Children, Childhood, and the Future

Children, Childhood, and the Future:

Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Edited by
Andrea Kleeberg-Niepage,
Yaw Ofosu-Kusi,
Sandra Rademacher
and Michael Tressat

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& MICHAEL TRESSAT

EDITORIAL

The origin of the international workshop and these conference proceedings

This book, as well as the conference that generated it, is the result of a rare and fortunate encounter that science occasionally holds out to members of its community. In 2013, the academic paths of three of the editors of this volume crossed at Europa-Universität Flensburg: Yaw Ofosu-Kusi began his three-semester DAAD[1] visiting professorship, Andrea Kleeberg-Niepage was appointed as Professor of Developmental and Educational Psychology, and Sandra Rademacher was appointed as Professor of Educational Science with a focus on childhood and adolescent research. This coincidental meeting at Germany's northernmost university not only opened the door to a fruitful interdisciplinary exchange on childhood and adolescent research at Europa-Universität Flensburg, but also set the parameters for an ensuing debate that has attracted scholars from various disciplines at German and West African universities and brought them together for regular meet-ups in West Africa and Europe. One of these encounters, which took place in 2016 in the form of the international workshop "Childhood, Children and the Future: African and European Perspectives in the 21st Century" at the University of Education Winneba in Ghana, is documented here.

With the preceding call for this workshop, scientists were invited to investigate topics related to children, childhood, and the "future of childhood"—defined here both as the future of today's children, and the future of childhood as a social and political construct—and to take part in an interdisciplinary discussion of their approaches, perspectives, and

[1] German Academic Exchange Service

findings. The decision to address the connection between childhood and its "future" at an international workshop came out of the many discussions and joint research projects between scientists from Ghana and Germany, as well as the need to fill a research gap on this topic. Scholarly interest in the living conditions and lifestyles of children and adolescents in international politics has been steadily increasing since 1989, when the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was proclaimed, leading to its ratification in 1990. Nevertheless, the vast majority of empirical research has focused on children and adolescents from middle-class families in the global north; to date, findings on children and adolescents in the non-Western world and the global south have found little entrance into scholarly conceptions of childhood and youth, or the related scientific discourses. It is, therefore, not surprising that scholarly debates with respect to German-speaking childhood and adolescence have repeatedly pointed to the relative dearth of international comparative childhood and adolescent studies.[2] The international workshop and the resulting contributions gathered in this volume, as well as the other international research collaborations that have emerged from this meeting, aim to narrow this significant research gap.

It was in this context that psychologists, educationalists, economists, and historians met in Winneba to discuss the relationship between childhood and its future in an interdisciplinary and cultural comparative setting. The various perspectives afforded by this intercultural and interdisciplinary setting allowed the participants to recognize the limitations of their own scientific perspectives and enabled them to explore the similarities and differences between a wide range of accounts and results. It is noteworthy that both European and African scientists carried out the research on children and adolescents in Africa discussed here, while no West African researchers contributed research on children in Europe. Notwithstanding the research design, it was analytically fruitful to discuss these studies in the comparative cultural context offered by the workshop.

Although the topic "childhood and future" was already broad, the workshop program was open to further ideas and speculation: for example, on methodological issues that arise during research with children and adolescents, especially with respect to how visual data (drawings and photos) should be handled in this context. Key questions from the workshop and the discussions that continue in the contributions to this volume are:

[2] See also, and with further evidence, the discussion in Ittel, A., Merkens, H., Stecher, L. (2012): Jahrbuch Jugendforschung. 11th Edition 2012. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

What is the future of children and childhood in a globalizing world? Are we (or will we be) approaching a homogeneous global childhood as a future standard? What are the influences of culture on childhood as an idea and on real children's life? How can cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches to researching children and childhood enrich our understanding of this topic and contribute to research in this field? How do children themselves perceive their own lives and futures, and what can we learn from these imaginings? In what ways are these perceptions informed by history, traditions, and transmissions?

The book's structure and the contributions

The first part of the anthology deals with considerations of African childhood during the 21st century.

Yaw Ofosu-Kusi criticizes a discourse about children that is highly influenced by orthodoxy and often underlined by the perception that children are physically immature and passive in relation to their social worlds. Contrary to the formalized notions of childhood in the West, he argues that African childhood is marked by a cultural essence that designates a person as a child or adult according to his or her social capabilities rather than their formal age. Hence, the constructed norm of socialization based on formal laws, age, and schooling is problematic and at odds with children's everyday realities. Ofosu-Kusi draws on this understanding to argue that, while many of the problems specific to Africa persist, the recalibration of childhood brought about by the "new social studies of childhood" has shifted scholars' focus away from children's shortcomings and towards their capabilities and the need to develop research strategies that capture children's agency and self-efficacy.

