JE: say something about how they

MB: Yes oh yes um mostly the weddings and I know a couple of women in my church and couples who have gone through the whole process, but mostly it will start with the traditional wedding where if it was back in Ghana this would be more elaborate but here it's you don't have the whole family here and everything probably be like the house um the fiancé or the groom will come and they tell who ever the women is living with – the man comes and he inquires like he is interested in this women etc. and then in front of the gathering the women's relatives and the man's people basically and so that will happen and then once those customs and everything have been taken care of the women and man can be suitable to get married but as Catholics we also believe you have to bring it to the church you know otherwise they can't be a real marriage. So that usually takes most Ghanaians a long time for that to happen but then the second part is bringing the marriage to church and then the it's like the wedding and wearing the white dress and the bride – yes so

MN: Now you have a Ghanaian mass every Sunday at the church?

MB: At 5

MN: At 5? And um who officiates that the Ghanaian mass?

MB: It can either be one of the Ghanaian – visiting Ghanaian priest who usually help us out. So usually it's one of those priests once in a while it'll be the parish pastor who is Hispanic so you

know he will officiate it and during that mass obviously the mass will be in English but like our songs will still be Twi and etc.

MN: And you have a choir?

MB: Yes we have one I am actually a member of the choir [Laughs] yes

MN: And how many people are in the choir?

MB: Um about 15 16?

MN: And these are songs in Twi?

MB: Yes mostly all of them in Twi

MN: And are there any different rituals that would take place in a normal – in a catholic mass that would be in the main church?

MB: Few diff between African catholic mass in general and here um we do a lot of singing we do a lot of dancing [Laughs]

MN: Dancing?!

MB: [Laughs] we do a lot of dancing um we do a lot of like calling back response it's very to African American yes

MN: So it's like a Baptist

MB: yes [Laughs] not to that extent but

MN: Now the dancing is – do wear traditional Ghanaian costumes?

MB: yes mostly every body's wearing traditional

MN: Now what sort of dancing would this be? In the aisles? Or in front of

MB: mostly during the offer, collection section like the box will be in the middle of the altar and everybody has to line up and then go to the front and the choir is singing and so you know have to dance you know –

JE: -- they don't walk there

[Laughter]

MB: yes so it's very interesting when we have non Ghanaians lets say like white visitors come in and you they try to dance [Laughter] and our masses our longer –

MN: --- yes so I've heard. [Laughter] what by three four hours?

MB: Yes yes 2 hours

Is there a meal afterwards?

MB: There's usually like a social gathering afterwards sometimes it's meal sometimes it's everyone just talking you know and that can go on for another hour.

JE: And I think those people go late frequently?

MB: Exactly exactly church is like our social time too

MN: Now we also had a description of a funerals, including one back in Ghana is that also a distinctive approach relative to the other parishioners have you been in any funerals?

MB: yes I've been in a funeral. Um I mean like how is the funeral like?

MN: Is it more of a celebration would you say?

MB: Yes yes [Laughs] especially in Ghana funerals are basically parties [Laughs] here I would say there more solemn here just because I've been to like a couple of funerals since I came here not as much music you know it usually very solemn not – definitely not really any food it's just drinks and things like that but you know Ghana is a party

MN: Now you mentioned your religion major as well as pre med. Do you see yourself going into like the ministry?

MB: yes since I was a kid I always wanted to be a nun actually [Laughs] and I still want to be it's still in my mind yes so I guess I will be dubbed ministry [Laughs].

MN: You may go into a religious order?

MB: Yes yes

MN: Are there any religious orders which have a specific um embrace African culture and traditions; is there anyone that you have in mind?

MB: I mean not here I haven't really come across. Back at home there I am part of the Kombi (sp?) catholic ministry

MN: Right

MB: A student catholic ministry and we volunteer like weekly at the Our Mother Teresa's are nuns -- ministers of charity in Harlem --

MN: --- Right

MB: and they have a small convent there so we go there to volunteer – they have a soup kitchen etc. so I am most familiar with them but –

MN: Now do nuns in Ghana run large social agencies – are they ever in positions of power and influence?

