Empowerment Practice with Refugees: Transnational Identities in Communities in Transition Eritrea, Horn of Africa, and the USA

Course URL: http://courses.washington.edu/commtran

Course e-mail: commtran@u.washington.edu

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Fridays, 9:30-12:20, Room B14; additional class meetings will be arranged
Instructor in our partner course at University of Asmara: Dr. Lizy James

Through classroom activities and interactive discussion among UW class participants and social work students in our partner class at the University of Asmara, Eritrea, students will learn applications of empowerment practice with displaced populations across a transnational continuum of forced migration, including flight, internal displacement, asylum-seeking, repatriation and reintegration, and resettlement. The class will address complexities of transnational identities and implications for strengths-based social services. Students will also have opportunities to participate in agency-based collaborative projects with local agencies serving Horn of Africa populations.

This course has been designed with a triple purpose:

1) This is a binational class, with a parallel section offered to undergraduate social work students at the University of Asmara, Eritrea. Students at both institutions will have the benefit of enhancing cultural competency and understanding of migration through feedback and collaboration on assignments with students at the partner school. Case examples for the course will draw from the Eritrean experience of conflict, forced migration, repatriation and resettlement, from Seattle’s East African communities, and from diverse analyses of forced migration.

2) The course examines the processes that characterize the transitions of displaced women, children, youth, and families within their country of origin and in resettlement in the United States, including: a) an overview of the historical events and processes that have resulted in the mass displacement of people; b) selected policies and service programs that have been developed to assist refugees in transition; and c) refugee trauma, adaptation, and integration after repatriation or resettlement.

3) The course also examines interventions with displaced women, children, youth, and families across a variety of community settings and agency programs, with a focus on a) mutual
assistance, psychosocial support, gender and family issues, youth assets development, and community mobilization, b) participatory approaches to program development, and c) the importance of multicultural understanding in social work practice. A wide array of strengths-based and empowerment approaches to social work practice in home, school, agency, and community contexts constitute the interventive focus of this course.

Course objectives

Upon completion of the course, the participants will be able to:

1. Understand causes and impacts of forced migration on refugees, resources, and social work practice with refugee women, children, youth, and families.

2. Communicate with Eritrean social work students at the University of Asmara on issues of mutual professional interest, with increased cultural competence and understanding.

3. Appraise responses of international and local service providers along the relief-to-development continuum, and in resettlement.

4. Analyze the chronic stressors, gender, and identity issues accompanying conflict, forced migration, repatriation, and resettlement.

5. Evaluate the particular issues of refugee women, children, youth, and families in ecological context, and apply this knowledge in social work practice.

6. Apply knowledge of refugee family and intergenerational resources and conflicts in social work practice.

7. Identify refugee trauma and related interventions to promote psychosocial health.

8. Apply knowledge of U.S., Eritrean and East African culture pertaining to refugee issues in originating and host countries.

9. Promote the development of appropriate services to refugees across multiple settings and levels of social work practice.

10. Interact and problem-solve at an international and multicultural level with a greater degree of cultural competence

11. Identify services and resources for Eritrean and Horn of Africa displaced persons in the local setting.
TEXTS AND REFERENCES

**Required Text**
Course reader: available for purchase at RAMS on the Ave – you are strongly encouraged to get a copy of the reader. A copy of the reader is also on reserve at the SSW library, and on electronic reserve. Additional readings may be assigned as needed.


**Recommended texts**


**Additional recommended readings, films, and references**: May be placed on reserve at SSW Library or posted on class website, as indicated in the course outline or in class.

**Academic Accommodations:**
If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services, 448 Schmitz, 206-543-8924 (V/TTY). If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating you have a disability that requires academic accommodations, please present the letter to me so we can discuss the accommodations you might need for this class.

**STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE**

The course is offered in a lecture – seminar format that combines lecture, discussion, and student presentations. Participation by all the members is important; students are expected to attend all classes, to prepare for class by completing the readings and assignments, and to participate in class discussions. Please inform me if you are unable to attend class. Students are expected to participate as both teachers and learners, in a climate that is respectful of diversity. Formulation of course projects will begin in the first two weeks, based on student interests, and will form a nucleus for integrating major themes and practice foci of the course. Students are encouraged to form cooperatives for discussion, reading, and collaboration on course projects.

This is a 5-unit course. Classes will meet regularly from 9:30 to 12:20 on Fridays. Additional class meetings / discussion groups will be scheduled regularly to facilitate communication with our partner students. We are also planning to arrange a workshop with local East African social service providers. In addition, there will be agency-based meetings for collaborative course
projects, and group meetings to discuss books, films, and newcomer orientation to the Pacific Northwest.

**COURSE GRADES WILL BE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:**

Regular attendance  
Preparation for and participation in class discussion and activities  
Structured and unstructured communication with our partner students on a regular basis.  
We’ll discuss this in class and develop guidelines together  
Completion of the following assignments and activities.

♦ Your biosketch: as soon as possible after our first meeting.  
Send to Edgar Hernandez: ehernan@u. with a copy to me at commtran@u.

♦ Orientation to the people, landscape, societies and cultures of East Africa: **due 4/9**  
Many country descriptions that are available for this part of the world focus on war, disaster, famine, and security issues. In order to honor the more complex realities that exist and that are inextricably interwoven with identity, memory, homeland, and exile, student groups are asked to research and write up a brief overview of a selected country: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, and Sudan. There are many possible sources for your research, including those on the web, histories, films or videos, and personal narrative. Do give references for the material you use. Your overviews will be posted on the course website.