For his part, Manfred Liebel examines African childhoods and the pitfalls of postcolonial education and childhood politics, exploring post-colonial theory to identify and illuminate African children's perspectives and experiences from an understanding of children and childhood other than that which predominates in Europe and the global north. In particular, he addresses questions of childcare and school education, problematics in the implementation of children's rights, and local practices of paternalism and children's participation. Finally, Liebel makes suggestions for possible alternative approaches and conduct.

The second part of the anthology offers a cross-cultural perspective on how children and young people envision the future, paying special attention to the meaning of reconstructive interpretive approaches.

After introducing the study upon which the following three contributions were based, Andrea Kleeberg-Niepage explores how socio-cultural context affects and shapes children's and young people's images of the future. Drawing on interviews with teenagers in Ghana and Germany, she argues that the process of conceptualizing one's future has to be understood as one that is deeply embedded in socio-cultural contexts and entrenched societal discourses. Young people negotiate and relate to these discourses when imagining their future selves and, while significant topics tend to repeat themselves with only slight variations across socio-cultural contexts, the points of reference for these negotiations differ significantly. Analyzing such narratives allows researchers to go beyond a simple inter-cultural comparison and gain deeper insights into the prescriptions and inscriptions of their own cultures.

Maja S. Maier and Sandra Rademacher show that photographic analysis offers privileged access to intercultural comparative explorations of childhood and youth. Specifically, they use photographs that were taken by children in Ghana and Germany in response to researchers' questions about how they imagined their lives as adults. Through detailed analysis of characteristic cases, the authors discuss how children picture the future when taking photographs of subjects in their everyday surroundings. Their preliminary results show that children seek "something of relevance" as an integral part of growing up. Further, they conclude that the process of taking pictures, and particularly the search for a photographic subject, expresses and shapes this quest for meaning.

Starting from the paradigm of the universalization of modern schooling, Nicolas Scholz examines how school shapes perceptions of the future among adolescents in Ghana and Germany. His considerations are based on a qualitative reconstructive study that sought to analyze differences and similarities between two interviews with students from each country. He used Objective Hermeneutics for the interpretative reconstruction of the data's latent and manifest sense level. Detailed case reconstructions show that students see school as playing a functionalized and instrumental role in their future.

The third part of the anthology deals with considerations of the history, future, and development of children and childhood in African contexts.

Jim Weiler uses a psycho-historical-perspective to look at how children at well-established junior high schools in Winneba, Ghana view the past, as well as how they see their future. His study does not find a strong connection between how these children think about the past and how they think about the future. However, by using a mixed approach with a survey design, the study also examined how well these children reportedly know their history. In general, their knowledge of history was ambivalent; however, they reported that history was important and that they often think about their future. Weiler's research suggests that these children are eager to pioneer their futures untethered by their pasts.

Emma Sarah Eshun discusses the role of language as a baseline for the development of the Ghanaian child. In particular, she focuses on the tension between mother tongue and the predominant language of communication. For this, she analyses children's experiences using the Effutu language to achieve their socio-economic goals, and takes a closer look at the contemporary language policy of education in Ghana. With a mixed method approach, her findings clearly show that although the majority of children in Winneba speak Effutu, they are discouraged from using their native language in school by teachers and are sometimes even punished for using it—an act that constitutes a violation of Ghanaian language policy with respect to education.

Urszula Markowska-Manista outlines three contemporary aspects of the education of children from the Ba'Aka hunter-gatherer community in the Central African Republic. The author uses an ethnographic approach, which draws on her analyses of field interviews and observation, to consider and analyze the so-called "forest education," the ORA (observer, réfléchir, agir) teaching method used in the private education sector, and the state education based on French educational models of the colonial period. Beyond this, she looks at the scholarly discourse on the problems that hunter-gatherers experience in the contemporary world, particularly the problematic nature of the education offered to Ba'Aka children from the Central African Republic over the past two decades.

Vivian Acquaye explores the perceptions of children and childhood among undergraduate students at the University of Education, Winneba. She analyses stories about children and childhood that these students are regularly required to write in order to advance within the academic system. She found that a larger percentage of the students studied viewed tragedy as a catalyst to future greatness or a successful life, and access to education as a luxury given to children out of pity or an insurance policy meant to

safeguard the future of parents or sponsors. Acquaye ends her analysis with some conclusions and recommendations for primary education.