MB: I am not actually very familiar but um I know that they – like we have had a couple of nuns from Ghana who are visiting here and you know living with different orders here. One last time one nun came to our church and she's part of this order, there try to help people who live in the villages in Ghana, boarding schools etc. So they do a lot of a teaching you know social service. But I'm not sure if there like having high authorities of power.

MN: I know that in this neighborhood there is Sister Barbara runs a very important organization called Folk Family Center and she's developed two major residencies for homeless families and she's a real powerhouse of the neighborhood. In the United States sometimes nuns run schools they run health care centers.

MB: Like the – my elementary that I was going to in Ghana was a catholic school and I know the head mistress was a nun.

MN: Now in you cohort in the church which is I assumed is you families major connection have people built business in the United States or in the Bronx you know do they own stores do they own import export businesses or car services or do most people work you know in nursing homes health care civil service

MB: Yes yes I would say it's more nursing home health care civil service, I don't particularly know of anyone, I mean my dad knows more of each person and their trades than I do. But I don't know of any particular one who is like big business owner huge things like that.

MN: Now –

MB: Mostly middle class

MN: Right. Does your father um he's a mechanical engineer does he work for the city or –

MB: Yes he works for new York city transit

MN: Oh! Ok Now your family now lives on southern blvd?

MB: Yes

MN: Between where and where?

MB: um 170th and 171th, 172nd

MN: Ok

MB: I know it's like [inaudible] Bronx Zoo

MN: Ok because I know that. Do they live in a private house or?

MB: yes

MN: So they bought a house?

MB: Yes

MN: Is it one of those new houses?

MB: yes

MN: Oh! I know exactly where it is!

MB: Marion Avenue that's the new –

MN: Near Crotona Park?

MB: Yes yes

MN: Cause there's a number of – that's very interesting. My theory is that there have been many of these one, two, three family houses and then African immigrants are one of the major groups purchasing.

MB: yes us actually, it's our house and then we are renting the top part to a man that actually goes to our church.

JE: The man is from Ghana also?

MB: Yes he's Ghanaian also [Laughs]

MN: Now how long ago they buy the house?

MB: It's been 3 years now? Yes

MN: And where were they living before? That same apartment?

MB: Um 198 that's where we were before

MN: Ok so – and it's a lot more space?

MB: Yes [Laughs] and also like my little brother was born he going to be 5 this November so it was also good.

MN: Now is he in kindergarden this year?

MB: Yes

MN: In public school or catholic school?

MB: He has some like developmental – it's a public school but um he was having some problems speaking so he went to the early [inaudible] program. So he is in a public school with all the facilities and everything that will be able to help.

MN: Right -- now do you think your parents are happy with the public schools in the Bronx?

MB: Um I think they are – I mean my sister is going to a public high school now so um I would say they are, they also have like their reservations with knowing that the schools aren't that serious um students aren't really that serious so they have kind of like their concerns with that but you know because it's just easier cheaper you don't have to pay anything so they are. So to a certain extent like obviously elementary school, middle school they have but for obviously for colleges they don't want to hear us say “o I want to go to a CUNY” [Laughs] they want better

MN: Now of the young people in your church are there other people who have gone to Ivy League schools and colleges or are you the only one at like Columbia Princeton Yale Harvard Brown Etc.

End of Side A

MB: Um yes I know um I think like – [inaudible] like I know another girl [inaudible]

MN: Right

MB: [inaudible]

JE: So are you planning to go back to Ghana when you [inaudible]

MB: I definitely want to go I used to say for a while that I want to go back and stay there and my parents were just like why [Laughs] but um I mean there fine with whatever I decide to do, but I definitely want to go back I have not been back since I came here, so it's been a long time so I definitely want to go back and [inaudible]

MN: Is it harder to come to the United States now than it was 10 years ago for people in your family

MB: Yes I think my mom has been [inaudible] once actually my uncle I think my mom's brother he actually ended up coming here and then [inaudible] I mean mama's [inaudible]

MN: Is this post 9/11? Do you think that it has become more difficult?