♦ Read Mezlekia’s book, *Notes from a Hyena’s Belly,* and post discussion questions on the web by **4/23**. After group discussion, post a short review related to themes relevant to the class. Compare and contrast your views and perspectives on the book. **Due no later than 5/7.**

♦ Feature an agency serving Horn of Africa populations. Visit the agency, meet with key personnel, write a 2-page description and post it on the course website. Include an agency brochure if available. **Due no later than 4/30**

♦ Summary of a key informant interview conducted with a service provider or service user from an East African community agency. Post on the website, subject to consent of Interviewee. Confidentiality and anonymity will be discussed. **Due 5/14**

♦ Course project and final paper: It will be important to identify your projects as soon as possible – preferably by the 3rd week of the quarter (**April 16**), so that we can incorporate your learning needs into the class. Projects will be presented in a workshop format during the last two sessions of the class, **May 28 and June 4.** Guidelines for course project and paper will be finalized with respect to the nature of the project, and summarized on a handout. Final paper due **June 4.**

You are encouraged to develop a course project in cooperation with a student in our partner class at the University of Asmara.
Agency-based course projects could include one of the following:
  Development of a resource guide
  Researching and writing a project proposal for services
  Documentation of youth program activities
  Powerpoint presentation for introducing the agency, its history, background, services, needs, resources, and potential

Evaluation of your projects will be based on the strengths and comprehensiveness of your critical analysis, integration of pertinent concepts and practice approaches, the organization and clarity of your presentation, and the organization and clarity of your writing. Please keep your final papers to 12 pages. Be sure they are edited for typos, grammar, organization, and narrative coherence and flow.

Local cultural events for your calendar:
Invitation to an evening with Horn of Africa youth group: to be scheduled
Folklife Festival: May 28-31 at Seattle Center. This year’s festival features the Horn of Africa.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 – April 2

Introduction to course

Forced migration in the Horn of Africa: An overview

Transnational identities in times of political conflict and its aftermath
Video: Bricks for Peace (excerpts)
    Kibrom Tekeste, Director

Week 2 – April 9

Responses of international and local policy makers and service providers
Complex emergencies and humanitarian response

From policy to practice: Human rights, Refugee policies, receiving communities, repatriation, and resettlement in Eritrea and among Horn of Africa populations in Seattle Illustration and discussion of resources and challenges of forced migration among refugee families
Readings:

Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora
  Ch. 1: A ghost story
  Ch. 2: A haunted house


Recommended:

U.S. Committee for Refugees (2001). Getting home is only half the challenge: Refugee reintegration in war-ravaged Eritrea. (On reserve at SSW library.)

Week 3 – April 16

Chronic stressors and the construction of identity in post-conflict or resettlement contexts
Exile
State power vs. individual autonomy
Ethnic identity, nationalism, racism, and xenophobia

Practice: Preparation for participant observation and informational interview with agency staff at an agency serving Horn of Africa populations.
Entering a community, as an outsider. How might one be regarded, what self-awareness work do you need to do; what preparation is needed
Discussion of agency visits

Readings

Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora
  Ch. 3: Shadowlands: Diaspora movements


Optional:


**Week 4 – April 23**

**Trauma**

-Coping strategies, resources, facilitating factors, and barriers

-Social identity group membership: cross-cultural issues

-Psychosocial support in situ, Exile

-Clinical and contextual practice concerns

-Role of state, local agencies, and mutual assistance associations

**Discussion of agency visits: Post your featured agency on the web by 4/30**

**Readings:**

-Matsuoka and Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora*

-Ch. 4: Exile, memory, and identity


**Week 5 – April 30**

**Gender roles in family and community context**
- Traditional; transitional; new obligations and resources

**Gender issues in program development and services**

**Women’s rights as human rights: The role of transnational women’s associations**

**How do we assess needs, resources, and barriers in a participatory way?**

**Overview of participatory needs assessment approaches**

Come with interview guide and contact information for person you will interview. Discuss interview process and content for informational interview.

Informational interview with East African service provider to ascertain the major issues, concerns, accomplishments, setbacks, etc., with the service population. What are the needs, how are they being assessed; what are the gaps, and what needs to be done.

**Analysis of interviews: insider / outsider perspectives; relationships between agencies and community members**

**Funding, “power” – how is power constructed or defined?**

**Responsiveness of programs to multigenerational needs**

**Readings:**

Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora
- Ch. 5: Gender relations in the Diaspora


**Recommended:**


**Week 6 – May 7**

**Gender (continued): education, capacity-building, health and mental health issues**

**Strengthening families**

**How do we assess needs, resources, and barriers in a participatory way (cont.)?**

**Uses of participatory approaches to assess domestic violence in refugee communities**

**Write up the major substantive issues that emerged from interview with Horn of Africa service provider, along with observations, reflections, and critique of interview process**

**Readings**


**Week 7 – May 14**

**Youth in transition: Youth assets programs, youth mobilization**

**Newcomers in the schools**

**Transnational youth movements and their role in mobilizing youth**

**Discussion of Interview assignment**

**Readings:**


**Optional:**

Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora
Ch. 6: Abyssinian fundamentalism and Diaspora Mythico histories (on reserve in SSW library)
Week 8 – May 21

Family transitions
Communication
Multigenerational concerns

Youth assets development and community mobilization among multiethnic youth
Mediation in family conflicts

Readings:

Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora
   Ch. 7: More real than a shadow

Kohli, R. Social work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.


Week 9 – May 28

Empowerment practice with refugees and immigrants
Transnational identities
In-class presentations.

Readings

Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora
   Ch. 8: Phantoms of Identity and ‘Race’


**Week 10 – June 4**

**Empowerment practice with refugees and immigrants**
**Transnational identities**
**In-class presentations**

**Readings:**

Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of identity and community in an African Diaspora
Ch. 9: Ghostly returns