Akoété Agossou Agboyibo considers how the revival of civil wars in postcolonial Africa endangers children's welfare. He focuses on the African child and her or his future in conflict zones by offering a literary analysis of Ahmadou Kourouma's novels *Allah n´est pas obligé* and *Quand on refuse on dit non*. Based on the Liberian civil war at the end of the last century and the beginning of the current one, his discussion shows how political instability can cause war and how this endangers children's futures in Africa. Finally, he shows that Ahmadou Kourouma's narration of Birahima's, the hero of both the novels, history provides ways to protect these children.

I.

REFLECTIONS ON AFRICAN CHILDHOODS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

YAW OFOSU-KUSI

CHILDHOOD, CHILDREN, AND THE FUTURE: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

In spite of the ambiguities and tensions in interpretations of childhood and the realities of children's lives, there is a plethora of universalized notions, policies, and actions that aim to address children's concerns. This complexity has driven new theories and methods for childhood studies, as well as turning it into an interdisciplinary study that bridges the intellectual compartments of history, psychology, linguistics, economics, sociology, and so on. It is within this framework that contemporary developments in our perception of children as generally malleable beings with limited faculties has metamorphosed into a more radical conception that appreciates children as active agents who negotiate change and continuity in their personal lives and society. This new paradigm raises important questions about how we engage children in various social settings, especially in research. It is a clarion call for Africa because, according to UNICEF (2012), the estimated average population growth rate of 2.1% from 2010 to 2030 means that children and young people will largely populate this continent in the future. This entreats us to take children and young people's views and efforts to exercise some control over their lives seriously, particularly considering the existential threats many are confronted with on the continent.

Theories, discourses, and contemporary literature on childhood are primarily situated in Western thought and practices. Just like many other aspects of life, although representing a minority world, such ideas have become the dominant ideals in the rest of the world, even if local interpretations and extensions are sometimes brought to bear on them. Hence, in order to establish an encompassing context for this paper, I will address the influential Western concepts and notions of childhood, relate it to Africa within the tensions of interpretation and practice, and then discuss some of the challenges constraining African children's futures.

Childhood: The Evolution of Ideas

The inevitability of UNCRC means that no viable appreciation of childhood and the conditions children experience can be considered without adherence to its "global" values. If we accept this premise, then a logical starting point would be Rousseau's *Emile*, which espouses the essence of nature in the metaphorical child's development (Ryan 2012) and the exhortation for children to be allowed to blossom in this way. Or Aries' (1962) "Centuries of Childhood" which has had a significant impact on contemporary notions of childhood in the West and the subsequent propagation of the global idea that children should be seen and treated as a separate group of people with their own social space.

The globalized themes of cognitive and behavioral development on the one hand and socialization on the other in children's maturation have held sway for a long while. In the former, biological imperatives of age underline the child's development as evidenced in the very influential Piagetian model of cognitive development within the discipline of developmental psychology. This linear development positions childhood as a universal concept because children are expected to traverse through fairly similar channels of cognitive and behavioral development. In spite of its Western orientation, middle class contexts, and sense of universality (Prout and James 1997, Thorne 2007), the model is widely applied in practice and policy setting in education in the developing world.

The sociological perspective, primarily Talcott Parson's socialization theory, positions the child as a being in the process of becoming a desirable member of its society. Social imperatives are critical as the child goes through the "process of becoming human" (Jenks 1996: 13) through the lens of adults since they are rational and competent, while the opposite of irrationality and incompetence is assigned to children. Beyond the confines of the home, the progress of the social child as the corollary of the natural child systematically transposes from the domestic environment to institutional ones such as schools. The child operates in that bounded space according to the rules and regulations of those institutions, which may implicate him or her in a positive or negative way. However, James and Prout (1990: 13) argue against socialization's importation of "implicit binarism" from psychology where the individual is viewed as an "instance of the species" but the person as that of "society". They argue that this insertion into "classical socialization theory" allows a dichotomy to be drawn between the adult and the child, as well as justifies the need to mold the child into a desired model of adult imagination. With the specific identities of children neglected, they

are conceptualized in relation to institutional contexts of the family, peer group, or school (Jenks, 1996). James, Jenks, and Prout (1998: 208) also argue that, as a socially developing theory, it neglects the "everyday, synchronic experience" in the real social world. Instead, it searches childhood's experiential qualities for evidence that it has acquired skills that bring it closer to maturity.

In the 1980s and 1990s a revolutionary view of childhood based on critiques of the inherent reductionism of childhood to incompetency, as well as the particularization of the Western model as the global ideal of childhood, emerged. Touted as a paradigm shift in childhood studies, this social constructivist approach has led to the so-called "new social studies of childhood" as a clear break from the orthodoxy of biological and social imperatives. It is antithetical to the dominant biosocial thinking in which the progress and abilities of the child are subsumed in that of the adult. Instead, it foregrounds the child as a fully participating being that should not be objectified in the process of socialization (Honig 2009).