MB: I think after 9/11 [inaudible]

MN: Ok um [inaudible]

JE: Well I guess I know you're involved in [inaudible] campus what type community [inaudible]

MB: Um I would say the [inaudible] it's very I like it a lot better just because it's like a [inaudible] Ghanians and you know I don't you [inaudible] I actually [inaudible] so I'm really enjoyed like into it like getting through it because basically [inaudible] it made me I guess like able to defend my African heritage [inaudible] I actually got to see a full picture which I don't get to see when I'm back home with the [inaudible]

JE: I was wondering were you part of any other groups on campus [inaudible]

MB: yes yes I would say the [inaudible] the ministry [inaudible] activities like I – during my freshman year I tutored in the south Bronx actually I was tutoring and now I work with like kids who have like Type 1 diabetes I volunteer with that in Harlem, but mostly that's about it

MN: Now have you and your family noticed the large and growing Islamic population from West Africa in the Bronx? Um people from Senegal, Togo, Mali?

MB: O yes definitely

MN: Is there much interaction between Ghanaians and the new immigrants from those

MB: I would say very little just because culturally wise language wise religion wise um if they were probably not [inaudible] different religion different culture different language, I do remember that [inaudible] so I think that's one thing that would be throughout African culture, immigrants together you know [inaudible] but not [inaudible]

MN: So Dr. Hayford do you have?

BH: [inaudible]

MB: I would say like when I was like in the 5th grade, yes like so in terms of like school friends no, I [inaudible] I was in the [inaudible] so um yes I mean [inaudible]

MN: [inaudible]

MB: Yes

MN: [inaudible]

MB: Oh yes, um language wise I had [inaudible] but like [inaudible] I couldn't read [inaudible] isolation [inaudible] with the black kids [inaudible] it took awhile

MN: [Inaudible]

MB: I keep saying [inaudible] from my dad [inaudible] he helped me a lot with my homework and things like that, my parents were basically my friends, they were all I had so

MN: Now it's interesting through the course of the interview I guess it [inaudible] she said one of the reasons she excelled in school was seeing her parents work that hard, was that a motivation for you as well

MB: O yes I mean they would tell me that you know [Laughs] you know – especially my mom she keeps telling me you know work hard so you don't end up you know doing what I'm doing

MN: Oh so your mother who works night shifts where is it located?

MB: She works at Our Daughters of [inaudible] nursing home in like [inaudible] avenue

MN: Its in the Bronx?

MB: Its in the Bronx yes

MN: Ok is it near –

MB: 167th street and you take the bus to like 167th street, Teller Avenue that's like the address

MN: Yes that's walking distance almost from where you are

MB: yes yes from where [crosstalk]

MN: Because you're right near my favorite little soul food restaurant on Clay Avenue Jimmy's Luncheonette [Laughter] on 169th and so um, she said you want to do better than this

MB: yes yes [inaudible]

JE: [inaudible]

MB: I mean her plan is similar to my father they will move back to Ghana [Laughs] there not going to stay here so that's her plan [Laughs], which is everyone I mean [Laughs]

MN: So there's a sense at your church that slot of the older people when they retire they will go back? And the house is already built for them?

MB: Yes [Laughs] they've already built the house so there going there

MN: You think they really are going to go back or you think

MB: After retirement?

MN: Or you think it's something they say but

MB: Yes I think that I mean my grandfather he's in Ghana but he retired long time ago

MN: And he went back

MB: Yes he's back there now I mean he comes to visit once in a while I think sometimes you know, I think you can say he probably does miss here you know he probably feels a bit lonely I guess, so you know he will come back here to visit, but mostly he is in Ghana and I think for most people that's their plan you know

MN: And the children will stay here do you think

MB: Children will stay here [Laughs]

MN: Do you get the house?