This provides the ideological underpinning for the child-centered paradigm of childhood, which deconstructs childhood from universal notions to social and cultural childhoods. As Jenks (1996: 122) notes, childhood is variable, "fragmented and stratified, by class, age, gender and ethnicity, by urban and rural locations and by particularized identities." It is the specificity of contexts that gives the intellectual legitimacy to particularized childhoods and, for that reason, a multiplicity of childhoods. While particularization subverts the notion of universality, it is nonetheless a biological phase of life. As Weller (2006: 301) puts it, "as a social group" they may have "similar experiences" as children; however, those experiences are "differentiated by factors such as gender, ethnicity and class".

Alan Prout, one of the earliest theorists of the new social studies of childhood, is once again at the forefront of what Ryan (2012: 440) calls the "new wave of childhood studies". The premise is that the tenets of the new social studies of childhood represents a "reverse discourse" that has shifted attention completely from the biological imperatives of childhood (developmental psychology) to social imperatives (Prout 2005: 84; cited in Ryan 2012). The bio-social dichotomy has been so pervasive that there has been limited dialogue or linkage between developmental psychology and sociology; therefore, the new wave aims to disconnect the "strictures of bio-social dualism" (Ryan 2012: 443). In looking to the future of childhood studies, this wave advocates multiplicity in childhoods but seeks to obliterate or blur the boundaries of bio-social childhood, render "categories" useless, and seek

more creativity and open-endedness (Lee 2001). This is because, as Prout (2005) argues, childhood is "ontologically" hybridized. Therefore, it cannot be separated into biological and cultural forms (Ryan 2012). In the absence of exclusivity, childhood is constituted by a host of social, biological, technological, and other forces. Thus, instead of a language of dichotomy and differentiation, and the dualism of nature and culture, the new wave, as a representation of the future, using Ryan's (2012: 441) words, connotes "commonality", "intersection", "complex combinations" "hybridity", "mobility", and "non-linearity".

An African Perspective of Childhood

Using this capsule of theories to consider the dominant ways in which childhood is interpreted and therefore studied from a Western perspective, a legitimate question to ponder is what the African perspective of childhood could be, if there is one at all.

An obvious starting point is the cultural significance of the child because the African child, like children in other communities, is cherished and valued as the crucial link in the family and lineage system (Mends 1994, Assimeng 1999). This is manifested in many cultural norms, with the most prominent being birth practices of out-dooring and naming ceremonies. There is considerable adoration with the child projected as the future of the family and society during such ceremonies and practices. Names are used to create continuities in the family and to chart a future course for the child through association with successful family members or significant members of the community. An additional practice for many families, with its origins in Christianity as a corollary of colonialism, is baptism in the church. The objective in both cases is to create an identity that the child may subjectively nurture as it matures in the community's social and religious space.

Beyond the formal definition of a child as anybody below the age of 18 years, which is largely a Western concept, who the child is and the childhood space they occupy is a very complex one in Africa. Age, the most definitive determinant of childhood in the global ideal, is just one factor; one that is easy to determine in formal situations, but of lesser significance when maturity is determined by more concrete markers, such as social capability, resourcefulness, and resilience. As Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi (2016: 306) argue, the majority of African children "self-identify and are viewed by peers or their families as 'adults' long before they legally are". The capacity to "negotiate and surmount" the myriad of challenges (Lo-oh 2009: 38), like trekking to school, caring for younger siblings, providing labor,

support, or independently assuming responsibilities in the household, is given prominence in the valuation of a child's maturity. Phiri and Abebe (2016) demonstrate that to be mature by African society's standard is to have the capacity to make a contribution to the development of the home or society at large.

The blurred line between age and maturity is also evidenced in the fact that many people live in rural areas that may lack birth registration offices and officials. Besides, many parents are illiterate and may not fathom the immediate relevance of birth registration in their children's lives and so would not wish to incur a cost in terms of time or money to register their children. In Ghana, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Botswana, and so on, the tenuousness of formal age is exemplified in manipulations to suit purposes such as school attendance or criminal liability (lowered), marriage or employment (raised) (White 2002, Durham 2004, Sorensen and Bekele 2009). This may be difficult to achieve or may not even be contemplated at all by most people in the developed world. As Durham (2004: 498) argues, a person is a child by reason of social indicators, such as the level of dependence or independence, as well as "rights, abilities, knowledge, [and] responsibilities" in addition to biological age. Obviously, age as a marker of maturity is a socio-cultural construct; therefore, its formalization for purposes of policy, support, or research would have long-lasting repercussions.

Even where formal age is largely relied upon, such as in schools, social maturity/immaturity is the most significant attribute in childhood in African societies. That binary signifies the capacity to perform, to achieve, to incur, to participate in societal activities, and demonstrate the required skills and competencies, or a lack of these attributes and a consequent inability or incapacity. Knowing this, children inadvertently or consciously position themselves in their societies and arrogate roles and responsibilities to themselves. Society may place those roles and responsibilities upon children, which they then willingly accept, reluctantly perform, or rebel against. This foregrounds the inevitability and importance of collective existence and being in African societies under which children's "capacity and interests intersect with those of other generations". Symptomatic of Aries' (1962) categorization of childhood, an African child is a discernible "miniature adult" who fully participates in society but on the basis of his ability and capability. Clemensen's (2016) study of Zambia shows the merit of close associations with adults as children acquire the intricacies of life, especially linguistic and cultural competencies. Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi (2016: 307) add that, through close proximity to adults and exposure to such fundamentals of life children acquire life-long skills that enhance their "creative agency-agency

to navigate the ambiguities of becoming human in the unfolding social transformations" that impact on their societies. This acquisition of cognitive and behavioral competencies (in an informal way) by doing things in the social space proves the bio-social divide to be an illusion because the natural and social phenomena of a child's maturation are rather contemporaneous.

Childhood in the structural sense is a continuum that facilitates a transition from limited to full capacity in biological, social, economic, and cultural senses. The global ideal attempts to strip economic capability from the continuum, generally by invoking age as a biological barometer. Yet, age as a determinant of children's entry into the world of work as advocated by the ILO and UN through various international conventions is quite problematic in the African context. Roles that are presumably adult roles, especially seen from the West, are instances of lived experiences. For many, there is no separation between work as an integral part of socialization and cognitive and behavioral development. This complicates research and policy-making for example, since the construction of operational definitions for a child or separation of work from socialization can be quite difficult to disentangle.

But, if childhood is socially and culturally constructed, and is largely a generational and structural phenomenon, then even in one country, there cannot be a uniform way in which to comprehend its ontology and how that affects daily behavior. Social constructivism has hugely impacted the historiography of childhood (Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi 2016), but it has also saddled it with the dilemma of plurality in a mirror of the global ideal. As noted earlier, while the developed world child is projected as the global benchmark of childhood, the construction of the African child is generally captured through a "myopic lens of development" (Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi 2016: 312). Development as implied here is relatable to both the national and the child's progress, which dialectically speaking is a "form of orientation to become more like the Western child" (ibid.). Beyond this, other aspects of life are also generally expected to reflect that of the West's notion of development and progress. Hence, and rather unfortunately, there is considerable pressure from development partners for African countries to emulate the development and growth models of the West, especially former colonial masters, in order to attain quantifiable economic and social indicators to be categorized as developed. Similar expectations apply to childhood and children.

With this as the basis of development, the primary leitmotif to an understanding of African children and young people relative to the global ideal has been the invocation of the inexorable poverty. This, however,

continually reinforces notions of despair and gives rise to divisive or disorganizing discourses that exemplify African childhood as one of deprivation. Dichotomization of both geographic and metaphorical spaces and the inherent binaries of rich and poor, North and South, developed and developing etc. automatically assumes a difference between theory and research in the global south and that of the global north. Thus, the recourse to the Western model of childhood at once creates a separation, as well as dualisms like First World/Third World, good/innocent childhood (or child), and bad/evil childhood (or child). The Third World child is obviously a deconstruction from the universal model of childhood premised on dominant ideas and ideals to a localized and tribalized child that, as Ennew and Milne (1989) put it, is considered to be "non-white", not adequately nourished and "lacking in identity". While the Third World child is generally a caricature, there are still good examples of childhood in the Third World and bad examples of childhood in the developed world, which shows the dynamic impact of society on our framing of childhood.

This dominant notion of good, preferred, or desirable childhood projected as the global benchmark is propagated through what Ndlovu-Gathseni (2013) considers to be resilient colonialism manifested in globalization and its inherent sociality, such as UNCRC. An immersion into what Ndlovu-Gathseni categorizes as the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being implicates much of the corpus of knowledge in the developing world, as it is heavily influenced by what is seen through the eyes of the West. This is not always a matter of choice because in spite of physical decolonization, post-colonial Africa, both literally and figuratively, is still embedded in global politics and economy under subordinate terms that afford it "little autonomy and capacity to act independently" even in the generation of knowledge (Ofosu-Kusi 2016: 36). Schools, schooling, education provision, research, and practice mimic the West, especially those of the former colonial masters, most often by reasons of association than preference. Similarly, Africa's participation at the international level through the UN finds reality in the form of an alliance with its principal donors as subordinate partners in the framing of crucial documents, such as UNCRC or international conventions on childhood or child labor. This colonial mentality shapes the caricaturing of childhood defined in what it lacks rather than what it possesses as a human being or what it shares in common with the rest of humanity.