[Laughter]

MB: I don't know [Laughs] so

JE: [inaudible]

MB: Exactly yes the whole idea of [inaudible] its seems so [inaudible] kind of [inaudible]

MN: So she's working in a setting which is – contradicts all her values of how you should treat an elderly person

MB: Yes yes sometimes [inaudible] especially when [inaudible]

MN: The people love you, the people like you

MB: O yes yes

MN: [inaudible]

BH: The people like you, the people, everybody [inaudible] give us a lot of money [inaudible] and they know [inaudible]

MB: Oh yes o yes [inaudible]

BH: It's more than just the people [inaudible] the fact that you live [inaudible] cousins down the road everybody [inaudible]

[Laughter]

MN: Well this young woman described going back to Ghana and it was an uncle of hers having a funeral and they carried [inaudible] a big tank of fish!

MB: [Inaudible]

[Inaudible]

MB: And sometimes you just wake up and its like you know [inaudible] [Laughs] Why are you saying this now? And she's like you know I don't want anything from you I just wonder when I die if you'd take care of me

MN: Maybe if you have a big fish [inaudible] Grand Concourse [Laughter]

[inaudible]

BH: [inaudible] don't forget American coffin [inaudible]

MB: Oh yes yes

BH: [inaudible] local one [inaudible] [Laughter]

MB: O yes!

JE: And this goes back to the family honor and [crosstalk]

MB: I actually my parents are going back this Monday because my grandmother, my mom's dad – my dad's mom recently died in Ghana so you know they're going to go do the funeral and yes

JE: So there expected to show [inaudible]

MB: Oh yes oh yes

MN: Do they have a digital camera [Laughter]

MB: My father might [crosstalk]

MN: I think we might have to have a Ghanaian funeral [inaudible]

MN: But yes it's like they basically have to take care of everything you know yes so

MN: But one thing that's very interesting is that, you know all these powerful traditions that, were going to this school and we can – where it was decided the toughest housing project in the Bronx and it was actually voted the lowest performing school in New York City, and in the last 5 years – it's called P.S 55 – 170th and St Paul and there have been a large influx of immigrants – west African immigrants and the schools performance has gone up as they have entered, and the whole atmosphere has changed because these young people are respectful in a way that some of the kids growing up will not be -- they would never curse out a teacher because if you came home [inaudible]

MB: That was also one thing because coming from Ghana where you get a [beating] if you're misbehaving sometimes you don't even see -- its just you know, they ask a question and you don't know the answer you get beating basically, then coming here and –

MN: Do you see students being disrespectful to teachers?

MB: O yes o yes all the time, not listening, talking, cursing and it just – it surprised me so much [Laughs]

BH: [inaudible]

MN: But you know, I think this is part of what African immigrants and their families they've helped improve the schools because the children are coming in with a different set of cultural values and respect for learning and authority and so that's one of the things – and this school

actually has social workers specifically to work with African immigrant families because the principal sees this is something that has improved the whole school

BH: [inaudible]

MN: Yes

BH: [inaudible]

MB: That's what my father says all the time and yes – I remember he told me once like if I had gotten like the education and these things that you are getting you know I'll president of this [inaudible] [Laughs]

MN: Well somebody is! [Laughter] He's right!

MB: Yes he was like be [crosstalk]

MN: That's exactly what

MB: You sometimes when ill complain too much homework you know he will tell me that you know because he didn't get that he tells me of times when he was [inaudible] spending time in the classroom and you know

MN: Wow, well, ok, thank you this was wonderful.

MB: Thank you.

MN: I am so glad you could join us – did you have your digital camera?

MB: I have one.

MN: Oh so maybe we should take some pictures? And I will get the food ready. We have lunch for everybody.

Interviewee: Mary Boadu
Interviewer: Mark Naison
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