Nonetheless, African childhood in reality is positioned to mimic the ideal (Western) childhood even if the terms under which this plays out are absolutely unfavorable. A clear example of this is how child centeredness as a

Western approach to childhood studies, as well as the formulation of policies and practice, has become the global model and bedrock of UNCRC. In spite of initial protestations of some of its articles and clauses, virtually all African countries have ratified and adopted it as important pillars of their national constitutions. For instance, the specific articles on childhood and children in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, as well as the Children's Act 560, are principally based on UNCRC articles. Article 43 of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya even has a mini bill of rights for children, while the Constitution of Nigeria 1999 gives extensive attention to their needs. Although, many observers and practitioners in Africa read the Convention as a unidimensional document founded on the ideals of the West, the core principles of Article 2 (universality); Article 3 (best interest of the child); Article 6 (right to life, survival and development); and Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) have largely been internalized in policies, research, and advocacy on children's welfare. Even Africa's critical response in the form of its own children's convention, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), replicates the UNCRC to a large extent.

What the foregoing tells us is the remarkable ambivalence of African childhood. For, while we are tempted to think in terms of a particular type of childhood instantiated by African realities and traditions of interdependence, respect for elders, learning by performance in the social space, and global realities undermine that notion. In spite of the hybridity, multiplicity, etc. of the new wave, or the particularization of childhood under the new social studies of childhood, we are confronted with an identity that is subordinate to that of the global childhood constructed on the ideals of the Western world. While child socialization in middle class families in Africa may tend towards this global ideal, with child labor and the narrative of deprivation absent from their daily lives, for a large proportion of households living on the margins, the lives of their children are defined by different levels of labor, deprivation, sub-standard education, dysfunctional families, and so on. It is, therefore, difficult to extricate the label of destitution and despair from African childhoods.

The Future of African Childhoods

Children naturally develop some form of identity and a consequent appreciation of their potential and capacity as they mature in all societies. However, in much of Africa this takes place within a socio-cultural context where the most expressive demonstration of responsibility and maturity is active engagement in labor and assumption of familial roles. Even in urban

middle class families where this period may continue to be free from rigorous labor, Imoh (2016), in her study of privileged children in Ghana, found that there is some amount of domestic work that has to be performed. Therefore, as Kleeberg-Niepage (in this volume) asserts, children and young people (and their families) "do not perceive childhood and adolescence as a kind of special world or reservation or a secure place free from responsibilities".

Beyond the family setting, schools become nurturing spaces and so by reason of their primary responsibilities treat children as "human becomings": people to be shaped according to the demands of society. As a reflection of the societies they represent, many educational systems in Africa are based on a pathology notion that assumes children's incapability of rational thought or action. Hence, education in schools tends to be teacher-centered, which, in combination with the structural constraints many schools face, often renders schooling unattractive to large swathes of children. Yet, there is abundant evidence of children's resourcefulness, ingenuity, and capacity to self-organize towards that future if they are provided with the right conditions.

Children's maturation and transition into adulthood through school systems and families is strongly influenced by the remarkable structural inequalities in African societies. Those from middle class families, especially in urban areas, are usually spared the abject deprivation and so have better opportunities of accessing education and completing it than those from poorer households (Canagarajah and Coulombe 1997, Bhalotra and Heady 1999, World Bank 2016). The skewing of economic opportunities in their favor obviously enhances their transition to adulthood, with the economic value of such children tending towards Zelizer's (1984) "priceless child" in the United States. Instead of engaging in income-earning labor to support their parents, pay their school expenses or make a living as many children do, they utilize their parents" substantial financial and social resources to progress to adulthood.

A different manifestation of structural inequality is evident in poor households that barely survive on $2 a day. For example, according to World Bank (2016) an estimated 48.3% of the population of Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) in 2015 subsisted on less than $1.25 a day.[1] Children from such destitute households have fewer opportunities of entering secondary schools let

[1] The closest to this is South Asia (37.2%), while, in stark contrast, only 3.2% can be found in this category in Latin America and the Caribbean.

alone tertiary institutions. Boys are sometimes given priority over girls if the scanty resources do not permit equalization of opportunities. In fact, girls in these households are 10% less likely to attend schools than their male counterparts (Canagarajah and Coulombe 1997), while boys tend marry in their early twenties largely because they need to prove their social and economic maturity (Assimeng 1999). The country differences are more glaring. In Niger, for example, approximately 66% of children who ought to be in primary schools but are not come from the poorest 20% of households, while those from the richer families have a 90% chance of obtaining primary education. In Nigeria, just 4% of girls and 15% of boys from the poorest 20% of the population are able to complete junior secondary school, while 85% of those from the richest 20% finish that level of education (World Bank 2016). Yet, under the UNCRC and the constitutions of many African countries, children are entitled to education, in most cases as a free social service. This dramatizes the incipient class structure in Africa that is enacted mostly through the distribution of resources and socio-economic opportunities. The astonishing effect is that opportunities are severely blunted for children from poor households, as well as those in the rural areas, thus diminishing their potential to translate their dreams into realities. The long-term consequence of this is an entrenchment of generational poverty in those households.

Generally, the transitional process from childhood to youth and maturity is riddled with challenges, many of which are beyond the abilities of children and young people. Some of these factors drive children towards a path of premature adulthood that culminates in disengagement with their kith and kin as they attempt to carve a life for themselves. Notable among the challenges is children's and young people's dissatisfaction with schooling and education as a pathway to the future. The value of education has been questioned on the grounds of its inability to offer opportunities for employment and personal growth (Bourdillon and Spittler 2012). According to the ILO (2016), youth unemployment in North Africa in 2016 was 29.3%, while that of SSA was 10.9%, but this was expected to decline marginally to 10.8% in 2017. There are regional and country differences; for example, more than half of South Africa's active youths were expected to be unemployed in 2016. Compared to other regions of the world, SSA's youth unemployment rate is not that drastic since even in some parts of Europe, especially Southern Europe, the rate for the same period is 18.9% (ILO 2016). However, within the context of the poor education on offer and bleak prospects of gainful employment as they mature, desperation can set in quite early in the lives of children and young people. This could set them on a collision course

with parents, guardians, or significant adults and often on a precipitous path of risky rural, urban, or international migration.

The unstable social environment of many African countries also jeopardizes both the present conditions and children's futures. Recent African history is prevalent with occurrences of internal strife and civil wars that truncated or decimated developmental opportunities for children in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Northern Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and so on. The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has had devastating consequences for people particularly, as Isokpan and Durojaye (2016) have shown, on the rights of children to attend school. The abduction of over 200 schoolgirls by Boko Haram and the shameless incapacity of the Nigerian government to rescue them imperiled their lives and vaporized any childhood or youth bordering on normality. A study by Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013) in some of Nigeria's most affected areas found that Boko Haram's activities have had a significant impact on school attendance in all levels of education, with the greatest impact in rural areas. An assessment by UNICEF in 2014 in Cameroon showed a similar impact from Boko Haram's insurgency on education provision and, for that matter, the development of children in the Far North region of the country. In the 2014–15 academic year, 120 schools spread over 10 districts had to close as a result of threats imposed on school heads and directors. Over 33,000, nearly half of which were girls, had to abandon their communities and seek education in other places, while an estimated 29,000 were in danger of losing a full academic year of schooling and education (UNICEF 2015). The situation in South Sudan is even more horrendous because its separation from the North did not yield the expected development and prosperity for the new nation and its children. Instead, according to UNICEF's 2015 Annual Report for South Sudan, there is a high rate of food insecurity and malnutrition for children. With regard to education, 1.8 million children were out of school because of the destruction of classrooms and general insecurity, while 16,000 children were engaged in the civil war as child soldiers (UNICEF 2016).

Moreover, a set of family-related factors bordering on the capriciousness of parents, abandonment, poverty-imposed vulnerability, tensions with stepparents, and so on accumulate to impinge on children's maturation and future. While a number of explanations could be adduced to account for these, there is a general consensus on the impact of the austere policies inherent in the ubiquitous structural adjustment programs that African countries have implemented in the last two decades. Instead of the professed objective of generating higher efficiencies in their economies, they succeeded largely in contracting them, thereby exacerbating unemployment and reducing

incomes in real terms for the majority of people across the continent (Verlet 2000, Davis 2006). These conditions weigh heavily on children's decisions to migrate to cities or neighboring countries for work, to pursue education, and to generally shape their lives (Hashim and Thorsen 2011, Ofosu-Kusi and Mizen 2012). These policies not only affect impoverished families but they have decimated and continue to erode developmental opportunities for many other children as well. Moreover, their arbitrariness provides opportunities for children to be part of the economic arrangements in the vastly unregulated social and economic space, thereby affecting their schooling and preparation for the future.

Although the taken-for-granted notion of African children's despair continues into their youth, a plausible alternative discourse is the capacity of children to generate actions that challenge this orthodoxy. The efforts of many children to stay in school in spite of challenges, such as trekking, teacher-abuse, and a shortage or lack of educational materials, engagement in paid labor to acquire meager resources, and internal or cross-border migration, provides clear evidence of motivated individuals. Although filial obedience constrains their efforts, the motivation to act independently in pursuit of their wellbeing is palpable. In this respect, there is an impressive demonstration of resiliency and agency in children's contributions to households undergoing "extreme stress as a consequence of HIV/AIDS" in southern Africa, in particular Lesotho and Malawi (Ansell and van Blerk 2004: 673–674); children's influence on the "socio-economic transformations of their communities" in Zambia (Phiri and Abebe 2016: 378); cross-border migration from the Sahelian region of West Africa to Cote d' Ivoire and Ghana (Hashim and Thorsen 2011); and participation in armed conflict in Sierra Leone (Peters and Richards 1998). The propellant for children's forays into the imaginative and sometimes dangerous world of adults could be the sheer need for humans to engage in actions that are of material benefit to them. However, the complex implications of agency do not necessarily connote their independence from adults who may be the *raison d'être* for their vulnerability. Unfortunately, agency and the premature search for independence and adulthood could, as shown by Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013), also deepen children's vulnerability.

Conclusion

The quest for a childhood stripped of all forms of abuse, especially exploitation, is fraught with problems and challenges in the realm of politics, culture and traditions, and economic ability in Africa. However, the

intersection of dominant notions and particularized identities of African childhood in the context of the UNCRC presents the basis for children to be treated with care and attention. As an organizing principle steeped in liberal discourse and globalization, the UNCRC presents a common platform for appreciating childhood and protecting children. In that quest for care and protection, policies and practice tend to converge rather than deviate from each other. In the end, the moral and ethical imperatives of proper childhood are as valid and mandatory in the developed world as in the developing world, especially Africa.

Children represent the future of any society; therefore, their imaginations and aspirations must be enamored against the travails of subsistence, crime, violence, conflicts, and other social ills that imperil many an African society. In this respect, necessary improvements in socio-economic conditions would greatly guarantee certainty in the average child's path to the future. Besides, a redressing of state and individual ambivalence of childhood as a social space, as well as the various rights enunciated in the UNCRC and many constitutions of African countries, would create much needed hope about the future. What children perceive and construct as their future are mere suppositions that are strongly influenced by the context in which they live. Regardless of their motivation, economic, social, political, and cultural structures could humble children's agency and the ensuing capacity to act in their personal interest when adults fail. It is nonetheless quite possible that they can overcome some of the challenges imposed by those structures. After all structures, as argued by Njamnjoh (2015: 10), are "what they are only if they cannot be humbled by the agency of those who consider them as such."

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MANFRED LIEBEL

AFRICAN CHILDHOODS AND THE PITFALLS OF POSTCOLONIAL EDUCATION AND CHILDHOOD POLITICS[1]

> "Did not the great thinker Hegel call Africa a land of childhood?" Professor Ezeka asked, in an affected tone.—"Maybe the people who put up those NO CHILDREN AND AFRICANS signs in the cinemas of Mombasa had read Hegel, then,' Doctor Patel said, and chuckled.–'Nobody can take Hegel seriously. Have you read him closely? He's funny, very funny. But Hume and Voltaire and Locke felt the same way about Africa,' Odenigbo said. "Greatness depends on where you are coming from" (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2007, p. 50)

Introduction

When Hegel characterized Africa as a "land of children" ("*Kinderland*") in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ([1837] 1986) he wanted to express that the people living in this continent were like children. Hegel's understanding of childhood was in accordance with the childhood image, which originated with the European enlightenment, as being unreasonable and incapable of significantly contributing to the development of civilization. When nowadays, with regard to the so-called developing countries, the term "children without childhood" is used, this type of subordinating thinking is sustained. In this phrase, a particular historically specific form or image of childhood is used as a scale to evaluate children's lives that appear extraneous. Despite the best intentions of such an effort, namely offering

[1] Due to being a sociologist who has originated from Germany and still mainly lives there, the author is aware that his understanding of African childhoods is limited and influenced by his own socio-geographic and cultural heritage. I do not claim to know more about what is "good for African children" than the African people. I would like to thank Erica Gendall-Conrad for her support with regard to expressing my thoughts in English, and the editors of this volume for their critical remarks on a former version of this paper.